

# Deficiency poser over plant-based diets

➤ Expert views vary on subject of adequate nutrition and whether supplements compensate for shortfall

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**PETALING JAYA:** Does a plant-based diet lead to nutrient deficiencies? Nutritionists have different views on this but they pointed out that deficiencies can be fixed with supplements.

Dietitian Farah Farhanah Hashim said not every nutrient can be substituted with plants and many vegetarians do not take extra supplements.

"Substituting animal-based

proteins with plant-based proteins would mean you will not get complete amino acids in your diet because plants lack certain types of amino acids," she told *theSun*.

"Digestibility rates are affected because the body absorbs 100% animal protein but only 60% to 70% of plant-based proteins are absorbed into the body. Hence, those who opt for these type of diets require an extra 10% of plant protein."

Farah, who is also a member of the Malaysian Dietitian Association,

pointed out that plants cannot produce Omega3 and Vitamin B12 that aid in the production of red blood cells.

"When you lack these supplements, problems such as menstrual issues for women and anemia can occur," she said.

However, associate professors and nutritionists Dr Geeta Appannah and Dr Mahenderan Appukutty noted that there is no evidence to show that a plant-based diet can cause deficiencies.

"The claim that certain plant foods are 'missing' specific amino acids is demonstrably false as almost all plant foods contain all 20 amino acids, including the nine indispensable amino acids," they said.

"A fraction of plant-based diet consumers, who are not consuming

sufficient energy intake, or who habitually, for some reason, avoid protein-rich plant sources such as legumes, nuts and seeds, may exhibit deficiency in protein intakes."

They added that certain amino acids such as lysine, may be limited in vegans whose protein intake would only come from grains alone.

"If protein is not sufficiently consumed, an individual will easily get weak as muscle mass is lost, which lowers the body's muscle strength. Anemia, that makes a person tire easily, may follow.

"We need proteins to aid the body to repair cells and make new ones and for growth and development in children, teens, and pregnant women," the nutritionists added.

Dietitian Er Ying Ting from the Department of Diabetes at Universiti Putra Malaysia said a well-planned plant-based diet can provide the basic requirements.

"However, incorporating processed foods high in sugar and sodium will not guarantee a healthy diet," she pointed out.

A balanced plant-based diet will ensure the person achieves adequate amounts of essential amino acids.