

Client Name _____ Date _____

RD/DTR _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Vegetarian Nutrition for Young Children



A vegetarian eating plan can be healthy for children. You may find it useful to meet with a registered dietitian (RD). The RD can help design an eating plan that meets your child’s personal nutritional needs.

Here are some general tips for making healthy vegetarian choices for your child:

- The eating plan should be mostly fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products or fortified nondairy “milks.”
 - Choose a variety of different colored fruits and vegetables every day.
 - Choose whole grains for at least half of each day’s grain servings. Choices include brown rice, whole wheat, oats, barley, cornmeal, and bulgur.
- For protein, choose beans, soy foods, nuts, and nut butters. Your child can also eat eggs if they fit the type of vegetarian diet he or she follows.
- Choose heart-healthy fats, such as olive oil and canola oil.
- Limit foods with added sugar.

Types of Vegetarians

As you discuss nutrition and meal-planning with your child’s RD or other health care providers, it can be useful to identify the type of vegetarian your child is.

- **Lacto-ovo-vegetarian:** Does not eat meat, poultry, seafood, or products made from meat, poultry, or seafood (such as gelatin, broths, gravy, and lard).
- **Lacto-vegetarian:** Does not eat meat, poultry, seafood, or products made from meat, poultry, or seafood (such as gelatin, broths, gravy, and lard). Also does not eat eggs or products containing eggs (such as many baked goods).
- **Vegan:** Does not eat meat, poultry, seafood, or products made from meat, poultry, or seafood (such as gelatin, broths, gravy, and lard). Also does not eat eggs, products containing eggs, milk, dairy foods (such as cheese, yogurt, and ice cream), ingredients made from milk (such as whey and casein), or honey.

Recommended Foods

Food Group	Recommended Foods
Milk and Milk Products	Fat-free or low-fat milk* Buttermilk* Evaporated skim milk* Fortified soy milk Nonfat or low-fat yogurt* Powdered milk* Nonfat or low-fat cheese* Low-fat ice cream*
Protein Foods	Dried beans Soy foods Nuts and nut butters Eggs*
Grains	All types
Vegetables	All types
Fruits	All types
Fat and Oils	Limit to 3 to 4 teaspoons per day. Choose heart-healthy vegetable oils, such as olive or canola oil. Choose low-fat salad dressings and mayonnaise.

Note: Children following a vegan diet will not eat foods marked with an asterisk (*). Children following a lacto vegetarian or a vegan diet will not eat eggs.

Notes:

Sample 1-Day Lacto-Ovo Vegetarian Menu

This menu is designed for a 2-year-old lacto-ovo-vegetarian. Ask an RD whether it is suitable for your child.

Breakfast	6 ounces low-fat milk ¾ ounce fortified ready-to-eat breakfast cereal ½ small banana
Snack	½ toasted English muffin 1 teaspoon soft margarine
Lunch	¾ cup low-fat milk Meatless hot dog, sliced in small pieces ½ slice whole wheat bread ¼ cup steamed green beans ½ cup sliced strawberries
Snack	4 ounces low-fat milk 4 whole wheat crackers
Evening Meal	¾ cup low-fat milk ½ cup spaghetti with ¼ cup kidney beans and ¼ cup meatless marinara sauce ¼ cup steamed broccoli with 1 teaspoon olive oil

1,039 kcal; 53 g protein; 132 g carbohydrate; 36 g fat.

Notes:

Sample 1-Day Vegan Menu

This menu is designed for a 2-year-old vegan. Ask an RD whether the menu is suitable for your child.

Breakfast	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup fortified soy milk $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce fortified ready-to-eat breakfast cereal $\frac{1}{2}$ cup calcium-fortified orange juice
Snack	$\frac{1}{2}$ toasted english muffin 1 teaspoon soft margarine
Lunch	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup fortified soy milk $\frac{1}{4}$ cup hummus $\frac{1}{2}$ small apple $\frac{1}{4}$ cup steamed carrots
Snack	Smoothie made with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup fortified soy milk, 2 ounces soft tofu, and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup strawberries
Evening Meal	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup fortified soy milk $\frac{1}{4}$ cup spaghetti with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup kidney beans and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup meatless marinara sauce $\frac{1}{4}$ cup steamed broccoli with 1 teaspoon olive oil

1,010 kcal; 46 g protein; 128 g carbohydrate; 40 g fat.

Notes:

Tips for Parents of Young Vegetarians

- A vegetarian diet can be a very healthy way for children to eat. Be sure to include plenty of whole grains, cooked beans, fruits, and vegetables. Soy foods are good sources of protein, vitamins, and minerals.
- Milk and dairy foods are good sources of vitamin B-12, calcium, and vitamin D. If your child does not drink milk or eat dairy foods, take care that they are getting enough of these nutrients.
 - Vitamin B-12 is added to some foods. You may find it in soy milk, breakfast cereal, some veggie burgers, and some brands of nutritional yeast. Children’s vitamins may also have vitamin B-12.
 - Calcium is found in some green vegetables, such as kale and broccoli. It is also added to many brands of soy milk and orange juice.
 - Vitamin D is added to some brands of soy milk and fruit juice. Vitamin D supplements not made from animal products are also available.
- Some vegetarian children have a hard time getting enough calories to grow at a normal rate because their meals are very high in fiber. High-fiber meals can fill up a child’s stomach very quickly. Then the child doesn’t want more food, even though he or she needs to eat more to grow. If this is the case for your child, here are some tips to cut back on fiber:
 - Peel fruits before serving them.
 - Serve more cooked vegetables and fewer raw ones.
 - Do not give your child fiber supplements or high-fiber cereals.
 - Use some processed grains (such as white flour or white rice) in place of whole grains. You can use half white flour and half whole grain flour in baking.
- If your child needs extra calories, serve foods that are high in protein and healthy fats, such as hummus, nut butters, avocado, and smoothies made with soy milk or dairy milk.
- Provide snacks. Children are often hungry between meals. Offer children choices of foods, but limit these choices to nutritious foods. For example, ask, “Do you want some carrot sticks or some grapes?” instead of “Do you want carrot sticks or a cookie?”
- Keep trying to introduce new and healthier foods. A child may refuse a food today but love it next week.
- Make food fun! Try sandwiches cut into shapes, vegetables and fruits with dips, or pancakes for a special occasion lunch.
- Involve children in buying and preparing food. Try planting a family garden.
- Some children do not care for mixed dishes like casseroles. Try serving individual foods like beans, rice, and a vegetable instead of a rice and bean pilaf.
- Toddlers and preschoolers may choke on foods because they have not yet learned to chew foods well or they are distracted while eating. Choking risks include nuts; nut butters by the spoonful; vegetarian hot dogs (unless sliced lengthwise and then crosswise); cherry tomatoes (unless halved or quartered); grapes (unless cut in quarters); raw cherries (unless pitted and sliced); raw celery and whole raw carrots; popcorn; and tortilla chips.