

# HELP CHILDREN GET OFF TO A GOOD START...



Vegetarian diets for children are simple and safe. There are also important advantages to raising children vegetarians. Vegetarian adults have lower risk for heart disease, hypertension, colon cancer, obesity, diabetes, renal stones and perhaps renal disease. Since some of these chronic diseases have their origins in childhood, healthy diet is important right from the start.

Children who eat plant-based menus are exposed to a greater variety of whole plant foods early in life, which can help to establish lifelong healthy eating habits. They eat less saturated fat and cholesterol and their diets are higher in many important nutrients like vitamins C and E, folate, and fiber.

Of course, making sure children are well nourished always requires some effort no matter what type of diet they eat. Just give a little extra attention to these nutrients.

**Calcium:** Calcium-rich plant foods have some important advantages over dairy foods. They contain phytochemicals—plant compounds that can help to lower disease risk and that aren't found in dairy foods. For example, soymilk contains compounds that may help to improve bone health. And foods like leafy green vegetables contain compounds that may lower risk for cancer and heart disease. Also, the lower protein content of vegetarian diets may help the bones to conserve calcium. Overall, plant foods are a smart way to get calcium.

A number of plant foods are excellent sources of well-absorbed calcium. Using some of the calcium-fortified plant foods, such as fortified soymilk, rice milk, and orange juice, makes it easy to meet calcium needs without milk. Other good sources of calcium are leafy green vegetables such as kale, collards, turnip and mustard greens; broccoli, blackstrap molasses, calcium-set tofu, hummus (chickpea and sesame butter spread), and figs.

**Iron:** Vegetarian diets are typically higher in iron than diets that include meat. Iron from plant foods is less well absorbed than from meat, but vitamin C gives a boost to absorption. Make sure children consume good sources of iron and vitamin C at every meal. Another advantage of plant-based diets: Too much dairy can interfere with iron absorption and because milk contains no iron, it can displace iron-rich foods from meals.

**Vitamin D:** The body makes its own vitamin D when skin is exposed to sunlight. A child playing only 15 minutes a day in the sun will make enough vitamin D in many cases. Dark-skinned children or children who live in northern or smoggy areas may need more sunlight. In these cases, fortified foods or a vitamin D supplement are a good idea. Few foods are naturally rich in vitamin D and cow's milk provides this nutrient only because it is fortified. Many breakfast cereals and soymilks are also fortified with vitamin D.

**Vitamin B12:** We need just tiny amounts of this nutrient but it is important and it's not found in plant foods. All children eating plant-based diets should consume B12 fortified foods or have a supplement.

**Zinc:** Include cereals, whole grain breads, and nuts or seeds in your child's diet every day to make sure zinc needs are being met. Some children, no matter what kind of diet they eat, don't get enough zinc.

**Calories and Fat:** Vegetarian children have an important advantage over children who eat meat: their diets are lower in total fat and especially in artery-clogging saturated fat and cholesterol. Small amounts of vegetable fats, however, are important in children's diets to help meet needs for energy and essential fats. Include two or three teaspoons of vegetable oil or margarine in your child's diet every day.

**Protein:** Children can get all the protein they need from a vegetarian diet as long as they get enough calories and eat a variety of plant foods. It's a good idea to make sure your child consumes enough protein-rich foods such as beans, soyfoods, and nuts or seeds every day. If children include these foods in their diet and they get enough calories, it's nearly impossible for them to be protein deficient.



# Simple Guidelines

## The Power To Make A Difference Is On Your Plate

# Healthy Kids

Fortunately, planning vegetarian diets for children is easy. Just follow these simple guidelines:

- Build your child's diet around grain products—both whole grains and refined, enriched ones. You might include such foods as fortified cereals; children love them and they give a boost to their nutrient intake.
- Make sure kids get plenty of calcium by offering at least 2 cups a day of a calcium-rich beverage like fortified soymilk, rice milk, or orange juice every day. Include plenty of other calcium-rich foods as well.
- Vegetarian children get plenty of iron but make sure they eat vitamin-C rich foods often to boost iron absorption.
- Include several servings of foods rich in protein, such as beans and soyfoods.
- Offer nuts, seeds or nut or seed butter to children every day; they are rich in protein, minerals, and essential fats.
- Include small amounts of fats or fatty foods, such as vegetable oil, margarine, or avocado
- Include foods fortified with vitamin B12 and, if your child doesn't get enough sunlight, vitamin D (or use supplements of these nutrients if necessary).
- Like all children, those on vegetarian diets should have plenty of fruits and vegetables in their meals.

It's as easy as that to plan healthful vegetarian diets for children. And the rewards are well worth any effort you make since vegetarian children have the best start on a long life of good health.

*Full citations for this brochure are available upon request.*  
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### Take Action

By enjoying a more plant-based diet, you can dramatically improve your chance of living a long and healthy life, help restore the planet's tender ecological balance and support a sustainable economy.

### Be Persistent

The cumulative effect of your actions will make a difference.

### Join EarthSave To Stay Informed and To Educate Others

EarthSave's greatly needed programs are actively helping people reclaim their health and restore our imperiled planet. By joining EarthSave, you learn how your food choices help protect and improve your quality of life, and you become an active player in healing the environment that we all ultimately depend on. For membership or information, call (800) 362-3648.

EarthSave educates, inspires and empowers people to shift toward a diet centered around fruits, vegetables, grains and legumes - food choices that are healthy for people and the planet.



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## Children & a Vegetarian Diet

**Vegetarian diets for children are simple and safe.**



**EarthSave International's  
Educational Series**