**Seitan is the devilishly healthy vegetarian meat alternative we’re all sleeping on**



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Real talk: Even the most devoted [vegans or vegetarians](https://www.wellandgood.com/good-food/vegan-or-plant-based-healthier/) might find themselves craving something “meaty” from time to time. And while [alt-meat options](https://www.wellandgood.com/good-food/alternative-meat-products/) have honestly never been better, sometimes it’s really easy to get into a food rut when you have more limited dietary options than most. (I mean, there’s only so much tofu a person can eat before getting sick of it, right?)

Enter seitan (pronounced say-tan), a plant-based protein option that’s often used as a fake meat dupe. “Seitan in a relatively new term for a centuries’ old plant-based protein made from wheat protein, aka wheat gluten,” says [Maggie Moon, MS, RD](http://www.maggiemoon.com/), and author of [The MIND Diet](https://www.amazon.com/MIND-Diet-Scientific-Enhancing-Alzheimers/dp/1612436072/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1477718058&sr=8-1&keywords=maggie+moon). It’s been a staple in Asian diets for years, Moon says, and it has been historically popular among Buddhists, since they’re often vegetarians.

“It’s different from tofu and tempeh because it is not made from soy, making it a great alternative for vegans and vegetarians with a soy allergy,” adds [Maggie Michalczyk, MS, RD](https://www.onceuponapumpkinrd.com/).

**Cool…so is seitan good for you?**

In a word, yes. “Seitan contains more protein than most other vegan protein sources,” says Michalczyk. For example, 100 grams of seitan has around [22 grams of protein](https://ndb.nal.usda.gov/ndb/foods/show/45356836?fgcd=&manu=&format=Full&count=&max=25&offset=&sort=default&order=asc&qlookup=seitan&ds=&qt=&qp=&qa=&qn=&q=&ing=), while an equivalent amount of [firm tofu has only 7 grams](https://ndb.nal.usda.gov/ndb/foods/show/16162?fgcd=&manu=&format=&count=&max=25&offset=&sort=default&order=asc&qlookup=tofu&ds=SR&qt=&qp=&qa=&qn=&q=&ing=). However, seitan isn’t a complete protein—it lacks the amino acids lysine and threonine, says Michalczyk. As with other [incomplete vegetarian protein sources](https://www.wellandgood.com/good-food/complete-proteins-vegetarians/), she suggests pairing seitan with other foods like beans to make sure you’re getting enough of the essential amino acids our bodies need to run properly.

“Seitan also is a good source of iron, selenium, and phosphorus, giving it a little more nutrient credibility than just its protein content,” says Michalczyk.

Plus, unlike other products that are made with wheat, it’s relatively low in carbs, Michalczyk adds ([5 grams of carbs per 100-gram serving](https://ndb.nal.usda.gov/ndb/foods/show/45356836?fgcd=&manu=&format=Full&count=&max=25&offset=&sort=default&order=asc&qlookup=seitan&ds=&qt=&qp=&qa=&qn=&q=&ing=)). This is because most of the carby starch content gets washed away during processing, she says. So, it’s a pretty good option for low-carb diets. However, watch out for added sugar content in prepared pre-marinated products, which could rack up that carb count.

However, there’s one group of people that should skip on seitan: anyone with Celiac disease or a [non-Celiac gluten sensitivity](https://www.wellandgood.com/good-food/is-gluten-bad/). (Because, duh, it’s basically pure gluten.) “Otherwise, it’s a good choice for plant protein, especially if you’re trying to mimic the texture and taste of meat,” says Moon.

Still, take note of sodium, and look for less salty options when purchasing at the store. “Depending on how it’s made, it can be high in sodium, so just check the label, especially on pre-packaged nuggets, crumbles, strips, ‘ribs’, and ‘patties,’” says Moon. It’s generally highly-processed, so Michalcyzk says it shouldn’t be eaten every day.

At the end of the day, Moon personally prefers tofu. “But that’s just because that’s what I grew up with,” she says. It’s still a great option for plant eaters. “It picks up flavor well and is versatile, so it makes a good substitute for meat. It can be steamed, baked, stir-fried, and rolled into noodles,” says Moon. (Some chefs also prefer the [texture of seitan to tofu](https://www.wellandgood.com/good-food/blossom-vegan-pantry-staples/), although that’s honestly just a personal preference.)

Michalcyzk agrees. “I’m a big fan of diversifying your protein sources and feel that it’s at least one of those things you should try once to see if you like it or not,” she says. If it’s not your thing, you can eat other plant-based protein sources, she says. As with all healthy eating, variety is the spice of life.