

# Team Vegan Philly

By Sally Andersen

When training for a marathon, proper nutrition is undoubtedly important. Finding the perfect balance of nutrients to fuel the body with enough energy to keep going, without feeling weighed down, is crucial. If finding optimal nutrition while training isn't hard enough already, thirty local runners have chosen to up the level of difficulty: they are all vegan. Collectively, they are Team Vegan Philly.

For the second year in a row, Team Vegan Philly will be running in the Philadelphia Marathon's. Along the way, team members will be raising money to support the Humane League of Philadelphia, a local animal advocacy nonprofit that sets out to improve life for animals through programs such as humane education and vegan and vegetarian outreach. Last year, fifteen runners raised \$10,000. This year, with twice as many participants, the fund-raising totals will surely exceed that.

Team Vegan Philly is more than just a group of altruistic runners looking for donations. They are healthy, successful athletes that thrive on beans, vegetables, fruits, grains, and anything else that never came from an animal. By getting active, Team Vegan Philly raises awareness that not only is a vegan diet great for animals' lives, it's great for the runners' health, too. Members even boast that their cruelty-free diet makes them, "leaner, healthier and more energetic!"

Don't brush them off as animal-hugging hippies; they know what they are talking about. For some of these meat-free athletes this race is not a one-time event. The line-up includes experienced marathoners, a female triathlete who is currently training for the Ironman, a mixed martial arts fighter, a trail and ultramarathon runner, a fitness instructor, a swimmer, yoga enthusiasts and a field hockey player. Their day jobs include lawyer, lab technician, rabbi, teacher, and even a cooking instructor and a nutritional counselor.

**But how do they do it without animal protein?**

High-protein diets such as the Atkins Diet have created vegetarian and vegan versions of their philosophy now these popular fad diets suggest

a daily protein intake that is twice as high. According to Runner's World Magazine, Atkins is not recommended for athletes, however. On the Atkins Diet, athletes would take in more protein than necessary and would miss one crucial aspect – carbohydrates.

Carbohydrates and protein are the two major factors that play into an athlete's diet. Both are used by the body to create energy. While carbs supply most of the energy needed by runners, without protein the body will absorb the carbs too quickly creating an insulin spike. Therefore, an optimal diet for any runner or athlete is a well-balanced one that combines carbs and proteins.

Getting hungry yet? Give one of these vegan protein-carb combos a taste:

- **Peanut butter and fruit preserves on whole wheat bread**
- **Hummus, pita and raw veggies**
- **Bean or lentil soup with a roll or baked potato**
- **Beans or tofu with vegetables, served on any grain**
- **Bean burrito**
- **Rice and beans**
- **Scrambled tofu and hash browns**
- **Peanut butter and banana smoothie made with soy milk**

So the rumors are true: athletes do need more protein than couch potatoes. But the rumors about vegans and proteins are not true. Vegans can easily incorporate enough into their diet – and Team Vegan Philly is proof!



Sally Andersen is the projects director for the Humane League of Philadelphia and a recreation leader for the city. She is also a certified fitness instructor with a special interest in health and nutrition.