

FACTSHEET

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Vegetarian Eating in Children

This information, with its food examples, is intended for educational purposes only and does not constitute SCHN/JHCH endorsement of any particular branded food product.

What is a vegetarian?

1. **Lacto-ovo** vegetarians avoid meat but include eggs, milk, and dairy products
2. **Lacto-vegetarians** avoid meat and eggs, but include milk and dairy foods
3. **Vegans** avoid all foods derived from animal products. This diet is low in iron, zinc, B12, and potentially protein and total energy. It will need additional consideration and is beyond the scope of this fact sheet. It is recommended you seek the assistance of an Accredited Practising Dietitian to ensure your child is eating an adequate diet,

Vegetarian Diets and Children

To grow and develop appropriately – children need to eat foods from all of the food groups:

- Breads and cereals
- Fruit & Vegetables
- Dairy Foods
- Meat and Meat Alternatives (protein rich foods)
- Fats and Oils

What nutrients are important for the vegetarian child?

DIETARY VARIETY

Vegetarian food choices are often high in fibre. This can mean children may not eat enough energy (kilojoules or calories) to grow because the fibre fills them up. Children can get enough energy by eating regular meals and snacks.

Include:

- Dairy products if permitted / Calcium fortified soy drink
- Eggs
- Tofu & Tempeh
- Nuts** and seeds
- Avocado
- A wide range of breads and cereals, including wholegrains
- Meat substitutes e.g. lentils, nutmeat, soy burgers, Sanitarium™ Vegie Delights Range, Quorn™ range
- Quinoa & other grains

Foods high in sugar and fat (e.g. lollies, chocolate, chips and cakes) offer little nutritional value and should not replace nutritious meals and snacks.

PROTEIN – Encourage Variety!

Children need good quality protein for growth.

It is important to include a variety of protein foods 2-3 times per day to provide enough protein for growth. Some protein foods from plants are:

- Tofu & Tempeh
- Legumes e.g. Lentils, Baked Beans, Kidney Beans, Chickpeas, Soybeans
- Protein from dairy products e.g. cow's milk, cheese, yoghurt
- Calcium fortified soya, rice, oats and almond drinks
- Nuts** and nut butters
- Eggs
- Quorn™ Mince (Meat Free, Soy Free Alternative) – Cook from Frozen
- Sanitarium™ products – tinned or chilled
- Syndian™ frozen meat alternative products

N.B. Rice, almond and oat milk are lower in protein than dairy and soy milk.

IRON

Children need iron in the blood to carry oxygen around their bodies. It is also important for maintaining energy levels, brain development and immune function. There are two types of iron in food:

1. Haem iron – found in red meats, poultry and seafood
2. Non-haem iron (vegetarian) – found in:
 - Legumes (e.g. baked beans and lentils)
 - Wholegrain breads and fortified (added iron) breakfast cereals
 - Green leafy vegetables
 - Nuts and seeds**
 - Eggs
 - Dried fruits

Our body is better able to absorb Haem iron compared to non-haem iron. Eating foods rich in vitamin C can help absorb non-haem (vegetarian) sources of iron.

Ways to combine non haem iron with foods rich in vitamin C to increase absorption are:

- Fruit with iron fortified breakfast cereal
- Vegetables or salad with legumes at dinner
- Baked beans in tomato sauce
- Tomato based pasta sauce with lentils
- Serve fruit with meals
- For more ideas see 'Ways to Boost Iron' Factsheet

CALCIUM

- Calcium is needed for strong bones and teeth. The best sources of calcium are dairy products such as milk, cheese and yoghurt.
- To meet calcium needs children (4-13 years) will need to eat 3 serves of dairy food each day. Adolescents (14-

18 years) will need to eat 4 serves of dairy food each day.

- 1 serve = 1x 250mL glass milk OR 1 x 200g tub of yoghurt OR 40g or 2 x slices of cheese
- Calcium-fortified soy drinks and yoghurt are good sources of calcium e.g. So Good™, Vitasoy™. Check that the brand of soy product used has added calcium (120mg/100mL).
- Other plant sources of calcium include nuts**, and some green vegetables. These often have lower amounts of calcium are not as well absorbed as dairy sources.

ZINC

Zinc is used by the body to help provide energy & to boost the immune system. The richest sources of zinc include meats, eggs and dairy foods.

However, plant based sources include:

- Wholegrain breads and cereals
- Wheatgerm
- Nuts and seeds**
- Legumes e.g. chickpeas, lentils

VITAMIN B12

Vitamin B12 has a key role in the normal functioning of the brain and nervous system. It is also used to make red blood cells and is involved in cell metabolism. Animal based foods are the ONLY sources of vitamin B12.

Vegetarian sources include:

- Eggs
- Dairy foods

It is very difficult for vegans to meet their B12 requirements unless they eat foods fortified with B12. For example;

- Sanitarium™ "Soy Tasty" range
- Sanitarium™ "Veggie Delights" range
- Sanitarium™ "So Good"

For vegans, it is recommended for B12 levels to be monitored as supplementation will usually be necessary.

SAMPLE MEAL PLAN

Breakfast

Iron-fortified Breakfast Cereal e.g. Weet-Bix with Milk or Calcium fortified Soy Milk OR

Toast with peanut butter or baked beans and one piece of fruit

Morning Tea

Fruit

Tub of Yoghurt or Soy Yoghurt

Cheese & Crackers

Lunch

Sandwich or wrap on multigrain bread with;

- Egg & Salad
- Hommus & Avocado with cheese and salad
- Cottage cheese and salad

Afternoon Tea

Handful of almonds or mixed nuts**

Vegies with hommus dip

One cup or small popper of flavoured milk

Dinner

Lentil Curry with Rice and Vegetables OR

Tomato & Mushroom Omelette with Salad and toast OR

Tofu Burger with Salad OR

Tender Fillets from the Sanitarium “Vegie Delights” range with cous cous and stir-fried with Vegetables

Quorn™ Lasagne

Quinoa with roast vegetables and tofu

Pasta with lentils, tomatoes and cheese

Dessert

Yoghurt OR Custard

Supper

Glass of Milo made on soy milk OR

Custard

DRINKS

Water

Milk up to 500-600mL per day

Where do I find the important nutrients?

This is a guide to help you choose nutrient-rich foods. Remember that not all foods contain the same amount of nutrients – this is just a basic guide.

For more information, talk to your dietitian.

Nutrients	Breads & Cereals	Vegetables	Fruits	Meat Alternatives			Dairy/Soy Products
				Nuts & Seeds**	Eggs	Legumes	
Protein				✓	✓	✓	✓
Fat				✓	✓		✓
Carbohydrate	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Iron	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Calcium		✓		✓			✓
Zinc				✓	✓	✓	✓
Vitamin C		✓	✓				
Vitamin B12					✓		✓

**** Whole nuts are not suitable for children under 3 yrs of age due to the risk of choking. Nut pastes can be used instead.**