

Healthy Eating Guidelines for Your Vegetarian Toddler: 1 - 3 Years

The word vegetarian means different things to different people. Lacto-ovo vegetarians don't eat meat, fish, seafood and poultry, but will have dairy products and eggs. Vegans are vegetarians who avoid all animal foods. With special planning a vegetarian diet can be healthy for all ages including toddlers.



Steps you can take

Parents and caregivers decide what food and drinks are served and when they served.

- [Canada's Food Guide](#) can be used to plan a healthy diet. Each of the 4 food groups has choices suitable for a vegetarian diet.
 - At meals, include at least 3 food groups. Offer your child up to 3 small meals a day.
 - At snacks, include at least 2 food groups. Offer your child 1-3 snacks a day.
 - Try to serve meals and snacks at about the same time each day
- Offer your vegetarian toddler the same healthy foods that you and the rest of your family enjoy. Some foods need to be modified in texture. For example, whole nuts and seeds are a choking hazard. Only offer your toddler ground nuts and seeds and their thinly spread butters.
- Continue to offer breastmilk on cue until 2 years of age and beyond.
- Offer 2 cups of 3.25% homogenized whole milk each day for toddlers under 2 years of age who are not breastfed.
- Offer store-bought soy formula for vegan toddlers under 2 years of age who are not breastfed.
- Lower fat milks or fortified soy beverage can be offered after 2 years of age.
- Limit cow's milk, formula or fortified soy beverage to 500-750 mL (2-3 cups) throughout each day. Drinking too much fluid is filling and leaves less room for food.

- Plant-based beverages such as rice, almond, soy, hemp or coconut should not replace breastmilk, cow's milk, formula or fortified soy beverage. These beverages do not have enough calories, fat and often protein.
- Offer water between meals and snacks to quench thirst.
- Fruit is a better choice than juice.
 - Limit juice to 125-175 mL ($\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ cup) per day.
 - Offer only pasteurized 100% fruit or vegetable juice.

Toddlers decide what they want to eat and how much they want to eat.

- Your child's appetite may change from day to day.
- Don't force your child to eat. Most healthy children will eat when they are hungry.

Vegetarian eating can meet your toddler's nutrition needs for growth and development. Have your toddler's weight and length measured regularly by your health care provider to ensure your toddler is growing well. It can be challenging to get enough protein, fat, omega-3 fats, vitamin B12, vitamin D, iron, calcium and zinc from some vegetarian diets. Pay extra attention to these nutrients.

Protein

Protein is necessary for muscle growth and repair. It is also used to make enzymes and hormones. Vegetarian toddlers get protein from:

- tofu
- beans, peas and lentils
- ground nuts/seeds or nut/seed butter
- soy formula or fortified soy beverage
- fortified soy yogurt
- textured vegetable protein
- soy based 'meat' products such as vegetable ground round
- eggs
- cow's milk, cheese and yogurt.

Fat

Fat is an important source of energy and other essential nutrients for your toddler. Include a source of fat each time you feed your child. Good sources of fat include:

- oil and soft non-hydrogenated margarines
- avocado
- ground nuts/seeds or nut/seed butter
- tofu
- breastmilk
- store bought infant formula
- 3.25% homogenized whole milk
- pasteurized cheese
- yogurt (4% M.F. or higher).

Omega-3 Fats

Omega-3 fats play a role in normal brain development and vision. Offer your child foods that contain omega-3 fats each day. Food sources of omega 3 include:

- canola oil
- ground chia and hemp seeds
- ground flax seeds
- soy oil
- soybeans
- ground walnuts or walnut butter
- tofu
- omega-3 enriched products like some eggs and margarine.

Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 helps the body to use fats and to make red blood cells. Vitamin B12 is only found naturally in animal foods. Sources of vitamin B12 include:

- eggs
- cheese and yogurt
- fortified soy based 'meat' products such as vegetable ground round
- Red Star® nutritional yeast
- cow's milk
- store-bought infant formula
- fortified soy beverage
- breastmilk (the breastmilk of vegan mothers may not provide significant amounts of vitamin B12).

Speak to your health care provider about vitamin B12 supplements if your child is not eating any of these foods regularly.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps the body absorb minerals, like calcium and phosphorus, which are needed for bones and teeth. Food sources of vitamin D include:

- soft margarines
- cow's milk
- store bought infant formula
- fortified soy beverage
- eggs.

Toddlers over one year of age need a 400 IU per day vitamin D supplement if they do not drink cow's milk, store-bought soy formula, or fortified soy beverage daily, and eat a varied diet. Discuss this with a health care provider if you are unsure if a supplement is needed.

Iron

Iron is important for growth and learning. It carries oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. Good sources of iron include:

- fortified cereals
- beans, peas, and lentils
- tofu
- eggs
- blackstrap molasses.

Iron is best absorbed when eaten with foods rich in vitamin C like:

- oranges, grapefruits and their juices,
- kiwi, mango and melons,
- sweet potato, sweet peppers and broccoli.

Calcium

Calcium helps bones and teeth grow and be strong. Calcium is found in:

- breastmilk
- cow's milk, yogurt, cheese
- fortified soy yogurt
- calcium fortified tofu
- almond and sesame butter
- beans, peas and lentils
- blackstrap molasses
- fortified orange juice
- store-bought infant formula.

Zinc

Zinc supports normal growth and development. It helps the body use carbohydrate, protein and fat from foods, and is needed for good immunity and body tissue growth and repair.

Zinc is found in:

- nuts and seeds,
- beans and lentils,
- wheat germ,
- cow's milk, yogurt, and cheese.

Meals and Snack Ideas

Meal Ideas:

- egg salad sandwich with cucumbers
- whole grain pita with nut butter and banana
- grilled cheese sandwich with vegetable slices
- quesadilla with grated cheese, mashed avocado and beans
- rolled crepes with nut butter and raspberries
- whole grain pita stuffed with hummus or tahini and grated raw carrots
- chili with corn bread
- vegetable chowder and bread sticks
- spinach and tofu or egg scramble with whole grain toast
- whole grain pancakes or waffles topped with fruit and yogurt
- whole grain macaroni and cheese with cooked peas
- oatmeal mixed with nut or seed butter
- bean or split pea soup with whole grain bun
- veggie "meat" balls and spaghetti with tomato sauce
- congee with peanuts and chopped vegetables
- multigrain congee with beans and mushrooms

- potato paratha (stuffed flatbread with vegetables), yogurt and cucumber slices
- basmati rice and saag paneer or chanay (chick peas)
- rice, daal and carrot cubes with yogurt on top (khichree).

Snack Ideas:

- soft cooked broccoli and cauliflower florets with hummus dip
- fruit with yogurt dip
- fruit and cheese plate
- baked beans and toast sticks
- edamame (removed from pods) sprinkled with lemon juice
- whole grain muffin with apple slices
- whole grain cereal O's with banana pieces
- cottage cheese and orange slices
- dessert tofu with diced fruit.



Additional Resources

HealthLinkBC File #69d Helping Your 1 to 3 Year Old Toddler Eat Well

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/helping-your-1-3-year-old-child-eat-well>

Dietitian Services Fact Sheets available by mail (call **8-1-1**) or at

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating-physical-activity>

HealthLinkBC. Visit www.healthlinkbc.ca for medically approved non-emergency health information.

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Notes

Distributed by:

Dietitian Services at HealthLinkBC (formerly Dial-A-Dietitian), providing free nutrition information and resources for BC residents and health professionals. Go to www.healthlinkbc.ca or call **8-1-1** (anywhere in BC). Interpreters are available in over 130 languages.