

## Feeding your vegetarian child (6 months and older)

This handout includes information about the special nutrient needs for vegetarian children. For general information about feeding children, see our fact sheets:

- *Feeding your baby (birth to 12 months)*
- *Eat Right Be Active (12-36 months)*
- *Eat Right Be Active (3-5 years)*



Well planned meals and snacks can meet the nutrient needs of your growing child. However, there are some nutrients that need your attention, especially if your child follows a vegan diet. What type of vegetarian is your child?

- Lacto-ovo-vegetarian – excludes meat, fish, poultry, but includes dairy and eggs
- Lacto-vegetarian – excludes all animal products, but includes dairy
- Ovo-vegetarian – excludes all animal products, but includes eggs
- Vegan – excludes all animal products

### Nutrients needing attention

#### Protein

Protein needs are higher for vegetarians because plant-based proteins are not digested by the body as well as animal-based proteins.

The following foods are good sources of protein:

- Eggs
- Nuts, nut butters, seeds
- Legumes – beans, lentils
- Fortified soy products – tofu, soy beverage
- Milk products – milk, cheese, yogurt

#### Omega-3 fats

Certain types of omega-3 fats that are important for brain development and vision are found mostly in fish, seafood and eggs. This means that

lacto-vegetarians and vegans are at a higher risk of not getting enough of these types of fats.

These foods are good sources of omega-3 fats:

- Eggs
- Oil – canola, soy and flaxseed
- Fortified soy products – tofu
- Walnuts – chop or crush for young children
- Products that are fortified with omega-3 fats. Be aware that some companies use a non-vegetarian source of omega-3 (e.g., fish oil)

#### Iron

Iron is a mineral that is needed for growth and learning. Iron needs are almost double for vegetarians compared to non-vegetarians because the iron from plant sources, such as beans and lentils, are not as well absorbed by the body.

Good vegetarian sources of iron include:

- Legumes – beans, lentils
- Breakfast cereals
- Fortified soy products – tofu

Serve foods high in vitamin C such as oranges, strawberries, 100% fruit juice, broccoli, tomatoes and red or green peppers at most meals and snacks to help your child's body absorb the iron.

#### Zinc

Zinc is an important mineral needed for growth and development.

Good sources of zinc include:

- Legumes – beans, lentils
- Fortified soy products – tofu
- Milk products – milk, cheese, yogurt
- Nuts, nut butters
- Sesame seeds – sesame butter or tahini
- Breads made with yeast

## Calcium

Calcium is a mineral needed for healthy bones and teeth. Milk-based beverages are the main source of calcium for most children, including vegetarians. A variety of healthy foods along with 2 cups (500 mL) of milk-based beverages each day will meet your child's calcium needs.

Milk-based beverage options for children less than 24 months of age include:

- Breastmilk
- Iron-fortified infant formulas, including soy
- Cow's milk (3.25% M.F.) – starting at 9-12 months of age

Milk-based beverage options for children 24 months of age or older include:

- Breastmilk
- Cow's milk – (2% or 1% M.F., skim)
- Fortified soy beverage

Although rice, almond and other vegetarian beverages provide calcium and vitamin D, they are not recommended because they are not a good source of protein.

Other vegetarian sources of calcium include:

- Almonds
- Blackstrap molasses
- Calcium-fortified 100% juices
- Dried milk powder
- Fortified soy products – tofu, tempeh
- Milk products – cheese, yogurt, keifer
- Oranges
- Sesame seeds – sesame butter or tahini
- Soy beans

## Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps the body use calcium. Although the body makes vitamin D directly from the sun, children in Canada may not get enough to meet their vitamin D needs.

For babies less than 12 months of age that are breastfeeding or drinking less than 32 ounces (1000 mL) of infant formula per day, a vitamin D supplement of up to 400 IU is recommended. See our fact sheet *Vitamin D and your baby* for details.

For children 12 months of age or older, drinking 2 cups (500 mL) of vitamin D fortified cow's

milk or fortified soy beverage will give the vitamin D needed.

Salmon is a good source of vitamin D. Margarine and egg yolk only have a small amount compared to vitamin D fortified beverages.

## Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>

Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is needed for healthy blood cells and nerves. Vegan children are at higher risk of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency because it is found only in animal products or fortified foods.

Good vegetarian sources of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> include:

- Milk
- Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> fortified soy beverage
- Yogurt
- Eggs
- Meatless versions of ground meat, chicken, luncheon slices (e.g., soy burger)

Vegetables, fruit, grain products, beans, nuts and tofu are not sources of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>.

