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Vegetarian Diets

en español: [Dietas vegetarianas](#)

Reviewed by: [Mary L. Gavin, MD](#)

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Parents may wonder if kids can follow a vegetarian diet and still get all nutrition they need to grow up healthy and strong. Experts agree that a well-planned vegetarian diet can be a very healthy way to eat for people of all ages.

What Are the Types of Vegetarian Diets?

There are different kinds of vegetarian diets. A true vegetarian eats no meat at all, including poultry or fish. Variations include:

- **Lacto-ovo vegetarians** eat no meat, poultry, or fish, but do eat eggs and dairy products.
- **Lacto-vegetarians** eat no meat, poultry, fish, or eggs, but do eat dairy products.
- **Ovo-vegetarians** eat no meat, poultry, fish, or dairy products, but do eat eggs.
- **Vegans** eat no meat, poultry, fish, eggs,

dairy, or other animal products like honey or gelatin.

Many people want to eat less meat. Some people who stop eating red meat but may eat poultry or fish consider themselves **semi-vegetarians**, sometimes called **flexitarians**. People who follow a vegetarian diet but eat fish and seafood are called **pescatarians**.

Why Become a Vegetarian?

People choose vegetarian diets for a variety of reasons. Younger vegetarians are usually part of a family that eats vegetarian meals for health, cultural, or other reasons. Older kids may decide to become vegetarians because of concern for animals, the environment, or their own health.

Don't be alarmed if your child declares they're a vegetarian. Find out why they made this choice and discuss what it means. Work together to help your child make healthy food choices.

Nutrition Tips for Vegetarians of All Ages

Your doctor or a registered dietitian can help you plan a healthy vegetarian diet that can meet kids' nutritional needs and offer many health benefits. A diet rich in fruits and veggies is high in **fiber** and low in fat, which is good for heart health. Vegetarians are less likely to be overweight, have high blood pressure, or get type 2 diabetes.

But kids and teens on vegetarian diets must be sure to get enough of some vitamins and minerals.

Nutrients that vegetarians need and ways to get

them include:

- vitamin B12: in dairy products, eggs, and vitamin-fortified products, such as cereals, breads, and milk alternatives, and nutritional yeast
- **vitamin D**: in milk, vitamin D-fortified orange juice, and other vitamin D-fortified products
- **calcium**: in dairy products; dark green leafy vegetables; broccoli; dried beans; and calcium-fortified products, including orange juice, milk alternatives, and cereals
- protein: in dairy products, eggs, tofu and other soy products, dried beans, and nuts
- **iron**: in eggs, dried beans, dried fruits, whole grains, leafy green vegetables, and iron-fortified cereals and bread

Depending on the type of vegetarian diet, kids may miss out on some of these important nutrients. The less strict the vegetarian diet, the easier it will be for your child to meet nutrition requirements. Talk to your doctor to see if your child needs to take vitamin or mineral supplements.

Can Infants Be Vegetarians?

The main sources of protein and nutrients for infants are breast milk and formula (soy formula for vegan infants), especially in the first 6 months of life. Vegan mothers and their breastfed infants may need B12 supplements. Vitamin D recommendations are the same for vegetarian and non-vegetarian infants.

Guidelines for the introduction of **solid foods** are the same for vegetarian and non-vegetarian infants. Breastfed infants 6 months and older should get iron from foods, such as iron-fortified

infant cereal.

After an infant starts eating solids, protein-rich vegetarian foods can include pureéd tofu, cottage cheese, yogurt or soy yogurt, and pureéd and strained legumes (such as beans, split peas, chickpeas, and lentils).

What About Vegetarian Toddlers?

Toddlers are already a challenge when it comes to eating. As they come off of breast milk or formula, pay extra attention to offering iron-rich foods, including iron-fortified cereals.

Toddlers are typically picky about which foods they'll eat. Vegetarian toddlers also may feel full before they get enough of the calories and nutrients they need. That's because the amount of vegetables served might be too bulky for their tiny stomachs. Use snack time to boost nutrition by offering **healthy food** between meals.

Talk to the doctor to see if your toddler needs a vitamin or mineral supplement.

Older Vegetarian Kids and Teens

Preteens and teens often voice their independence through the foods they choose to eat. One strong statement is the decision to stop eating meat.

If it's done right, a meat-free diet can be a good choice for teens, especially considering that vegetarians often eat more of the foods that most teens don't get enough of — fruits and vegetables.

A vegetarian diet that includes dairy products and eggs (lacto-ovo) is the best choice for growing teens. A more strict vegetarian diet can meet your teen's nutritional needs, but will need more attention and planning. If you're concerned that your child is not getting enough important nutrients such as iron, calcium, and vitamins D and B12, talk to your doctor, who may recommend a vitamin and mineral supplement.

The good news for young vegetarians — and their parents — is that many schools have vegetarian fare, including salad bars and other healthy vegetarian choices. Check your school's upcoming lunch menus to see if your child will have a vegetarian choice. If not, you can pack lunch.

If your child would rather make their own school lunch or buys lunch, keep in mind that their idea of a healthy vegetarian meal may be much different from yours (e.g., French fries and a soda). Talk to your child about the importance of eating right, especially when following a vegetarian diet.

Also be wary if your child has self-imposed a very restrictive diet. A teen with an [eating disorder](#) may drastically reduce calories or cut out all fat or carbohydrates and call it "vegetarian" because it's considered acceptable and healthy.

Even if preteens or teens approach vegetarian diets in a healthy way, it's still important for them to understand which nutrients might be missing. To support your child's choice and focus on what they should be eating, consider having the whole family eat a vegetarian meal at least one night a week.

A Healthy Lifestyle

A vegetarian diet can be a healthy choice for all kids, as long as it's planned well.

The basics of a vegetarian diet are the same as for any healthy diet — provide a variety of foods including plenty of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes (like beans, soy, and lentils), nuts, and seeds. Be careful when it comes to processed foods, which tend to be low in nutrients and high in fat, calories, and salt.

If you aren't sure your child is getting all needed nutrients or if you have any questions about vegetarian diets, check in with your family doctor, pediatrician, or a registered dietitian.

Reviewed by: [Mary L. Gavin, MD](#)

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Vegetarian Diets

Post Test – December 2023

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1. Experts agree that a well-planned _____ can be a very healthy way to eat for people of all ages.
2. _____ eat no meat, poultry, fish or eggs, but do eat dairy products.
3. People who follow a vegetarian diet but eat fish and seafood are called pescatarians.
True or False?
4. A diet rich in fruits and veggies is high in _____ and low in fat, which is good for heart health. Vegetarian are less likely to be overweight, have high blood pressure or get type 2 _____.
5. Breastfed infants 6 months and older should get iron from foods, such as _____ - _____ infant cereal.
6. Vegetarian _____ also may feel full before they get enough of the calories and nutrients they need.
7. If it's done right, a meat-free diet can be a good choice for teens, especially considering that vegetarians often eat more of the foods that most teens don't get enough of – candy and soda.
True or False?
8. A vegetarian diet that includes dairy products and eggs (_____ - _____) is the best choice for growing teens.
9. A teen with an _____ may drastically reduce calories or cut out all fat or carbohydrates and call it "vegetarian" because it's considered acceptable and healthy.
10. The basics of a vegetarian diet are the same as for any healthy diet – provide a variety of foods including plenty of fruits and vegetables, _____, legumes, nuts and seeds.

November 2023 Quiz Answers. 1.Liver 2.Strokes 3.True 4.Blocked/Clots
5.Removed 6.Obesity 7.False 8.Dietitian 9.High Blood Pressure 10.60



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