

Nutrition Facts

Feeding Your Vegetarian Baby (Birth to 24 months)

A vegetarian diet that includes a wide variety of foods will help your baby grow well and be healthy. However, a vegetarian diet that lacks too many nutrients may put your baby's growth and health at risk.

Breastmilk: Baby's First Food

Breastmilk is the only food or drink your baby needs during the first six months of life. When you introduce solid foods at about 6 months, breast milk continues to be the main source of nutrition for your baby. Breastfeeding can continue up to two years or longer.

Introducing Solid Foods to Your Baby

At about 6 months of age, a baby requires more nutrients, especially iron, from solid foods. You can offer iron-fortified infant cereal and pureed meat alternatives such as tofu, dried peas, beans and lentils, nut butters or whole cooked eggs. After these iron rich foods have been given, vegetables, fruit and milk or soy products can follow. Continue breastfeeding your baby with the gradual introduction of new foods. Aim to include foods from all four food groups of Canada's Food Guide in your infant's diet every day.



Nutrients That Need Special Consideration

Calcium

Baby will get enough calcium from breast milk and the gradual introduction of calcium rich foods. You can introduce whole cow's milk in an open cup to your baby between 9 and 12 months of age. Breast milk, milk products and fortified soy products are good sources of calcium and are important for building strong bones and teeth. Other sources of calcium include cheese, yogurt, dark green leafy vegetables, nut butters, salmon with bones and legumes.

Vitamin D

A daily vitamin D supplement (400IU) is recommended for breastfed babies. A single vitamin D supplement (without other vitamins) in a liquid (drop) format is recommended. Limited sun exposure, poor vitamin D stores at birth, eating few foods fortified with vitamin D and no Vitamin D supplement puts breastfed babies at higher risk for vitamin D deficiency. Vitamin D sources in the diet include cow's milk, fortified soy products, fish, egg yolk and margarine.



Protein

Vegetarian babies get protein from breast milk, soy products, tofu, tempeh, hydrolyzed vegetable protein, eggs, dried beans, peas and lentils, ground nuts and seeds, nut/seed butters, cow's milk, cheese and yogurt. Include sources of protein at all meals.

Vitamin B₁₂

Vitamin B₁₂ is only found in animal and fortified foods. Vitamin B₁₂ is found in breast milk, milk products and eggs. Read labels on packages of tofu, infant cereals, breakfast cereals and nutritional yeast to see if the food is fortified. Include sources of Vitamin B₁₂ daily.



Iron

Iron needs are higher for vegetarians compared to non-vegetarians. This is because iron from plant sources is not absorbed by the body as well as iron from animal sources. If you combine foods that are high in vitamin C with foods that are sources of iron, your baby can absorb the plant-sourced iron better. Include sources of iron and vitamin C at all meals.

Vitamin C rich foods

Cantaloupe, citrus fruit, kiwi, mango, papaya, peppers, potatoes, strawberries, tomatoes, broccoli



Iron rich foods

Chick peas, baked beans, kidney beans, lentils, navy beans, breakfast cereals, sesame tahini, tofu, wheat germ



Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3 fats are important fats for a baby's normal brain development and vision. Sources include breast milk, omega 3-fortified cow's milk, fatty fish, omega-3 enriched eggs, seaweed, ground flaxseed, flaxseed oil, canola oil, soybeans, soybean oil, tofu, walnuts and walnut oil. Include these foods daily. Discuss the use of supplements with your health care provider.

For more information about feeding babies, refer to the Feeding Your Baby booklet.

Suggested reading:

Melina V, Stepaniuk J. (2003) *Raising Vegetarian Children: A Guide to Good Health and Family Harmony*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Davis B, Vesanto M. (2000) *Becoming Vegan: The Complete Guide to Adopting a Healthy Plant Based Diet*. Summertown: Book Publishing Company.

References:

Health Canada (2014). *Nutrition for Healthy Term Infants. Recommendations from Six to 24 months*. Retrieved from <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/infant-nourisson/recom/recom-6-24-months-6-24-mois-eng.php>

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