

A vegetarian or vegan diet is a valid and sensible choice for an infant and a growing child. Balanced vegetarian/vegan diets provide all the nutrients and energy needed to grow.



From birth

Breastmilk is the perfect food. Your baby will enjoy and thrive on your milk. Ask for help from your midwife, Plunket nurse, La Leche or lactation consultant to help get feeding going successfully.

I was so thirsty when I was breastfeeding. I made a jug of organic smoothie drink at the start of each day. In it went soya yogurt, frozen berries, banana, brewers yeast, flaxseed oil, kelp and fortified soya and rice milks. This kept me going when continual breastfeeding had me tied to my chair! – Suzanne, mother of vegan Alanah (2)

Eat well while you are breastfeeding. The amount of food you eat should be the same as you ate during pregnancy. Adequate nutrition produces quality milk.

Protein requirements while breastfeeding are higher than in pregnancy, while iron recommendations are lower. Ensure a good supply of vegetarian protein such as beans, tofu, seitan, lentils, nuts and seeds (if there are no allergy concerns). Keep a bottle of water and snacks beside you to nibble on whilst breastfeeding. If you are too tired to cook, try easy to prepare nutritious foods such as ready made hummus, felafel, vege sausages and luncheon or baked beans with whole-meal pita bread.

Add 1 tablespoon of flaxseed oil daily to your salad dressings or shakes daily for Omega-3. If you are vegan, drink B12 fortified soy and rice milks so that B12 is present in your breast milk. To maintain a healthy Vitamin D intake, ensure that your baby enjoys a few minutes of sun everyday.

Get as much rest as you can and drink lots of water so that your body can make plentiful amounts of milk.

Introducing solids

First weaning foods for most babies are vegetarian because they consist of fruit, vegetables and cereals.

Ella's first food was mashed potato (which is still one of her favourite foods today). She quickly progressed onto



other fruits and veges, but early favs were hummus, peanut butter sandwiches and olives, stolen from my plate. – Yolanda, mother of vegan Ella (12)

At 6 months

Try cooked kumara, potato, pumpkin, carrot, apple, pear or uncooked avocado or banana. You can puree these with a little breastmilk or cooled boiled water to make them runny. Introduce solids slowly, a teaspoon a day at first. Gradually increase the amount and frequency over the next few months. Always give your baby the milk feed first, then offer solids.

I breast fed Dwyn to 18mths and am just weaning Dorian now – but both of them started eating solids at about 3mths. Dwyn just grabbed a banana off me one day and devoured it! – Sandi, mother of vegan children Dwyn (5) and Dorian (18mths)

N.B. check with your Plunket nurse as to when to start your baby on solids. Generally, this is advised at around 6 months, but every baby is different.



8–9 months

Increase the variety of foods. Great vegetarian foods to try now include tofu, crackers, corn, yams, bread, courgettes, broccoli, custard, yogurt, cauliflower, peas, soft fresh fruit and beans and lentils. Try a split pea soup, hummus on crackers or scrambled tofu. Slowly increase the lumpiness in your baby's food and you can now mash some items instead of pureeing them.

If anyone ever questioned the vegan diet they would only need to spend 5 minutes with our articulate and bright child to know that it cannot be faulted. – Victoria and Simon, parents of vegan Wills (2)

12 months onwards

By about one year, most babies can eat family foods. Just mash or cut up whatever you are having. Eating together as a family teaches healthy eating habits, and babies love to copy you by eating the same. Continue to offer your baby milk: either breast or other milk (about 500-600mls per day). Whole cow's milk should not be given as a milk drink until after 12 months of age. If using soya or rice milks, choose those that are fortified. If your baby has stopped breast feeding, add a teaspoon of flaxseed oil daily to ensure Omega-3.

Further information

Leaflet sets available from the
NZ Vegetarian Society

Vegetarian families set

Reasons for vegetarianism set

Vegetarian nutrition set

Each set contains 5 information leaflets

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Websites

www.vegetarian.org.nz

www.vegetarianfamilies.org.nz

www.vegfamily.com

www.vegetarianbaby.com

www.viva.org.uk

www.vrg.org/family/

VEGETARIAN BABIES



VEGETARIAN NUTRITION

Well planned vegan and other types of vegetarian diets are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including during pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence. From: *Position of the American Dietetic Association and Dieticians of Canada: Vegetarian Diets*. 2003. Endorsed by the New Zealand Dietetic Association.

This information was compiled by Yolanda Soryl and was produced by the New Zealand Vegetarian Society.



New Zealand Vegetarian Society