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Athletic Performance and a Vegan Diet

By Lisa J Lowery-Jones

Amongst athletes, usually the first question a vegan athlete gets asked is: “How do you get your protein?” This may be because we’ve had it drummed into us by the producers of protein powders that protein is paramount, especially in muscle-building activities. Whereas protein is, of course, important for the repair and building of muscles there should be more than enough in a vegan diet.

Six times World Ironman Triathlon Champion, **Dave Scott**, says that he feels healthier and has more energy on a vegan diet, and what could be more challenging than a 2.4 mile swim, 112 mile bike ride followed immediately by a 26.2 mile run? He says that he is sleeping better and can keep his weight better under control since going fully vegan from vegetarian.

Robert Cheeke was America’s top ranking vegan body builder, winning championships. He now writes, lectures and blogs about his diet and lifestyle inspiring many people to move over to a vegan diet. He recently cut back on supplements of protein powders and decreased his protein intake noticing that he gained more muscle mass. “When I cut out protein powders and all other sports supplements from my diet I, like many people, worried about my ability to build or even maintain muscle, and wasn’t exactly feeling optimistic, but proceeded anyway. The result? I was stronger than ever before, and not only maintained muscle mass, but I have built significant muscle over the past few years following a whole-food, plant-based, supplement-free diet, and I am now bigger and stronger than I have ever been!”

John Machin is a 61 year old lifelong vegan who demonstrates his strength and ability on his vegan diet his YouTube channel where you can see how much muscle can be built on a vegan diet. At 61 he has more muscle than most even half his age. He is a personal trainer and has a background in Sports Nutrition.

There are many vegan groups on Facebook where various athletes demonstrate just how well they are doing on their vegan diets. UK Vegan Runners has over 3,700 members whilst Vegan Bodybuilding and Fitness has well over 240,000 members.

More high profile athletes who have achieved incredible results on vegan diets include: 9 x Olympic gold medallist sprinter Carl Lewis who has been vegan since 1990; Tim “Livewire” Shieff – freerunning champion and finalist in *Ninja Warrior UK*; David Haye – former WBA Heavyweight boxing champion; Venus Williams – 23 x Grand Slam winning tennis player; and Fiona Oakes – 3 x world recording holding marathon runner who has been vegan her whole adult life.

So what nutrients do we actually need for muscle-building athletic performance?

The first big one that most people are convinced that vegans can’t get enough of is the macro-nutrient **protein**. The building blocks of protein are amino acids and these are required to both build and maintain muscle-mass – amongst other things.

We know that meat eaters get their protein mainly from