

Healthy Eating Guidelines for your Vegetarian Child (4-13 years)

A vegetarian diet is one that does not include animal products like meat, poultry, fish and seafood. Vegan diets also exclude eggs and milk products or any food that contain animal ingredients, such as honey from bees.

A vegetarian diet is healthy for people at any age – even children. As with any diet, it will take planning to make sure that all of your child’s nutrition and energy needs are met especially for nutrients like protein, omega-3, iron, zinc, calcium, vitamin D and vitamin B12.



Steps you can take

Vegetarians can follow Canada’s Food Guide to help them follow a healthy well balanced diet. The diet is based on four food groups, each food group has choices for a vegetarian diet. For example, in the meat and alternative group, a vegetarian would choose the “alternatives,” such as legumes or eggs.

This chart shows the number of servings of each food group that children should aim for each day. For examples of “one serving,” see www.myfoodguide.ca.

	<i>Age 4-8</i>	<i>Age 9-13</i>	<i>Example</i>
Vegetables and Fruit	5	6	Apples, bananas, pears, mango, broccoli, leafy greens, carrots, tomatoes.
Grain Products	4	6	Bread, rice, quinoa, pasta, cereal, crackers, oatmeal.

Milk and Alternatives	2	3-4	Milk, cheese, yogurt, fortified soy beverages, kefir.
Meat and Alternatives	1	1-2	Legumes (beans, peas, lentils), tofu, eggs, nuts, seeds, nut butters.

Plan for the following nutrients in your child's vegetarian diet:

Protein

Protein is important for muscle growth and repair. It's also used to make enzymes and hormones. Good vegetarian protein choices include:

- | nuts, seeds and nut butters
- | tofu, edamame, soy beverages and other soy products
- | legumes, such as chickpeas, lentils, kidney beans and black-eyed peas
- | dairy products like; milk, cheese, yogurt (especially Greek), kefir (not for vegan diets)
- | eggs (not for vegan diets)
- | grain products like bulgur, quinoa, pasta and bread.

Vegans can drink fortified soy beverages instead of milk. Other non-dairy products like almond or rice milk are not a good source of protein.

Omega-3 Fat

Children should also have some omega-3 fat each day. This type of fat is important for heart and brain health.

DHA and EPA are omega-3 fats most commonly found in fish. Some vegetarian sources of DHA and EPA include:

- | omega-3 enriched milk (not for vegan diets)
- | omega-3 enriched eggs (not for vegan diets)
- | foods and beverages made with algal oil (algae), such as fortified soy beverages, juice and peanut butter.

Plant-based sources of omega-3 fat are called alpha-linolenic acid, or ALA. It's called an essential fat because the body cannot make it, so it must be provided by the diet. ALA can be changed in the body to DHA and EPA, but at low levels. Examples include:

- | flax, chia and hemp seeds
- | walnuts
- | soybeans
- | oil made from soy, canola, flax or hemp
- | omega-3 enriched milk and eggs (not for vegan diets).

Iron

Children need iron for healthy growth and brain development. It also carries oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. Iron needs increase when girls begin to menstruate. Vegetarians tend to need more iron than non-vegetarians, so offer your child iron-rich foods several times a day :

- | extra firm tofu and tempeh
- | iron-enriched breakfast cereals
- | whole grains such as quinoa, oats, brown rice and millet
- | legumes (beans, peas and lentils)
- | eggs
- | nuts and seeds
- | fortified soy beverages
- | blackstrap molasses.

You can increase iron absorption by serving these foods with foods rich in vitamin C. Examples are sweet peppers, broccoli, tomatoes, kiwi and oranges. In some cases, iron supplements are necessary. Speak to your doctor.

Zinc

Zinc is important for normal growth and development. It's part of the body's immune system, and helps with tissue growth and repair. Zinc is found in:

- | nuts and seeds
- | legumes (beans, peas and lentils)
- | wheat germ and bran
- | tofu
- | eggs
- | milk, cheese and yogurt (not for vegan diets).

Calcium

Calcium is important for strong bones and teeth. It also plays a role in ensuring that the heart and muscles work well. Include the following foods in your child's diet on a daily basis, or meet the recommend number of Milk and Alternative servings as outlined above.

