

Vegan feeding guidelines for babies and toddlers

A well-planned vegan diet can be a healthy eating pattern for people of all ages, including babies and toddlers.

This handout provides information about eating well while following a vegan eating pattern during early childhood.

What do I offer my child to eat?

A vegan eating pattern:

- Includes whole grains, vegetables, fruit, beans, peas, lentils, nuts and seeds
- Excludes animal meat, poultry, fish, seafood, dairy products, eggs and other animal-based foods, such as gelatin or honey

Most babies are ready to start solid foods around 6 months old. Your baby can eat many of the same foods enjoyed by the rest of the family. Provide a variety of foods that:

- Are prepared to a safe texture. Offer new textures as your baby gets older
- Have different tastes and colours
- Are made with little or no added salt or sugar

See [Baby's first foods - HealthLinkBC File #69c](#) for information on introducing solid foods. For example: when to start offering solids, safe textures, when to introduce common food allergens, how much food to offer and more. Some of the food examples may not fit into a vegan eating pattern.

Balanced meal and snack ideas

Below are sample meals and snacks that include foods suitable for babies and toddlers following a vegan eating pattern. Prepare foods so that they're a safe size and texture for your child.

Breakfast ideas	
6-12 months	One year and older
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strips of pancakes made with iron fortified infant cereal, blueberry puree • Shredded tofu scramble, whole grain toast, cut into small pieces or strips, cooked and mashed broccoli or other vegetable • Oatmeal with mashed banana 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blueberry pancakes made with iron fortified infant cereal • Congee (rice porridge) with small pieces of tofu and soft-cooked diced mushrooms • Banana and peanut butter muffin with fortified plain plant-based yogurt
Lunch and dinner ideas	
6-12 months	One year and older
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red lentil dahl with minced vegetables • Rice, mashed black beans, green peas, cooked soft, mashed • Hummus on baby crackers, mashed strawberries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rice with cooked broccoli and strips of tempeh • "Cheesy" polenta flavoured with nutritional yeast, soft-cooked carrot sticks • Chopped soba noodles in a mashed avocado edamame sauce
Snack ideas	
6-12 months	One year and older
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fortified plain plant-based yogurt topped with mashed ripe fruit or puffed wheat cereal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banana and almond butter wrapped in a whole grain tortilla • Baked sweet potato fries drizzled with thinned nut butter or tahini

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mashed sweet potato drizzled with thinned nut butter or tahini 	
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For more meal and snack ideas, see:

- [Canada's Food Guide Kitchen](#). Here you'll find vegetarian recipes for toddlers 2 years of age and older, tips for cooking with plant-based protein foods and more

For recipes that use animal foods, substitute plant-based ingredients. For example, replace cow milk with fortified plain soy beverage, and dairy-based yogurt with fortified plain plant-based yogurt. Choose options with higher amounts of fat per serving. Fat is an important source of energy for growing children.

What do I offer my child to drink?

Human milk (breast milk)

- Continue to offer human milk with complementary foods until 2 years of age or older
- If you follow a vegan eating pattern, your milk may be low in vitamin B12. Speak to your health care provider about vitamin B12 supplements for you and your child

Infant formula

- If you offer your baby infant formula, soy-based formula is the best choice for babies who follow a vegan eating pattern
- After one year of age, offer 2-3 cups (500-750 mL) of soy-based formula as part of meals and snacks to help provide key nutrients needed for your child's health and growth
- Offer soy-based formula until 2 years of age
- The vitamin D in some soy-based formulas comes from sheep's wool. Though the sheep are not harmed, this may be a factor for some families when choosing formula types for their baby. Contact the manufacturer if you have questions about the source of nutrients in soy formula

- If cost or availability is a concern, you can consider giving your baby fortified, plain soy beverage instead of formula starting at one year of age. Speak to a registered dietitian to make sure your child is getting enough nutrients from other foods

Plain water

- Sips of plain water can be offered from an open cup after 6 months but should not replace human milk or formula
- Continue to offer water from an open cup between meals for thirst after one year of age

Fortified plain soy beverage

- At 2 years, toddlers can be given fortified plain soy beverage as a main drink and source of calcium, vitamin D, energy, and protein

Can I offer my child plant-based beverages other than soy?

Fortified plant-based beverages such as almond, rice, coconut, and oat have less fat, energy, and protein than fortified soy beverage. They're not recommended for children under the age of 2. Only offer them if your child is over 2 and gets enough fat, energy, and protein from other foods.

Can I offer my child juice?

Do not give sugary drinks like 100% fruit juice, fruit flavoured drinks and sweetened milk to your child. They can cause tooth decay and replace more nutritious foods and drinks. Make water your child's drink of choice.

After one year of age, if you choose to give 100% fruit juice, use an open cup and limit the amount to no more than ½ cup (125 mL) a day.

Will my child get enough key nutrients on a vegan diet?

When well-planned, a vegan eating pattern can provide enough energy and nutrients for your child's growth and development.

Nutrients to pay attention to include protein, iron, zinc, vitamin B12, omega-3 fatty acids, calcium and

vitamin D. Plan meals and snacks around foods with these key nutrients.

Protein

Protein is needed for muscle growth and repair. It also supports a healthy immune system. The following foods are good sources of protein:

- Human milk
- Soy-based store-bought infant formula
- Fortified plain soy beverage
- Soy-based foods like tofu, tempeh, and edamame (green soybeans)
- Beans, peas and lentils
- Ground nuts and seeds and their butters
- Meat alternatives like textured vegetable protein (TVP). Choose products with little or no added salt

Iron

Iron helps the body make red blood cells, which is important for growth and brain development. It also carries oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. **At around 6 months of age, start to include iron-rich foods in your child's meals and snacks a few times each day.** These include:

- Iron-fortified infant cereals and grains like quinoa, millet and spelt
- Beans, peas, and lentils
- Tofu, firm or extra firm, or edamame
- Smooth/thinned nut and seed butters like pumpkin seed or almond
- Seeds such as chia and hemp seeds

To increase absorption of plant-based iron sources, pair iron-rich foods with foods high in vitamin C, such as:

- Orange, grapefruit
- Kiwi, strawberry and cantaloupe
- Cauliflower, red pepper and broccoli

Zinc

Zinc supports normal growth and development. It's also needed for a healthy immune system. Zinc is found in:

- Human milk
- Soy-based store-bought infant formula
- Fortified plain soy beverage
- Tahini (sesame seed butter)
- Ground pumpkin seeds and smooth/thinned pumpkin seed butter
- Beans, peas and lentils
- Grains like quinoa, millet and spelt

Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 helps keep nerves and red blood cells healthy. It's only found naturally in animal foods. Sources of vitamin B12 on a vegan diet include:

- Human milk
- Soy-based store-bought infant formula
- Fortified plain soy beverage
- Vitamin B12 fortified foods like nutritional yeast, tofu and plain plant-based yogurt. Check the nutrition facts table to see if vitamin B12 has been added

Speak to your health care provider about vitamin B12 supplements if your child is not having these foods regularly, or if you're vegan and are breastfeeding or chestfeeding your child. The milk of people following a vegan eating pattern may be low in vitamin B12.

Omega-3 fats

Omega-3 fats play a role in brain and eye development. They also provide a good source of energy for growth. Sources of omega-3 fats include:

- Human milk
- Soy-based store-bought infant formula
- Omega-3 enriched soft margarine and egg
- Seeds such as flax, chia and hemp seeds

- Ground walnuts
- Vegetable oils like canola and olive oil
- Soybeans and soy products like tofu

Calcium

Your child's calcium needs increase after 12 months. In addition to soy-based infant formula, offer calcium-rich foods daily. Calcium helps form bones and teeth. It's also important for muscle function. Foods that are high in calcium include:

- Human milk
- Soy-based store-bought infant formula
- Fortified plain soy beverage
- Calcium-fortified tofu. Look for calcium sulfate as an ingredient

Smaller amounts of calcium are in:

- White beans and navy beans
- Ground almonds and sesame seeds and their butters
- Dark green vegetables such as kale and broccoli

Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps the body absorb minerals like calcium and phosphorus that are needed for strong bones and teeth. Only a few foods contain vitamin D naturally, such as egg yolks. In Canada, vitamin D must be added to certain fortified foods. Vegan options include:

- Soy-based store-bought infant formula
- Soft margarines. Some margarines may contain animal-based ingredients like milk. Check the label to ensure it's suitable for a vegan eating pattern

Other foods such as plant-based beverages and plant-based yogurt may have added vitamin D. Check the nutrition facts table to see if vitamin D has been added.

How can I make sure my child gets all key nutrients?

- Be aware of fibre. Vegan meals and snacks can be high in fibre, which can fill up a child's small stomach quickly. This can make it hard for children to get enough energy. To help lower fibre intake, try using refined grains such as white flour or white rice in place of some whole grains. For example, mix half white flour and half whole grain flour in baking
- Add energy-dense foods like avocado, olive oil, fortified plain plant-based yogurt, nut butters and seeds in every meal and snack. Even very small portions of these foods provide a good source of calories and nutrients
- Provide structured snack times in between meals. By one year, offer 3 meals and 2 to 3 snacks daily. Children have small stomachs and tend to eat small portions
- Avoid grazing. After the age of one, do not offer foods and drinks other than water in between structured meal and snack times
- Limit soy-based infant formula and fortified plain soy beverage to no more than 3 cups (750 mL) per day. Drinking too much will leave little room for solids
- Give your child a daily 400 IU vitamin D supplement if they're fed human milk

For more information

Call **8-1-1** to speak to a HealthLink BC registered dietitian if you have questions about feeding your child.

- [HealthLink BC File #69h: Feeding your baby: Sample meals for babies 6 to 12 months old](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #69i Iron-rich foods for babies and toddlers](#)