

A balanced vegetarian diet is a great start to family life. A vegetarian or vegan diet can give you all the nutrients both you and your baby need throughout pregnancy and beyond. All expectant mothers, whether vegetarian or not, will want to ensure an optimum diet for their growing baby by ensuring good intakes of vitamins, minerals and trace elements.



Important nutrients in pregnancy

If you were eating a varied and balanced vegetarian diet before pregnancy, keep it up! It will support you through your pregnancy.

Protein needs are higher in pregnancy, so keep your intake up with milk smoothies, and sprinkle toasted nuts or tofu cubes over your vegetables/salads. Try adding lentils or beans (use canned if you don't have time to soak your own) to soups, stews or stirfrys. Snack on nuts, or miso or tahini spread on toast or crackers. Wholegrains such as brown rice, rolled oats, pearled barley, millet, quinoa, amaranth and wholewheat bread or couscous also are great sources of protein.

Iron needs are higher too. Any woman while pregnant, vegetarian or not, has a greater risk of iron deficiency during this time. A vegetarian diet is full of iron from many sources. Assist your absorption of iron by eating vitamin C with every meal. (Have an orange juice or eat some fruit). Avoid tea, coffee and cola with meals as they deplete iron.

Everyone would comment on how healthy I looked during my pregnancies. I kept up work, gym and a social life without any of the complaints my non vegetarian pregnant friends were experiencing. My hair and skin were great, and, best of all, I have had 3 babies and no stretchmarks! At birth, my babies weighed 7½lbs, 9lbs and 8½lbs respectively, so obviously they thrived on their vegan pregnancies. – Yolanda, mother of vegan children Ella (9), Asher (7) and Neve (4)

Vegetarian foods high in iron include wholegrains (wholemeal bread, brown rice, quinoa), nuts, dried fruits (raisins, dates, apricots), pulses (lentils, beans) pumpkin and sunflower seeds, fortified soya and rice milks, tofu, chocolate, molasses and green vegetables.

Carbohydrate needs can be met by a well balanced diet of vegetables, wholegrains and fruit. Always choose the whole version: wholemeal bread or pasta, brown rice etc. as these contain more micronutrients and fibre. Potatoes, peas, beans and lentils are also a source of carbohydrates.

Calcium absorption is improved by vitamin D from sunlight. Foods such as green vegetables, wholegrain cereals, tofu, bread, nuts (especially almonds), legumes and calcium fortified milks are rich in calcium.

Zinc helps with synthesising protein and making new cells, so it is especially important in pregnancy. Zinc absorption can be affected by iron supplements, so if you need these, take iron supplements separately from meals. Good sources of zinc include wholegrains, leafy root vegetables, milk and nuts.

B Vitamins are obtained in yeast spreads such as marmite or vegemite, brazil nuts, oats, wholegrain

bread, legumes, peas, green vegetables, avocados, peanuts, asparagus, walnuts, cabbage, pumpkin seeds, millet, and wholegrain pasta. Vegans can obtain Vitamin B12 and Vitamin B2 (riboflavin) from fortified soya milks and marmite. Non vegan sources include eggs, cow's milk, yoghurt and cheese. To ensure your B12 level, ask your LMC (Lead Maternity Carer) to include a serum B12 level when requesting a routine ante natal blood screen.

Folate is another B vitamin. Vegetarian diets are naturally higher in folic acid than non vegetarian diets. As this nutrient is easily destroyed by cooking, all pregnant women are recommended to take 0.8mg of folic acid every day at least 4 weeks prior and 12 weeks after conception. Vegetarian sources of folic acid include well washed, fresh, raw or lightly cooked vegetables, raw fruit, cereals, legumes and breads.

Omega 3 is an essential fatty acid that can be added to vegetarian diets by using flaxseed or canola oils for salad dressings or by adding them to smoothies. Consume two teaspoons of flaxseed oil or two tablespoons of canola oil or ground flaxseeds a day.



Food safety

To avoid the risk of food poisoning affecting the baby during pregnancy, always properly wash raw fruit and vegetables, and eat salads or dishes that are freshly prepared. If reheating food, ensure that it is steaming hot with no cool spots. Non vegans will also need to avoid runny eggs and unpasteurised cheeses.

Support in pregnancy

To provide care for you and your baby throughout your pregnancy, you will need to choose a LMC (Lead Maternity Carer). This is usually a midwife, or may be your GP. You might also want to see a dietician, nutritionist, alternative health practitioner or specialist. Before choosing your health professionals, find out their views about vegetarianism. You will want a health professional who is up to date and positive about your lifestyle, and is able to give you correct information and support should difficulties arise. A negative response to your vegetarianism from your LMC or health professional is likely to affect the quality of information and support you receive, and how you feel about your care.

Support from your partner, family and friends is also vital for a happy stress free pregnancy. If they are worried about your diet, refer them to the many books/ websites/leaflets about the benefits of vegetarian diets for pregnancy. Remind them of the many groups who produce generation after generation of healthy vegetarian children (Hindu, Jain, Seventh Day Adventist etc.) Your healthy pregnancy and baby will be the best evidence!

For more information

Raising Vegetarian Children: A Guide to Good Health and Family Harmony by Joanne Stepaniak and Vesanto Melina

New Vegetarian Baby: An Entirely New Updated Edition of the Classic Guide to Raising Your Baby on the Healthiest Possible Diet by Sharon K Yntema and Christine H Beard

Your Vegetarian pregnancy - A month-by-month guide to health and nutrition by Dr Holly Roberts

Contact the Vegetarian Society for information on vegetarian families groups, postal library, informative talks, magazines and leaflets. Join the nzveg families email chat group. Chat about everything vegetarian from pregnancy to weaning to feeding teens. nzveg families invites you to network with other NZ vegetarian families, post questions and share parenting experiences. To subscribe, email chatgroup@vegetarianfamilies.org.nz

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

The New Zealand Vegetarian Society

PO Box 26664, Auckland

ph/fax: 09 523 4686

email: info@vegetarian.org.nz

Websites

www.vegetarian.org.nz www.vegetarianfamilies.org.nz

www.vegfamily.com www.vegetarianbaby.com

www.viva.org.uk www.vrg.org/family/

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.

VEGETARIAN PREGNANCY



VEGETARIAN NUTRITION

“ I had a wonderful pregnancy – no sickness or side effects at all, and my vegetarian diet produced a 4.3kg baby who has always enjoyed great health. Now at the age of three, she is a fantastic eater – loves her food and is thriving on a vegetarian diet. ”

– Sala'am, mother of vegetarian child Molly, (now 3)



New Zealand Vegetarian Society