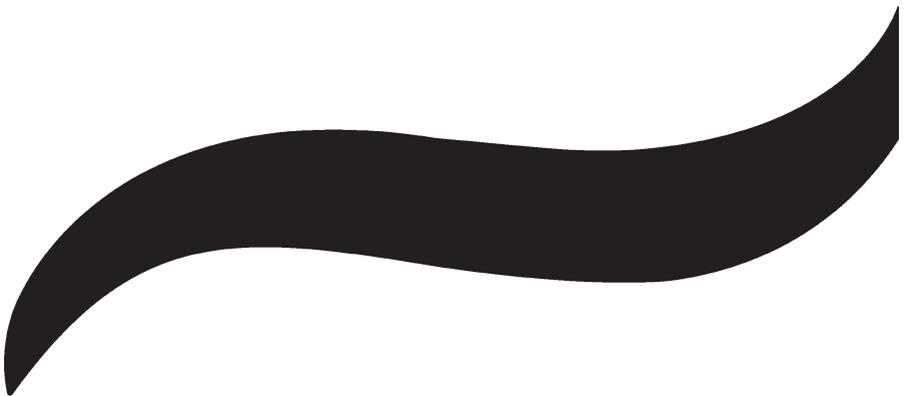




# Guidance on following a Vegan diet with young children

Information for patients  
Dietetics Department



A vegan diet is a plant based diet that excludes meat, fish, poultry, eggs, honey, dairy products and any other animal products. You therefore need to thoroughly consider whether it is suitable for your child as it can be very difficult to meet a child's nutritional needs.

A well planned vegan diet rich in beans, nuts, seeds, fruit and vegetables, whole grains such as oats, rice, cereal based foods such as breads, and pasta along with **fortified foods and supplements** may provide all the nutrients needed for good health. This includes essential fats, protein, vitamins, minerals and plenty of fibre too.

This leaflet aims to help you to choose the right foods as part of a balanced vegan diet. Make sure the food is of a suitable consistency and texture for the age and eating ability of your infant or child

Most nutrients are abundantly available in plant-based diets, but if you are avoiding all animal-derived foods there are a few nutrients that you need to pay special attention to.

## CALCIUM

Calcium is essential for bone health; as children get older, their calcium requirements increase.

Dairy foods are rich in calcium but if you are not eating these, you must obtain calcium from other sources such as:

- ❖ fortified plant based dairy alternatives
- ❖ dried fruit such as figs
- ❖ nuts such as almonds
- ❖ brown and white bread, pitta bread
- ❖ leafy green vegetables
- ❖ red kidney beans
- ❖ sesame seeds
- ❖ tahini
- ❖ calcium set tofu

## VITAMIN D

Vitamin D is needed to keep children's bones, teeth, muscles and immune system healthy and is made in our bodies when our skin is exposed to appropriate sunlight. In the UK this is usually between April and September. During the winter months, we are therefore recommended to take a vitamin D supplement.

Plant-based sources of vitamin D include sun-exposed mushrooms and fortified foods such as vegetable spreads, breakfast cereals and plant based dairy alternatives. Since it's difficult to get adequate vitamin D from food alone, everyone should consider taking a daily supplement of 10mcg/day especially during the autumn and winter months. Some vitamin D supplements are not suitable for vegans. Vitamin D2 and lichen-derived vitamin D3 are suitable.

## VITAMIN B12

Children need vitamin B12 for many reasons. Too little can result in fatigue, anaemia and nerve damage. It can also lead to heart problems.

Most people get vitamin B12 by eating animal products. If you are eliminating all animal derived foods, the only reliable sources of vitamin B12 are fortified foods and supplements. Suitable B12-fortified foods include fortified breakfast cereals, fortified yeast extracts such as marmite and vegemite, soya yoghurts and fortified milk alternatives.

Most unsweetened fortified milk alternatives are fortified with vitamin B12. 300 - 400ml of fortified unsweetened milk alternatives may provide adequate vitamin B12 (*about 1.5 micrograms a day*).

Parents or carers should consult a GP if they are worried that their child may have vitamin B12 deficiency.

## IRON

Iron is needed to produce healthy red blood cells which help carry oxygen around your body and hence give you energy.

Good plant sources of iron include pulses (*beans and lentils*), fortified cereals, wholemeal bread, dried fruits, green leafy vegetables, nuts (*Beware of the potential choking risk in young children and infants*) and seeds. These sources are not absorbed as well as iron from animal derived sources so you should eat plenty of fruits and vegetables rich in vitamin C and drink a small glass of fruit juice to help the iron to be absorbed.

## PROTEIN

Plant-based sources of protein include lentils, beans, chickpeas, seeds, nuts (*Beware of the potential choking risk in young children and infants*) and nut butters like peanut butter, and tofu.

Suitable meat substitutes like vegetarian burgers, sausages, and other meat alternatives can be useful for those adapting to a plant-based diet and can provide a source of protein. However, as with any processed foods, these can often be high in salt and fat so should be used in moderation for both children and adults.

## OMEGA 3 FATTY ACIDS

Omega-3 fatty acids are needed for a healthy heart and are commonly found in oily fish. However, if you are not eating fish, plant sources of omega 3 include walnuts, flax (*linseed*), hemp seeds, chia seeds and soya beans. Oils such as hemp, rapeseed and flaxseed oil provide essential omega 3 fats and are preferable to corn/sunflower oils.

## IODINE

The major sources of iodine are dairy products, fish and iodine fortified dairy alternatives. The iodine content of plant foods depends on the iodine content of the soil which is variable. Foods grown closer to the ocean tend to be higher in iodine. Where soils are iodine deficient, iodised salt and seaweed provide iodine which is needed in moderation.

As the iodine content of seaweed is variable, and sometimes too high, guidance is not to consume sea vegetables more than once a week. An excess of iodine is also unhealthy, so if you are taking a supplement, discuss this with a health professional.

## ZINC

Zinc from plant sources is less well absorbed than zinc from animal sources (*due to the presence of phytates*) so it is important to make sure that foods rich in zinc are eaten on a daily basis.

Good sources of zinc include: pulses, whole grains, wheat germ, tofu, and seed, nuts (*Beware of the potential choking risk in young children and infants*), nut butters and some fortified breakfast cereals.

## SELENIUM

Plant sources of this mineral include grains, seeds and nuts (*Beware of the potential choking risk in young children and infants*).

# IDEAS FOR VEGAN MEALS AND SNACKS

## Breakfast

- ❖ Porridge made with milk alternative
- ❖ Breakfast cereal (*preferably fortified*) with milk alternative
- ❖ Peanut butter on toasted muffin/bagel/toast
- ❖ Muesli with fruit/soya yoghurt
- ❖ Beans on toast
- ❖ Flapjack/cereal bar

## Meals

- ❖ Vegetable and bean casserole, chilli or curry
- ❖ Shepherd's pie made from lentils, soya or quorn
- ❖ Nut roast, lentil loaf or vegetarian sausages
- ❖ Sandwiches with peanut butter, quorn slices, vegetarian pâté, hummus, tahini
- ❖ Veggie burger with pitta bread and salad
- ❖ Jacket potato with baked beans, chilli bean filling, hummus
- ❖ Baked sweet potato with hummus/chilli bean filling
- ❖ Soup - e.g. Lentil, barley or split pea soup with a salad filled roll
- ❖ Tomato pasta
- ❖ Vegan pesto pasta
- ❖ Vegetable, bean, pulse risotto
- ❖ Mexican bean rice
- ❖ Bean stew/lentil stew
- ❖ Rice noodle stir-fry

## Desserts

- ❖ Fresh, stewed or tinned fruit in natural juice with coconut/soya yoghurt or sorbet
- ❖ Fruit crumble (*include some wholemeal flour or oats*)
- ❖ Baked apple filled with dried fruit and served with soya custard

## Snacks

- ❖ Fresh, tinned fruit or dried fruit (*apricots, prunes*) and nuts
- ❖ Glass of oat, almond, soya milk
- ❖ Coconut yoghurt, soya custard, milkshake made with milk replacement
- ❖ Pitta bread or vegetables (*carrots, cucumber*) with hummus
- ❖ Rice cakes/pitta/toast/oat cakes with hummus/mushroom pate/tahini/nut butter
- ❖ Rice/Oatcakes with nut butter and banana
- ❖ Fruit cake, date slice, banana cake, flap jack or cereal bar
- ❖ Carrot/cucumber sticks with dip (*tahini/ hummus*)
- ❖ Apple slices with peanut butter

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