

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 can be 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 make sure 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?

Total Energy

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 milk
- Eggs
- Tofu & Tempeh
- Nuts** and seeds
- Avocado
- Oils
- A wide range of breads and cereals, including wholegrains
- Meat substitutes e.g. lentils, nutmeat, soy burgers
- Quinoa, rice, pasta & other grains

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 3 1/2 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 plant based 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 and are not as well absorbed as dairy sources.

Zinc

Zinc is used by the body to help provide energy and 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
- Tofu
- Nuts and seeds**
- Legumes e.g. chickpeas, lentils

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 500mL 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		✓	✓				

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