



Vegetarian Diet Throughout the Life Cycle: Infancy to Teenager Years

Before your child or family decides to change to a vegetarian diet, it is important to know that all vegetarian diets are not alike. All vegetarian diets exclude meat, poultry, seafood or products containing those foods. However, some common vegetarian diets exclude additional foods:

- **Lacto-ovo vegetarian:** eats dairy products and eggs
- **Ovo-vegetarian:** eats eggs, but no dairy
- **Lacto-vegetarian:** eats dairy products, but no eggs
- **Vegan:** eats only foods from plant sources, no dairy products, eggs or honey

Individuals who have eliminated red meat, but not poultry or fish, from their diet are sometimes referred to as semi-vegetarian.

A well-planned vegetarian diet can meet a person's nutritional needs and provide some health benefits. The diet can lower levels of saturated fat, cholesterol and animal protein as well as increase levels of complex carbohydrates, fiber, magnesium, potassium, folate, antioxidants and phytochemicals. However, special care needs to be taken in children and adolescents so they get adequate amounts of certain vitamins and minerals.

A vegetarian diet can be a healthy choice for your child, as long as it is properly planned. Check with your family doctor, pediatrician or a registered dietitian if you have questions about the diet.

Infants

The main sources of protein and nutrients for infants are breastmilk or formula, especially in the first 6 months of life. Breastfed infants should receive a source of Vitamin B12 if their mother is a vegetarian and her diet is not supplemented. Breastfed infants and infants drinking less than 32 ounces of formula should get a Vitamin D supplement.

Guidelines for the introduction of solid foods are the same for vegetarian and non-vegetarian infants. Breastfed infants 6 months and older should receive iron from complementary foods such as iron fortified infant cereals.

Toddlers

After the age of 1, strict vegan diets may not offer growing toddlers enough essential vitamins and minerals, such as Vitamin D, Vitamin B12, iron, calcium and zinc. It is very important to serve fortified cereals and nutrient dense foods. Vitamin supplementation may be needed. Parents and caregivers need to make sure that the child is getting enough calories for growth.

Older Children and Teens

A lacto-ovo vegetarian diet (includes dairy products and eggs) is the best choice for growing children and teens. Many teens choose this diet because of environmental and ethical concerns regarding meat production and consumption. Make sure they are getting enough of the following: iron, zinc, calcium, Vitamin D and Vitamin B12. A vitamin and mineral supplement may be needed.

Your vegetarian preteen or teen might have a different idea than you about what is a healthy vegetarian meal (e.g., french fries and soda). Talk to your child about the importance of eating right, especially when following a vegetarian diet.

Be on the lookout if your child has self-imposed a very restrictive diet. A teen with an eating disorder may drastically reduce calories or cut out all fat or carbohydrates and call it “vegetarianism”.

Food Sources of Important Nutrients

Protein	beans, whole grains, soy products, nuts and nut butters, dairy products, eggs
Iron	beans, green leafy vegetables (e.g., kale, collard greens), fortified bread and cereals, instant oatmeal, nuts and nut butters, potatoes (with skin), enriched pasta, dried fruit <i>Consuming a good source of Vitamin C at each meal increased iron absorption.</i>

Calcium	cow's milk, fortified soymilk, fortified almond milk, fortified rice milk, leafy green vegetables, broccoli, beans, calcium-fortified juice, almonds and almond butter, sesame seed and sesame butter, soy nuts, blackstrap molasses, figs
Vitamin B12	vitamin B12 fortified foods (such as nutritional yeast, soymilk, meat analogs, or ready-to-eat cereals), dairy products, eggs <i>A vitamin B12 supplement may be necessary.</i>
Vitamin D	eggs, vitamin D fortified foods (such as soymilk, cow's milk, orange juice, ready-to-eat cereals) <i>Although vitamin D is also made in the skin from sunlight, a vitamin D supplement or a multivitamin that contains vitamin D may be necessary.</i>

Vegetarian Meal Ideas

Breakfast

- Cereal with soymilk or cow's milk
- Whole wheat toast with margarine or jelly and a piece of fruit
- Instant oatmeal with nuts, raisins, and soymilk or cow's milk

Lunch

- Vegetable sandwich (tomatoes, peppers, onions, avocado) with or without cheese on whole grain bread
- Vegetable soup with a piece of toast
- Veggie burger or falafel with soy cheese, mushrooms, and tomato on a whole grain bun
- Pita bread filled with veggies or peanut butter
- Chili with beans and textured vegetable protein

Dinner

- Tofu stir-fry with brown rice
- Pasta with tomato sauce plus vegetables
- Tacos or burritos filled with beans, textured vegetable protein, tofu, or tempeh
- Pizza with or without cheese and topped with vegetables, tofu, or meat substitute

Snacks

- Dried fruits
- Trail mix
- Popcorn
- Rice cakes
- Yogurt
- Smoothies
- Hummus
- Bagels with nut butt
- Instant soups

Tips for Parents and Caregivers

- If your child needs extra calories, serve foods high in protein and healthy fats. Provide snacks as children are often hungry in between meals.
- Share the food your family eats with others. Invite your child's friends for snacks or meals. Bring healthful, good tasting food to school/organized sport activities/church for everyone to try.
- School lunch program may offer limited options for vegetarians. You may need to pack a lunch or supplement the school lunch with foods from home.
- Sometimes it is hard to provide enough calories for your child to grow at a normal rate. If the diet is high in fiber, it may fill up your child's stomach quickly. If this is the case with fiber, here are some suggestions:
 - Peel fruits
 - Serve more cooked vegetables and fewer raw ones
 - Switch to lower fiber cereals
 - Use some processed grains (e.g. white flour) in place of whole grains (e.g. whole wheat flour)

Food Guidelines for Vegetarian Children and Adolescents

Food Group	Serving Description	Number of Servings for Specific Age Groups			
		1-4 years	4-8 years	9-13 years	14-18 years
Grains	½ cup cooked grain or cereal 1 slice bread 1 ounce ready to eat cereal	4	6	7	10
Legumes, nuts, and other protein rich foods	½ cup cooked beans ½ cup tofu or tempeh 1 oz. meat analog 2 tbsp. nut or seed butter ¼ cup nuts 1 egg 1 cup cow's milk or soy 6 oz. dairy or soy yogurt 1 oz. dairy or soy cheese	4	5	6	6
Vegetables	1 cup raw ½ cup cooked ½ cup vegetable juice	1 to 1 ½	3	3 to 4	4 to 5
Fruits	1 piece medium fruit ½ cup cooked or cut up fruit ½ cup fruit juice ¼ cup dried fruit	1 to 1 ½	2 to 3	2 to 3	3 to 4
Fats	1 tsp. oil, mayonnaise or margarine	3	4	5	4 to 5

Additional Information:

If you have questions, call: _____, *Registered Dietitian*

Phone: (717) 531- _____ or (717) 531-8406

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