



Vegetarian Nutrition

a dietetic practice group of the
eat right. American Dietetic Association

RD Resources for Consumers:

Vegetarian Nutrition for School-Aged Children

Balanced vegetarian diets are healthy for children and may help them maintain a healthy body weight.

Vegetarian children often eat more fruits, vegetables and fiber, and less fat and cholesterol. This may reduce risk of chronic disease and weight-related illness.

Types of Vegetarians

Lacto-ovo: Includes dairy products and eggs. Excludes meat, poultry, and fish.

Lacto: Includes dairy products. Excludes eggs, foods containing eggs, meat, poultry, and fish.

Vegan: Includes only foods from plant sources, such as fruits, vegetables, beans, grains, seeds, and nuts. Excludes dairy products, eggs, meat, poultry, fish, and all foods containing these items.

Lacto-ovo, lacto, and vegan vegetarian diets can support healthy growth and development.

Calorie Needs and Growth

All children need more calories during times of rapid growth or increased physical activity. Vegetarian diets are often high in fiber and low in fat. This may cause children to feel full before they consume enough calories. Watch for sudden changes in your child's growth and activity level. Include foods rich in nutrients and calories. Nutritious snacks can help to ensure proper calorie intake.

Changing to a Vegetarian Diet

Some children are vegetarian from birth, but many families change later in life. There are many ways to help children make this transition. Explain why the family has chosen a vegetarian diet. Introduce new foods gradually. Make familiar foods available. Try making meat-free versions of favorite family meals.

A Healthy Diet for Life

A vegetarian diet can help form healthy eating habits for life. Include whole-grains, fruits, and vegetables often. Limit foods high in saturated fat, sugar, and salt. Consult a registered dietitian (RD) for help with diet assessment and meal planning. To find an RD in your area, visit www.eatright.org.

Foods high in nutrients and calories

- Avocado
- Nuts & nut butters
- Seeds & seed butters
- Dried fruits
- Full-fat soy products
- Bean spreads
- Fruit juices

Important Nutrients and Good Sources

Protein

- Beans
- Grains
- Tofu
- Meat analogs
- Nuts and nut butters
- Dairy products
- Eggs

tip Protein needs can be easily met if children eat a varied diet.

Vitamin D

- Vitamin D fortified foods (cow's milk, soymilk or rice milk, orange juice, ready-to-eat cereals)
- Eggs
- Skin exposure to sunlight

Calcium

- Fortified soy or rice milk
- Fortified orange juice
- Milk and yogurt
- Green leafy vegetables (broccoli, kale, bok choy)
- Calcium-set tofu
- Almonds and almond butter

Iron

- Whole or enriched grains
- Dried fruits
- Fortified cereals
- Beans
- Green leafy vegetables

tip Include a source of vitamin C (bell peppers, tomatoes, citrus fruits) with meals to increase iron absorption.

Vitamin B12

- Fortified soymilk
- Some meat analogs
- Vitamin B12-fortified nutritional yeast
- Fortified ready-to-eat cereals
- Eggs
- Dairy products

tip A vitamin B12 supplement may be used

Zinc

- Whole-grain products
- Wheat germ
- Fortified cereals
- Nuts
- Beans

Meal Ideas

Breakfast

- Cereal with soy or cow's milk
- Pancakes topped with berries
- Bagel with nut butter
- Oatmeal with fruit
- Eggs, tomato, and cheese in whole wheat tortilla
- Tofu scramble
- Yogurt, fruit, and nuts

Lunch

- Bean soup with whole-grain bread
- Green salad
- Noodles with peanut butter sauce
- Avocado sandwich
- Pasta salad
- Nut butter and banana sandwich

Dinner

- Pasta with tomato sauce
- Vegetable pizza
- Bean chili
- Veggie burger
- Tofu stir-fry over brown rice
- Bean burrito
- Vegetable curry with barley

Snacks

- Hummus with pita
- Fruit smoothie
- Fresh or dried fruit
- Raw vegetables with dip
- Trail mix
- Applesauce
- Low-fat graham crackers

Menu Planning

Provide your child with a balanced and varied diet. Choose foods high in nutrients. Focus on foods rich in calcium and iron. Keep healthful snacks on hand.

If some family members eat animal products, consider meals that allow these foods to be easily added or subtracted. Try meat-free products. Enjoy new vegetarian recipes. Explore meat-free ethnic foods.

Resources

Resources for More Information

Vegan Lunch Box, By Jennifer McCann

Raising Vegetarian Children, By Joanne Stepaniak, Vesanto Melina

The Vegetarian Way, By Virginia Messina and Mark Messina

Better Than Peanut Butter & Jelly, By Marty Mattare, Wendy Muldawer