

## Healthy Eating Guidelines for Your Vegetarian Baby: 6-12 months

The word vegetarian means different things to different people. Lacto-ovo vegetarians don't eat meat, fish, seafood and poultry, but will have dairy products and eggs. Vegans are vegetarians who avoid all animal foods. With special planning, vegetarian diets can be healthy for all ages, including babies.



### Steps you can take

Before 6 months, your baby only needs breastmilk and a 400 IU vitamin D supplement every day. By about 6 months of age, your baby needs more nutrients, especially iron, and is ready to start solid foods.

Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Keep offering breastmilk and a 400 IU vitamin D supplement. Continue to breastfeed until 2 years of age and beyond. Breastfed babies of vegan mothers may need a vitamin B12 supplement if the mother's B12 intake is not adequate. Talk to your health care provider.
- When you offer solids, let your baby decide how much to eat.
- Make your baby's first foods rich in iron. See the 'Iron' section below for more information. Offer iron-rich foods at least 2 times per day.
- Once a variety of iron rich foods are accepted, offer a variety of other healthy foods.
- Work towards feeding your baby 2 to 3 meals and 1 to 2 snacks of solid foods each day, based on their appetite. Your baby will decide how much they need to eat.
- You can start offering small amounts of 3.25% homogenized whole milk in an open cup when your baby is 9-12 months of age and eating a variety of iron-rich foods.
- Do not give your baby lower-fat milk (2%, 1% or skim) or fortified soy beverage before 2 years of age.
- If your child is vegan and is not breastfed, a store-bought soy-based formula is recommended until they are 2 years old.

Vegetarian eating can meet your baby's nutrition needs for growth and development. Have your baby's weight and length measured regularly by your health care provider to ensure your baby is growing well. It can be challenging to get enough protein, fat, omega-3 fats, vitamin B12, vitamin D, iron, calcium and zinc from some vegetarian diets. Pay extra attention to these nutrients.

## Protein

Protein is necessary for muscle growth and repair. It is also used to make enzymes and hormones. Vegetarian babies get protein from the following foods:

- breastmilk
- store-bought infant formula
- 3.25% homogenized whole milk (after 9 months)
- eggs
- cheese and yogurt
- tofu
- beans, peas and lentils
- fortified soy yogurt
- ground nuts/seeds and thinly spread nut/seed butters.\*

\*Whole nuts and seeds are a choking hazard. Lumps of nut or seed butters on a spoon can also cause choking. Ground nuts and seeds and thinly spread nut and seed butters are safer choices for your baby.

## Fat

Fat is an important source of energy and is needed for the absorption of other essential nutrients. Include a source of fat each time you feed your child. Good sources of fat include the following:

- breastmilk
- store-bought infant formula
- 3.25% homogenized whole milk (after 9 months)
- yogurt (4% M.F. or higher)

- oil and soft non-hydrogenated margarines
- avocado
- pasteurized cheese
- ground nuts/seeds and thinly spread nut/seed butters.

## **Omega-3 Fats**

Omega-3 fats play a role in normal brain development and vision. Offer your baby foods that contain omega-3 fats each day. Sources of omega-3 fats include the following:

- breastmilk
- store-bought infant formula
- canola oil
- soy oil
- soybeans
- ground walnuts
- tofu
- omega-3 enriched products like some eggs and margarine.

## **Vitamin B12**

Vitamin B12 helps the body use fats and make red blood cells. Vitamin B12 is only found naturally in animal foods. Sources of vitamin B12 include the following:

- eggs
- yogurt and cheese
- 3.25% homogenized whole milk (after 9 months)
- store-bought infant formula
- breastmilk.\*

\*The breastmilk of vegan mothers may not provide enough vitamin B12. Talk to your health care provider to see if a supplement is necessary.

## Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps the body absorb minerals like calcium and phosphorus that are needed for bones and teeth. It is recommended that all breastfed babies receive a supplement of 400IU vitamin D daily. Babies fed only store-bought infant formula do not need vitamin D supplements.

## Iron

Iron is important for growth and learning. It carries oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. Good sources of iron include the following:

- fortified cereals
- beans, peas, and lentils
- ground nuts/seeds and thinly spread nut/seed butters
- tofu
- eggs.

Iron is best absorbed when eaten with foods rich in vitamin C:

- oranges, grapefruits
- kiwi, mango and melons
- sweet potato, sweet peppers and broccoli.

## Calcium

Calcium helps bones and teeth grow and be strong. Calcium is found in these foods:

- breastmilk
- store-bought infant formula
- 3.25% homogenized whole milk (after 9 months)
- yogurt and cheese
- fortified soy yogurt
- calcium-fortified tofu

- thinly spread almond and sesame butters
- beans, peas and lentils.

## Zinc

Zinc supports normal growth and development. It helps the body use carbohydrate, protein and fat from foods and is needed for good immunity and body tissue growth and repair. Zinc is found in these foods:

- breastmilk
- store-bought infant formula
- 3.25% homogenized whole milk (after 9 months)
- ground nuts/seeds and thinly spread nut/seed butters
- beans, peas and lentils
- yogurt and cheese.



## Additional Resources

For information and advice based on your specific food and nutrition needs and preferences, call **8-1-1** and ask to speak to a HealthLink BC dietitian.

For additional information, see the following:

- HealthLink BC [www.healthlinkbc.ca](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca) – Get medically approved non-emergency health information.

*These resources are provided as sources of additional information believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of publication and should not be considered an endorsement of any information, service, product or company.*



## Notes

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**Distributed by:**

Dietitian Services at HealthLinkBC (formerly Dial-A-Dietitian), providing free nutrition information and resources for BC residents and health professionals. Go to [www.healthlinkbc.ca](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca) or call **8-1-1** (anywhere in BC). Interpreters are available in over 130 languages.