## Where to find more information

If you think your child is not meeting their nutrient needs, they may need a vitamin or mineral supplement. Talk to your child's health care provider or call *EatRight Ontario* at 1-877-510-5102 and talk to a registered dietitian.

For additional information, visit our website at [www.york.ca/nutrition](http://www.york.ca/nutrition) to see our fact sheets:

- *Calcium the non-dairy way*
- *Iron needs for children*
- *Omega 3 fat: Reel in the benefits!*
- *The healthy eating and cookbook shelf*
- *Vitamin D and your baby*
- *When your child does not drink milk*
- *When your child does not eat vegetables*
- *When your child does not eat meat*

Look for vegetarian recipes on the internet or at the library. These websites can help you plan nutritious vegetarian meals and snacks:

- In a vegetarian kitchen - [www.vegkitchen.com](http://www.vegkitchen.com)
- Vesanto Melina, Registered Dietitian – [www.nutrispeak.com](http://www.nutrispeak.com) (see “related links”)

## Easy child-friendly vegetarian recipes

### Baked tofu nuggets vegan friendly

3 tbsp (45 mL) Wheat germ  
 2 tbsp (30 mL) Cornmeal  
 16 oz (450 g) Tofu, extra firm, cut into  
 ¾ inch cubes

Preheat oven to 400° F.  
 Combine wheat germ and cornmeal and set aside. Blot tofu well between clean tea-towels or several layers of paper towel. Coat tofu cubes with mixture in bowl. Arrange on a lightly oiled non-stick baking sheet. Bake for 15 minutes, stirring 1-2 times or until golden and firm. Serve with dipping sauce. Makes 4-6 servings



Source: In a vegetarian kitchen @ www.vegkitchen.com

### Homemade pizza vegan friendly

1 Flatbread, whole wheat - pita or naan  
 ½ cup (125 mL) Tomato sauce or hummus  
 ¼-½ cup (60-125 mL) Vegetables, chopped, any variety  
 1½ oz (45 mL) Milk-based or soy cheese

Preheat oven to 400° F. Spread a thin layer of tomato sauce or hummus on flatbread. Add chopped vegetables and top with cheese. Bake until cheese melts. Makes 2 servings.

### Smoothie vegan friendly

½ cup (125 mL) Milk-based or soy yogurt  
 ½ cup (125 mL) Milk or soy beverage

Add in options:  
 ½ cup (125 mL) Fruit, fresh or frozen - strawberries, raspberries, pineapple, mango or ½ banana  
 ¼ cup (60 mL) Peanut or nut butter  
 ¼ cup (60 mL) Almond meal/flour or wheat germ

In a blender, mix yogurt with milk. Add any of the 'add in' options. Blend well in a blender. Makes 2 servings.

### French toast

1 Egg  
 2 tbsp (30 mL) Milk or soy beverage  
 ½ tsp (2 mL) Cinnamon  
 2 slices Bread, whole wheat  
 ½ cup (125 mL) Fruit, pureed or cut up

Blend egg, milk and cinnamon in a shallow bowl. Coat the bread with egg mixture. Place onto a frying pan on medium heat. Flip over once edges start to turn golden brown. Remove from frying pan and serve warm with fruit. Makes 2 servings.

### Banana log vegan friendly

1 medium Flour tortilla, whole wheat  
 2 tbsp (30 mL) Peanut or nut butter  
 1 medium Banana

Spread peanut or nut butter thinly on the tortilla. Place banana on one end of the tortilla and roll. Optional: Cut ½ inch (1 cm) slices. Makes 2 servings.



### Trail mix vegan friendly

⅓ cup (75 mL) Iron-fortified cereal  
 ⅓ cup (75 mL) Soy nuts or slivered almonds  
 ⅓ cup (75 mL) Fruit, dried - raisins, apricots, cranberries

Mix together and place in an airtight container. Makes 2 servings.

\* If your child is 3 years of age or younger, only include foods that are low risk of choking

### Peanut butter cookies

1 Egg  
 1 cup (250 mL) Peanut butter  
 ½ cup (125 mL) Sugar

Preheat oven to 375° F. Mix all ingredients together. Roll into small balls and place 2 inches (1 cm) apart on an ungreased pan. Flatten balls with fork to desired thickness. Bake for 15 minutes. Makes 16 cookies.

Source: Kraft Canada

**To boost the nutritional value, try adding 1-2 tbsp per serving of any one of the following ingredients:**

\* Almond meal/flour      \* Peanut or nut butter      \* Dried milk powder      \* Wheat germ

Note: Do not add these items into the peanut butter cookie recipe as it will not bake as intended.