- | milk, cheese and yogurt
- | fortified soy beverages, cheese and yogurt
- | calcium-fortified tofu
- | almond and sesame butter (tahini)
- | fortified orange juice
- | white beans and navy beans
- | blackstrap molasses
- | dark leafy greens, such as collards, spinach and kale.

Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 helps the body to use fats and make red blood cells. It's only found naturally in animal products, such as meat, eggs and milk. Vegetarians who include milk products in their diet can get vitamin B12 from milk, cheese, yogurt and eggs. Vegans can get vitamin B12 from:

- | fortified soy foods, such as soy beverages, burgers and sliced deli-style "meats"
- | Red-Star nutritional yeast (a flaky condiment that tastes like Parmesan cheese)
- | vitamin B12-supplements.

If your child is vegan, the above foods should be eaten on a regular basis.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps the body absorb minerals, including calcium. Vitamin D plays a role in building healthy bones and teeth. Food sources include:

- | milk
- | fortified soy beverages
- | fortified orange juice, almond beverage or rice beverage
- | eggs
- | soft, non-hydrogenated margarine
- | fortified yogurts.

If your child is not drinking 2 cups of milk or fortified soy beverage a day, talk to your doctor or a registered dietitian to ensure they are getting all the vitamin D they need.

Making vegetarian meals

It's important for children to get a variety of foods in their diet to help them get the energy and nutrients that they need for normal growth and development. Aim for 3-4 food groups in a meal. Snacks can include 1-2 food groups. Here are some vegetarian ideas for breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks.

Meal ideas for breakfast:

- | whole grain toast with peanut butter and sliced apple
- | smoothie made with fruit and Greek yogurt or soy yogurt
- | oatmeal or congee made with milk or fortified soy beverage instead of water
- | refried beans or hummus on whole grain toast with sliced avocado
- | whole grain breakfast cereal and berries with milk or fortified soy beverage
- | banana and almond butter wrapped in a whole grain tortilla
- | scrambled eggs with vegetables (or tofu scramble) with toast
- | oat or barley pancakes (made with milk and eggs) with berries

- | quinoa porridge made with milk and fresh fruit.

Meal ideas for lunch:

- | nut butter and raisin sandwich
- | bean and vegetable burrito
- | split pea soup with crackers and cheese or soy cheese
- | lunch parfait with fruit, granola and soy or Greek yogurt
- | curried lentil and carrot soup with a whole grain bun
- | pizza topped with vegetables and veggie pepperoni
- | black bean and tomato chilli
- | pasta salad with kidney beans and vegetables
- | cheese, soy cheese, tofu or hummus sandwich
- | chickpea, spinach and tomato curry
- | tomato soup and grilled cheese or soy cheese sandwich
- | veggie burger with tomato on a whole grain bun
- | cold sesame-peanut noodles with vegetables.

Meal ideas for dinner:

- | spaghetti and veggie "meat" balls with tomato sauce
- | tofu and vegetable stir-fry and sesame seeds
- | greek salad, hummus, eggplant dip and whole wheat pita
- | hearty bean and vegetable minestrone soup
- | lentil dhal and cauliflower with brown basmati rice
- | egg or tofu frittata with broccoli, peppers and mushrooms
- | chana masala (spiced chickpeas) with chapati
- | congee with tofu and steamed vegetables
- | vegetarian sushi and edamame
- | tofu fajitas with whole grain tortilla
- | mushroom crepes
- | cheese or tofu ravioli in veggie 'meat' sauce.

Snack ideas:

- | carrots and sweet peppers with hummus dip
- | almond butter spread into celery and topped with raisins
- | trail mix with nuts, seeds, dried fruit and whole grain cereal
- | roasted chickpeas or soy nuts
- | tofu and vegetable dumplings
- | edamame (green soy beans)
- | chopped egg, cheese or hummus on crackers
- | lentil samosas
- | vegetable and tofu cold rolls or spring rolls
- | banana slices with nut butter, topped with crispy rice cereal
- | greek or soy yogurt with berries.



Additional Resources

® · Feeding Your 6-12 year Old Picky Eater

<https://www.pennutrition.com/viewhandout.aspx?Portal=UbY=&id=JMDqXwA=&PreviewHandout=bA==>

These resources are provided as sources of additional information believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of publication and should not be considered an endorsement of any information, service, product or company.



Notes

Distributed by:

