

NUTRITION UPDATE

When Kids Don't Eat Meat

Preadolescence is a time for self-expression and independence. It's also the time when many children first turn to vegetarian eating.

When this happens, the first question most parents ask their health professional is, "Will my child be able to get enough protein without meat?" Yes, a vegetarian diet can meet all the nutrient needs of a growing child or adolescent as long as varied, age-appropriate meals and snacks are prepared and eaten.

Getting Enough Protein

The sources of protein in a vegetarian diet will vary, depending on the degree to which animal products are restricted. For example, a 2000-calorie meal plan composed of 8 servings per day from the Bread Group, 3 from the Vegetable Group, 3 from the Fruit Group, 3 from the Milk Group, and 2 from the Meat Group provides approximately 78 grams of protein—more than enough to satisfy the requirements of most children 4 to 18 years of age. When additional servings from among the food groups are included, the protein level will also rise. (See "Vegetarian Selections From the Food Guide Pyramid.")

Even if your child rejects dairy products, alternative sources of protein are available from soy milk, soy yogurt, and soy cheese. When fortified with calcium and vitamin B₁₂, these substitutes can provide many of the key nutrients found in cow's milk.

Benefits of Vegetarian Diets

Without careful food selections and/or supplementation, vegetarian diets can be deficient in calcium, zinc, iron, and vitamins A, D, and B₁₂. These are the same nutrients that are lacking as well in the diets of many omnivorous young people. Children often skip meals and make the same food choices day after day. Therefore, if your child eats poorly planned meals—vegetarian or not—there's a greater risk of nutrient deficiency.



Tomato Soup 'N Crackers

The best way to ensure that the nutrient needs of vegetarian and meat-eating children will be met is through **variety, moderation, and balance**. Choosing a variety of foods from within each food group will supply all the necessary vitamins and minerals. **Moderation** in the amounts eaten from each group helps reduce the risks associated with excess calories, fat, cholesterol, and sodium. **Finally, balancing meals and snacks over the entire day** allows energy needs to be met.

What to Cook?

The real challenge parents face when youngsters reject meat is to learn how to prepare meals that the entire family can enjoy. Meat substitutes made from textured vegetable protein that look and taste like cutlets, patties, chops, and links are convenient. In addition, many favorites like spaghetti, chili, and tacos can be prepared with cheese and/or beans instead of meat.

For children whose meals and snacks are still eaten under a parent's supervision, it's best to keep a variety of appropriate foods on hand. Teenagers who have begun to eat more of their meals and snacks away from home often feel that french fries and pizza are their only options. Let them pack plenty of

portable, tasty, and nonperishable snacks in their backpack for when they're away from home. Keep a stock of fresh, seasonal fruit on hand, plus multi-grain muffins, granola bars, and small bags containing a mixture of nuts, seeds, popcorn, cereal, and dried fruit. Single-serving containers of fruit or vegetable juice, and crackers spread with peanut butter or hummus are also great to refuel a hungry teen while offering even the most independent adolescent a choice.

Use the suggestions below to get the best possible vegetarian selections from the Food Guide Pyramid.

Vegetarian Selections From the Food Guide Pyramid

Bread, Cereal, Rice, and Pasta Group 6-11 Servings per day

1 slice bread; 1/2 roll or bagel; 1 tortilla (6"); 1 ounce ready-to-eat cereal; 1/2 cup cooked cereal, rice, or pasta; 3-4 small crackers; 3 cups popcorn.

- Select enriched bread, crackers, and cereal for extra iron and B vitamins.
- Be sure to choose at least 3 servings a day of whole grains (whole wheat, multi-grain, rye, corn) for fiber and nutrients.

Vegetable Group 3-5 Servings per day

1/2 cup cooked or chopped raw vegetables, 1 cup leafy raw vegetables, 3/4 cup vegetable juice.



- Make at least one daily serving of leafy green or bright orange vegetables for vitamin A.
- Select from fresh, frozen, and canned to get the greatest year-round assortment.

Fruit Group

2-4 Servings per day

1 medium hand-held piece of fruit; 1/2 cup canned, chopped, or cooked fruit; 3/4 cup juice.

- Choose one serving daily of citrus fruit or other vitamin C-rich varieties like kiwi and strawberries.
- Look for fruit juices fortified with calcium and vitamin C.

Milk, Yogurt, and Cheese Group

3 Servings per day for preteens and

4 Servings per day for teens

1 cup milk or yogurt, 1 1/2 ounce lower-fat natural cheese, 2 ounces lower-fat process cheese.

