

## 7 Easy Vegetarian Meals for Your Athlete

The vegetarian diet is growing in popularity in the youth sports community, inspired in part by the many elite and professional athletes making the leap to plant-based nutrition to maximize their athletic performance and recovery time.

[Some vegetarians rely too heavily on processed foods, which can be high in calories, sugar, fat, and sodium. Moreover, they may not eat enough fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and calcium-rich foods, thus missing out on necessary nutrients.](#) TrueSport expert Kristen Ziesmer, a registered dietitian and board-certified specialist in sports dietetics, adds that “vegetarians need to focus on getting common nutrients like iron, zinc, vitamin D, and B12 when it comes to meal planning, as it’s more of a challenge for young vegetarian athletes to reach their basic nutrient needs.”

As a non-vegetarian parent, preparing vegetarian meals for your athlete may be challenging, but here are seven quick and easy meals that you can make for your athlete that are also packed with the nutrients they need to help them reach their sport performance goals.

### Breakfast Options

Breakfast is extremely important because it jumpstarts your metabolism and provides energy for the day. Here are a few options to help your vegetarian athlete get their day started on the right note.

#### 1. Breakfast Tacos (*serving size 4 tacos*)

In addition to the ease of preparation of this recipe, it’s also one that you can adapt to your athlete’s preferences, so don’t be afraid to add, remove, or alter the ingredients.

#### *Ingredients*

- 4 small flour or corn tortillas
- 4 large eggs
- 1 tablespoon sour cream (or milk), plus more for serving if desired
- Two dashes of hot sauce, such as Cholula, plus more for serving if desired
- ½ teaspoon fine sea salt, divided
- 1 ½ tablespoons olive oil
- 2 cups thinly sliced vegetables
- ¼ teaspoon chili powder
- ¼ teaspoon ground cumin
- ¼ cup shredded or crumbled cheese, optional (cheddar, Cotija, feta, goat, even mozzarella)
- ¼ cup thinly sliced green onion
- Suggested garnishes (choose a few): chopped fresh cilantro, hot sauce, salsa, or Pico de Gallo, strips of avocado or guacamole, diced tomato or sliced cherry tomatoes, sour cream

#### *Directions*

1. Warm the tortillas in a large skillet over medium heat in batches, flipping to warm each side.
2. Whisk to combine eggs, until pure yellow, and add sour cream or milk, hot sauce, and ¼ teaspoon of the salt.
3. In a large skillet, melt 1 tablespoon of the butter over medium heat. Add the vegetables, the remaining ¼ teaspoon salt, and the chili powder and cumin. Stir to combine, and cook, stirring occasionally. Once cooked, transfer the vegetables to a bowl and set aside.
4. Return the skillet to the stove over medium-low heat and melt the remaining ½ tablespoon butter. Pour in the egg mixture. Use a spatula to gently stir and push the eggs around the skillet until the eggs are clumpy but still slightly wet, about 3-5 minutes.
5. Remove the skillet from the heat. Add the cheese (if using) and green onion, and gently stir to combine.
6. Assemble your tacos by spooning scrambled eggs down the length of a tortilla, topping with some cooked veggies, and your garnishes of choice.

## 2. Power Porridge

If your athlete prefers sweet over savory breakfasts, make this power porridge their go-to meal.

### Ingredients

- ½ cup oats (steel-cut for more fiber)
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter
- 1 tablespoon coconut flakes
- 10 ounces low-fat milk (if your athlete is vegan, use oat milk as an alternative)

### Directions

1. Measure the oats in a glass and then pour them in a pot. Pour double that amount of water in the pot and then start heating it.
2. Stir frequently, until you reach the consistency of porridge you prefer.
3. Pour in the peanut butter and coconut flakes and then mix it all together.
4. Fill bowl with the oat milk.

## 3. Avocado Toast

Another breakfast favorite that your athlete can make their own by adding a variety of toppings. Be sure to serve this with a protein source to make it a complete, balanced meal. Examples include: milk, yogurt, egg, cottage cheese.

### Ingredients

- 1 slice of bread
- ½ ripe avocado
- Pinch of salt
- Optional: any of the extra toppings (garlic, radish, green onion, arugula, spinach, tomato, egg)

### Directions

1. Toast your slice of bread until golden and firm.

2. *Remove the pit from your avocado. Use a big spoon to scoop out the flesh. Put it in a bowl and mash it up with a fork until it's as smooth as you like it. Mix in a pinch of salt (about 1/8 teaspoon) and add more to taste, if desired.*
3. *Spread avocado on top of your toast. Enjoy as-is or top with any extras.*

## **Lunch/Dinner**

### **4. Ultimate Vegan Protein Burrito (serving size 4)**

With 22 grams of protein, this is a protein-packed meal that will help your athlete recover from a big day of training or competition.

#### *Ingredients*

- *Pico de Gallo salsa*
- *Guacamole*
- *4 large corn or flour tortillas*

#### *For Quinoa:*

- *3/4 cup white quinoa, thoroughly rinsed*
- *1 1/2 cups water*
- *1/4 teaspoon sea salt*
- *1 can black beans, drained and rinsed*
- *1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro*
- *3 tablespoons lime juice*
- *3 tablespoons hemp seeds*
- *1/4 - 1/2 teaspoon sea salt, to taste*
- *Freshly ground black pepper, to taste*

#### *For Kale:*

- *3 cups destemmed and chopped kale*
- *1 tablespoon lime juice*
- *1/2 tablespoon olive oil*
- *Sea salt, to taste*
- *Freshly ground black pepper, to taste*

#### *Directions*

#### *For Quinoa:*

1. *Add the quinoa and water to a small pot with 1/4 teaspoon sea salt. Heat over medium-high heat until boiling. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer for 10-14 minutes or until quinoa is tender and translucent. Fluff with a fork and transfer to a large bowl.*
2. *Add the black beans, chopped cilantro, lime juice, hemp seeds, sea salt, and black pepper to the quinoa and stir. Set aside.*

For Kale:

1. *Add the chopped kale, lime juice, olive oil, and sea salt to a bowl and massage the kale for 2-3 minutes or until tender. Set aside.*

*Burrito Assembly: Lay one tortilla flat on a clean work surface. Fill the tortilla with the quinoa mixture, Pico de Gallo, guacamole, and kale. Begin rolling the burrito away from you, being sure to tuck the sides in as you go. Slice in half and serve immediately. Repeat.*

## **5. Black Bean Sweet Potato Chili**

*Ingredients*

- *1 tablespoon plus 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil*
- *1 medium-large sweet potato peeled and diced*
- *1 large red onion diced*
- *4 cloves garlic minced*
- *2 tablespoons chili powder*
- *½ teaspoon ground chipotle pepper*
- *½ teaspoon ground cumin*
- *¼ teaspoon salt*
- *3 ½ cups vegetable stock*
- *1 15-ounce cans black beans rinsed*
- *1 14.5-ounce can diced tomatoes*
- *½ cup dried quinoa*
- *4 teaspoons lime juice*
- *If desired: avocado cilantro, crema, cheese*

*Directions*

1. *Heat a large heavy bottom pot with the oil over medium high heat.*
2. *Add the sweet potato and onion and cook for about 5 minutes, until the onion is soft.*
3. *Add the garlic, chili powder, chipotle, cumin and salt and stir to combine.*
4. *Add the stock, tomatoes, black beans and quinoa and bring the mixture to a boil. Stir everything to combine.*
5. *Cover the pot and reduce the heat to maintain a gentle simmer.*
6. *Cook for 30-40 minutes until the quinoa is fully cooked and the sweet potatoes are soft, and the entire mixture is slightly thick like a chili.*
7. *Add the lime juice and remove the pot from the heat. Season with salt as needed.*
8. *Garnish with avocado, cilantro, crema or cheese before serving.*

## **6. Loaded Sweet Potato**

*Ingredients*

- *4 medium sweet potatoes*

- 2 cups cooked black beans, or 1 (15-ounce) can black beans
- 1 cup salsa
- ½ chopped fresh cilantro
- Optional: ¼ cup mashed avocado or dry-roasted pepitas (pumpkin seeds)

#### *Directions*

1. Wash the sweet potatoes. Pierce each potato 4 to 5 times with a fork and bake in the oven or microwave.
2. *Oven:* Preheat the oven to 400 °F. Place the potatoes on a rimmed baking sheet lined with foil or parchment paper. Bake 45-75 minutes, or until tender.
3. *Microwave:* Place the potatoes in a microwave-safe dish with ½ cup water. Cover loosely with a lid or plastic wrap. Microwave for 10 minutes. Carefully turn the potatoes over. Microwave another 10-12 minutes, or until the potatoes are tender.
4. Once cooked, split the potatoes and top each potato with black beans, salsa, cilantro, and mashed avocado or pepitas, if using.
5. Note: Other tasting toppings include corn (fresh or thawed from frozen), chopped tomatoes, and sliced green onions.

### **7. Mexican Quinoa Stuffed Peppers (serving size 4)**

#### *Ingredients*

- 1 cup quinoa or rice (thoroughly rinsed and drained)
- 2 scant cups vegetable stock (sub water, but it will be less flavorful)
- 4 large red, yellow, or orange bell peppers (halved, seeds removed)
- ½ cup salsa (plus more for serving)
- 1 tablespoon nutritional yeast (optional)
- 2 teaspoons cumin powder
- 1 ½ teaspoons chili powder
- 1 ½ teaspoons garlic powder
- 1 15-ounce can black beans (drained / if unsalted, add ¼ teaspoon sea salt per can)
- 1 cup whole kernel corn (drained)

#### *Directions*

1. Add quinoa and vegetable stock to a saucepan and bring to a boil over high heat. Once boiling, reduce heat, cover, and simmer until all liquid is absorbed and quinoa is fluffy – about 20 minutes.
2. Preheat oven to 375°F and lightly grease a 9×13 baking dish or rimmed baking sheet.
3. Brush halved peppers with a neutral, high heat oil, such as avocado oil or refined coconut oil.
4. Add cooked quinoa to a large mixing bowl and add remaining ingredients – salsa through corn. Mix to thoroughly combine then taste and adjust seasonings accordingly, adding salt, pepper, or more spices as desired.

5. *Generously stuff halved peppers with quinoa mixture until all peppers are full, then cover the dish with foil.*
6. *Bake for 30 minutes covered. Then remove foil, increase heat to 400°F, and bake for another 15-20 minutes, or until peppers are soft and slightly golden brown. For softer peppers, bake 5-10 minutes more.*

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Preparing a filling vegetarian meal for your athlete doesn't have to be daunting. Try these recipes to prioritize your athlete's overall health, growth, and development while supporting their choice to be vegetarian.



### ***About TrueSport***

TrueSport®, a movement powered by the experience and values of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, champions the positive values and life lessons learned through youth sport. [TrueSport](#) inspires athletes, coaches, parents, and administrators to change the culture of youth sport through active engagement and thoughtful curriculum based on cornerstone lessons of sportsmanship, character-building, and clean and healthy performance, while also creating leaders across communities through sport.

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You can link back to the TrueSport article beginning January 1<sup>st</sup> at: <https://learn.truesport.org/7-easy-vegetarian-meals-for-your-athlete>