

BABY'S FIRST FOOD

Vegetarian diet

The following information is appropriate for infants who will be weaned onto a vegetarian diet including dairy products and eggs. For infants who will be weaned onto a diet without any animal products (a vegan diet), discussion with a Doctor or Dietitian is essential.

IMPORTANT POINTS FOR WEANING ON TO A VEGETARIAN DIET

Although vegetarian diets can be just as nutritious as other diets, there are some nutrients which require special consideration. Without careful planning, the following are likely to be limited in an infant's or child's diet:

Energy (Kilojoules):

It is essential that the vegetarian diet supply enough kilojoules for normal growth and development. When wholegrain cereals and legumes replace meat, diets may become low in fat and energy and high in fibre. This may be an advantage in adults, but is inappropriate in infants and young children who have small appetites. To avoid this, combine vegetarian foods with higher fat foods to make meals more energy dense.

For example:

- Use a white or cheese sauce with vegetables.
- Add nut butters, avocado, margarine or ricotta cheese to bread or toast and mix with rice and vegetables.

So that your infants appetite is not reduced by bulky high fibre grains, offer a mixture of refined and unrefined grains, white and whole meal breads, brown and white pasta or rice.

Snacking should be encouraged but should not replace breast feeds or infant formula in young infants.

Protein:

Protein is essential for growth and repair of body muscle and tissue.

Protein is made up of different building blocks called amino acids. Protein from animal sources contains all the amino acids our body needs, but those from plants may be low in one or more amino acids. Eating a variety of proteins from various sources is important on a vegetarian diet.

Vitamins and Minerals:

Iron:

For children weaned onto a vegetarian diet, a low iron intake is the greatest concern. Iron is an important mineral involved in the formation of blood and the prevention of anaemia. Iron from plant sources such as wholegrain cereals and green leafy vegetables and legumes is better absorbed if eaten with foods containing Vitamin C such as citrus fruits, fruit juices, tomatoes or potatoes. Once your baby is eating a variety of solid foods, these foods should be combined in ways to increase iron absorption.

For example:

Dilute orange juice with iron fortified breakfast cereal or orange segments after a meal.

Vitamin B12:

Vitamin B12 only occurs in animal products such as milk and egg. These should be included daily.

Zinc:

Zinc is particularly important for growth. Good sources of zinc for vegetarians include legumes, nuts and nut pastes, seeds and soy products (including tofu). Try peanut butter, hummus or tahini (sesame seed paste) on toast.

Other nutrients will be provided by a diet that includes a wide variety of foods, Babies on a vegetarian diet may need to continue breast feeding or infant formula until 2 years of age to ensure adequate intake of vitamins and minerals.

REMEMBER!

- Babies are all individuals and learn to eat at different rates.
- Not all babies the same age eat the same amounts of foods.
- Learning to eat is just that – a new skill that needs lots of practice
- Relax and enjoy this stage of your baby's development

This information is intended to be used together with “Food and Active Play in the First Year of Life” which can also be found on the RCH Nutrition & Food Services Department website: www.rch.org.au/nutrition/resources/