## One week sample menu for a lacto-ovo vegetarian child (eats milk and egg products)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<b>Breakfast</b>	Cereal with milk Apple slices	Whole grain toast with margarine Scrambled egg Banana Milk	Banana bread with almond butter Mango slices Milk	Cereal with milk Pineapple slices	French Toast* with applesauce mixed with cinnamon for dipping Milk	Oatmeal Grapes (cut in quarters for a young child) Milk	Pancakes Fruit yogurt for dipping Cantaloupe Milk
<b>Morning snack</b>	Yogurt Strawberries	Zucchini bread Milk	Trail mix* Milk	Smoothie*	Fruit yogurt 100% juice	Graham crackers 100% juice	Cereal with milk 100% juice
<b>Lunch</b>	Banana log* Carrot sticks Milk	Homemade pizza* Banana Milk	Hummus Whole grain pita Raw zucchini sticks Milk	Macaroni and cheese Broccoli Watermelon Milk	Grilled cheese sandwich Tomato soup Kiwi slices Milk	Cheese omelette Whole grain toast Blueberries Milk	Lentil soup Whole grain crackers Cheese Milk
<b>Afternoon snack</b>	Trail mix* 100% juice	Yogurt Whole grain muffin	Peanut butter cookies* Milk	Mini whole grain bagel with silken tofu 100% juice	Carrot loaf Milk	Smoothie*	Whole grain pita and baba ganoush for dipping Milk
<b>Dinner</b>	Pasta with tomato and ground soy sauce Broccoli Milk	Beans with rice Green beans Peach slices Milk	Chili Whole grain toast with cheese Milk	Soy burger Sweet potato French fries Milk	Bean burrito with cheese Carrot and cucumber sticks Milk	Vegetable lasagna made with lentils Mixed berries Milk	Quiche or fritatta cups Potato wedges Avocado slices Milk
<b>Evening snack</b>	Smoothie*	Cereal with strawberry slices and milk	Fruit salad Graham crackers Milk	Whole grain muffin Milk	Trail mix* 100% juice	Apple slices Whole grain crackers Milk	Whole grain muffin Pear slices Milk

Portion sizes and texture depend on child's age

\*See recipe

## One week sample menu for a vegan child

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<b>Breakfast</b>	Banana bread with almond butter Soy beverage	Cereal with soy beverage Apple slices	Oatmeal Grapes (cut in quarters for a young child) Soy beverage	Cereal with soy beverage Pineapple slices	Whole grain muffin Smoothie*	Cereal with soy beverage Blueberries	Whole grain toast with peanut or nut butter Pineapple Soy beverage
<b>Morning snack</b>	Trail mix* Calcium-fortified juice	Carrot loaf with nut butter Soy beverage	Mini whole grain bagel with silken tofu Calcium-fortified juice	Banana bread Soy beverage	Fruit salad Graham crackers Soy beverage	Trail mix* Calcium-fortified juice	Cereal with soy beverage Calcium-fortified juice
<b>Lunch</b>	Homemade pizza* Pear slices Soy beverage	Grilled soy cheese sandwich Tomato soup Kiwi slices Soy beverage	Peanut/nut butter sandwich Avocado slices Watermelon Soy beverage	Hummus Whole grain pita Raw zucchini sticks Soy beverage	Black bean soup with shredded soy cheese Whole grain crackers Mandarin slices Soy beverage	Banana log* Carrot sticks Soy beverage	Chili Whole grain toast with soy cheese Soy beverage
<b>Afternoon snack</b>	Smoothie*	Whole grain pita and baba ganoush for dipping Soy beverage	Trail mix* Soy beverage	Soy yogurt Whole grain muffin Calcium-fortified juice	Whole grain crackers Soy cheese Calcium-fortified juice	Smoothie*	Zucchini bread Soy beverage
<b>Dinner</b>	Falafal on pita Diced tomato and cucumber with tahini sauce Soy beverage	Beans with rice Peach slices Soy beverage	Soy burger Sweet potato French fries Soy beverage	Bean burrito with soy cheese Carrot and cucumber sticks Soy beverage	Pasta with tomato and ground tempeh sauce Broccoli Soy beverage	Bean salad with tofu cubes Naan Mixed berries Soy beverage	Baked tofu nuggets* Mashed sweet potatoes Cucumber sticks Soy beverage
<b>Evening snack</b>	Soy yogurt Whole grain muffin	Fruit salad Graham crackers Soy beverage	Smoothie*	Apple slices Whole grain crackers Soy beverage	Cereal with soy beverage	Whole grain muffin Soy beverage	Apple slices Whole grain crackers Soy beverage

Portion sizes and texture depend on child's age

\*See recipe

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