- Use soy milk, soy yogurt, and/or soy cheese, all fortified with calcium, if dairy products are not eaten.
- When using regular dairy products, remember low-fat and nonfat options have less saturated fat and cholesterol.

Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs, and Nuts Group

2-3 Servings per day

1/2 cup cooked dry beans, 1 egg, 1/4 cup egg alternative, 4 ounces bean curd or tofu, 1/3 cup shelled nuts, 2 tablespoons peanut butter, 2 tablespoons tahini, or 1/4 to 1/2 cup seeds.

- The legume family includes dried beans, peas, and lentils. The dried and canned forms are excellent sources of protein, vitamins, and minerals.
- Look for nuts, seeds, and nut butters.

- Use whole eggs, egg whites, or cholesterol-free egg alternatives for a source of high-quality protein at any meal.

Child-Pleasing Cooking Tips

- Try buckwheat pancakes or whole-wheat french toast. Top with fresh or frozen fruit for added taste and nutrition.
- Add raisins to brown rice pudding or top a cornmeal cobbler with berries.
- Keep white and sweet potatoes handy for cooking in the microwave and top with low-fat yogurt or cheese as a hot and satisfying snack.
- Serve tropical fruit juice blends. Freeze your favorites for tasty juice pops.
- Lower-fat cheese and/or tofu are good stuffings for blintzes, pita pockets, or raytoli.
- Create parfaits using plain low-fat or nonfat yogurt or cottage cheese layered with fruit and dry cereal crumbs.
- Sprinkle nuts and seeds into muffin/quick bread batters, over egg-soleles and salads, or into stir-fries.
- Feature cooked, dried beans, peas, and lentils in soups; combine them with rice or other grains for pilafs, add them to tomato sauce to top pasta, or mash them into spreads for sandwich fillings and dips.
- Offer dinner omelets or frittatas filled with vegetables and cheese.
- Put a new twist on a classic quiche by making the crust with cold spaghetti or rice flour by some cholesterol-free egg alternative or egg whites.

Enjoy these vegetarian recipes with your children.

Tomato Soup 'N Crackers

Makes 4 servings
(Pictured)

- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon FLEISCHMANN'S Margarine
- 1 cup peeled, diced baking potato
- 1 cup water
- 1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 cup 2% milk
- 1/4 cup nonfat plain yogurt
- 2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
- 20 Fat Free PREMIUM Saltine Crackers

In medium saucepan, over medium heat, saute onion and garlic in margarine until tender. Add potato and water; heat to a boil. Reduce heat; simmer uncovered for 10 minutes or until potato is tender. Add tomatoes, sugar, and pepper; heat to a boil. Cover; reduce heat and simmer 15 minutes.

Place mixture in blender or food processor container; cover and puree (do in two batches if necessary). Press through a sieve, discarding solids.

In same saucepan, combine tomato mixture and milk. Over low heat, cook and stir until heated through.* In small bowl, blend yogurt and cheese. Ladle soup into serving bowls; top with a dollop of yogurt mixture. Serve with crackers.

*Soup may be stored in covered container in refrigerator for up to 4 days. To reheat in microwave, ladle 1 cup soup in microwavable bowl. Microwave at HIGH (100% power) for 2 to 3 minutes, stirring every minute until hot.

NUTRITION INFORMATION per serving (1 cup soup, 5 crackers): 192 calories, 537 mg sodium, 7 mg cholesterol, 3 gm total fat, 1 gm saturated fat.

Corny Macaroni and Cheese

Makes 6 servings

- 2 cups tricolor macaroni twists, cooked and drained
- 1 cup skim milk
- 1 cup 1% low-fat cottage cheese
- 1 (8 3/4-ounce) can whole kernel corn, drained
- 1/2 cup EGG BEATERS 99% Egg Product
- 1/2 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
- 10 Fat Free PREMIUM Saltine Crackers, coarsely crushed

In large bowl, combine macaroni, milk, cottage cheese, corn, egg alternative, and 1/4 cup Cheddar cheese; spoon into greased 1 1/2-quart baking dish. Bake at 350°F for 30 minutes.

In small bowl, toss crackers with remaining 1/4 cup cheese; sprinkle over macaroni mixture. Return to oven; bake 30 minutes more or until browned and set.

NUTRITION INFORMATION per serving: 240 calories, 422 mg sodium, 12 mg cholesterol, 4 gm total fat, 2 gm saturated fat, 2 gm dietary fiber.

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