

## Nutrition Nuggets:

### What About Those Vegan Convenience Foods?

by Delisa Renideo

As more and more of us begin choosing a plant-based diet, food producers and manufacturers are responding. We can find many kinds of non-dairy milks, meat and cheese substitutes, frozen vegan pizzas and burritos, box mixes, organic tortilla chips, “energy” bars. . . Sounds great, doesn’t it? We often talk about how much easier it is to be vegan now than it was 15 years ago, before there were so many vegan convenience foods.

It might be great -- if processed food was the goal.

Let’s take a look at a few popular vegan processed foods to see whether they provide a positive addition to our diets.

Earth Balance Buttery Spread tastes great and provides a vegan substitute for dairy butter and unhealthy, hydrogenated margarine. But what does it do for us nutritionally? One tablespoon of this spread has 100 calories of pure fat. 100% fat! We spread it on bread, and for a “treat” we mix large amounts of this fat with sugar and flour to make cookies. That sure sounds healthy, doesn’t it? (We can make very tasty cookies with no added fat.)

Why would we want to smear 100 calories of salty grease on our bread? Pure habit, that’s why. We could get used to eating plain bread or using a nutritious bean spread instead.

How about Vegemise? This is a vegan substitute for mayonnaise. It doesn’t contain eggs like regular mayonnaise does, which is good. However, it still has 90 calories per tablespoon, and is 89% pure

fat. We can end up with a lot of fat and calories when we use it in potato salad or coleslaw, or in our sandwiches. We can make a much healthier spread with silken tofu with only 14 calories per tablespoon. We can also purchase Nasoya brand vegan mayonnaise with 35 calories per tablespoon.

Tofutti makes a sour cream substitute and a cream cheese substitute. Yes, they taste good. No, they aren’t healthy. They have less fat than the Earth Balance spread or Vegemise, but adding them to our food certainly doesn’t provide nutrients we need. Just more fat and calories.

Using small amounts of these substitutes occasionally probably doesn’t matter too much, but unfortunately, they can become staples in our diet very easily. This leads to excess calories, excess weight, and a perpetuation of less than optimal eating habits. For anyone wanting to lose weight, beware of these foods!

We would benefit by basing our diets on the vegan foods that have always been around -- long before these vegan convenience foods showed up. Fresh and frozen vegetables and fruits, beans of all colors and varieties, and whole grains are easy to find

***Vegan convenience foods have made it convenient to be an unhealthy vegan; the produce department makes it easy to be a healthy vegan!***

and provide us with the colorful, tasty, nutritious food that have been the basis of health for people

around the world for thousands of years.

These vegan convenience foods have made it convenient to be an unhealthy vegan; the produce department makes it easy to be a healthy vegan!



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