

Vegetarian and Vegan Toddlers

With careful planning, feeding your toddler a vegetarian diet can be a healthy choice. Vegan diets are more restrictive so they require even greater care. Talk with a registered dietitian at HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 if you're thinking about feeding your child a diet free of animal products.

Help your child get the nutrition they need by:

- ✓ breastfeeding or chestfeeding up to 24 months and beyond
- ✓ introducing iron-rich foods at about 6 months (see [Introducing Solid Foods](#))
- ✓ giving them 400 IU of liquid vitamin D supplement every day (see [Vitamin and Mineral Supplements](#))
- ✓ offering iron-rich protein foods at each meal and snack, like eggs (for vegetarians), cooked tofu, soy and veggie "meats," beans, peas, lentils, nut and seed butters and iron-fortified infant cereals

See [Feeding By Age](#) for more feeding tips.



DID YOU KNOW?

Until your toddler is 2 years old or older, continue to offer human milk. If they're under 2 and not breastfed or chestfed, give them 2 cups (500 ml) of whole (3.25%) milk each day. Limit cow's milk to no more than 3 cups (750 ml) per day. If your child isn't breastfed or chestfed and doesn't drink cow's milk, try a soy-based infant formula.

Nutrients to Pay Special Attention to

If your child doesn't eat meat or other animal products, they could be missing some key nutrients. Choose alternate foods carefully to ensure they're getting all the nutrition they need.

Iron

Why it's needed: for red blood cells, growth and brain development

Where it's found: iron-fortified infant cereal, enriched cereals, quinoa, beans, peas, lentils, tofu, blackstrap molasses



DID YOU KNOW?

Talk with a dietitian. Iron is best absorbed when eaten with foods high in vitamin C like oranges, grapefruit, kiwi, sweet potato, sweet peppers and broccoli.

Omega-3 fats

Why they're needed: for brain development and vision

Where they're found: human milk, store-bought infant formula with DHA and ARA, ground flax, chia, hemp seeds, ground walnuts, omega-3 enriched eggs and soft margarine, flaxseed oil, canola oil, soybeans

Protein

Why it's needed: to build and repair cells and make enzymes and hormones

Where it's found: human milk, store-bought infant formula, tofu, lentils, beans, peas, nut and seed butters, soy based "meats," homogenized whole cow's milk (3.25%), unsweetened fortified soy beverage (after 24 months), cheese, yogurt, soy yogurt



DID YOU KNOW?

If your child is over 2 years old and doesn't drink cow's milk or vitamin D-fortified goat's milk, give them plain soy beverage fortified with calcium, vitamin D and vitamin B12. Other plant-based beverages – like rice, almond and oat milk – don't have enough nutrients for toddlers. If you offer these drinks, be sure to provide plenty of other sources of energy and protein.

Fat

Why it's needed: for energy and brain and nerve function

Where it's found: human milk, store-bought infant formula, ground nuts and seeds, nut and seed butters, tofu, avocado, cow's milk, vegetable oils, soft margarine

Vitamin B12

Why it's needed: for healthy nerve and blood cells and to make DNA, the genetic material in cells

Where it's found: eggs, fortified foods like veggie "meats," fortified nutritional yeast, store-bought infant formula, unsweetened fortified soy beverage (after 24 months)

Calcium

Why it's needed: to build strong bones and teeth

Where it's found: human milk, store-bought infant formula, unsweetened fortified soy beverage (after 24 months), calcium-fortified tofu, cheese, yogurt, baked beans, blackstrap molasses and smaller amounts in almond butter, sesame butter, oranges



DID YOU KNOW?

Toddlers who drink soy-based formula may need more calcium-rich foods in their diet.

Zinc

Why it's needed: to heal wounds and keep the immune system strong

Where it's found: nuts, pumpkin seeds, squash seeds, tempeh, tofu, unsweetened fortified soy beverage (after 24 months), soy based "meats," lentils, dried peas, eggs, milk, soy yogurt

For more information, talk with a registered dietitian at HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 and see [Canada's food guide](#).



BRAIN BUILDER

If you're vegan, your milk may be low in vitamin B12. Help your toddler get enough of this brain-building nutrient by eating B12-fortified foods or taking a daily supplement.

