

Accommodating Vegetarian Diets

Many families have adopted a vegetarian lifestyle. If you have a vegetarian child in your care, there are a number of ways that you can make minor adjustments to recipes and menus and still meet the child's nutritional needs.

According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, “Appropriately planned vegan, lacto-vegetarian, and lacto-ovo-vegetarian diets satisfy nutrient needs of infants, children, and adolescents and promote normal growth.” Foods such as fruits, vegetables, beans, whole grains, nuts, and seeds to supply many important nutrients. The vegetarian diet takes this advice one step further, excluding many foods of animal origin, especially red meat, poultry, and fish.

There are as many reasons for vegetarian diets as there are the families who adopt them. Families may choose a vegetarian lifestyle for reasons related to health, culture, ethnicity, religion, the environment, or concern about animals.

Follow the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Meal Patterns

The CACFP meal patterns guide in providing adequate amounts of meat alternates, based on a child's age. A child who is vegan will need a written statement from a recognized medical authority in order for fortified soy or rice milk to count as a substitute for milk.

Overview of Vegetarian Diets

Most vegetarian diets will fall into one of the following categories:

- **Lacto-ovo-vegetarians** consume eggs, dairy products, and all plant-based foods including grains, vegetables, fruits, legumes (dry beans, peas, and lentils), soy products, nuts, and seeds in their diets.
- **Lacto-vegetarians** include milk and dairy products in their diet, as well as all plant-based foods.
- **Vegans** eat only plant-based foods.



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- **Semi-vegetarians**, sometimes called “**flexitarians**,” eat mostly plant-based diets but may include small amounts of chicken and/or fish.

Careful planning is needed to ensure diet variety and quality. Key nutrients such as protein, calcium, vitamin D, iron, vitamin B12, and zinc are critical for proper growth and development in children. Non-meat sources of these nutrients are shown in the chart below:

Nutrient	Non-Meat Food Sources
Protein	Legumes, soy products, peanut and other nut butters, nuts, dairy products, and eggs; grains and many vegetables also supply some protein to the diet.
Calcium	Dairy products, calcium-fortified soy or rice milks and orange juice, dark green leafy vegetables, and almonds.
Vitamin D	Fortified cow's milk, some brands of fortified soy or rice milk, and some fortified breakfast cereals.
Iron	Whole or enriched grains, iron-fortified cereals, legumes, green leafy vegetables, and dried fruits.
Vitamin B12 (especially important for vegans)	Foods fortified with vitamin B12, including fortified soy milk, fortified nutritional yeast, and some fortified breakfast cereals.
Zinc	Legumes, hard cheeses, whole-grain products, wheat germ, nuts, and some fortified breakfast cereals.

If you care for a child who eats a vegetarian diet, it does not mean you will have to prepare an entirely different set of meals and snacks. Instead, plan menus that include simple side dishes which can combine to fulfill the child's protein and other nutrient requirements. For instance, top vegetable-based soups or salads with beans, sunflower seeds, or chopped boiled eggs. Nut butter sandwiches, baked beans, legume-based dips and spreads, cheese slices, or yogurt also make easy menu additions.

Suggestions for Success

v **Communicate**

Ask the family to provide details about the type of vegetarian diet that they follow. Request a written list of food preferences and restrictions. Discuss the menu with the family in advance and always ask questions if you are unsure about a food or ingredient. For instance, some vegan families do not use honey as a sweetener.

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✓ **Read Labels**

Pay careful attention to the ingredient labels on processed foods. Most vegetarians do not consume foods made with chicken broth or chicken fat. Vegans do not eat products made with any type of dairy or egg product, including ingredients such as whey protein, casein, and other derivatives of milk. Check labels on beans and other non-meat items to make sure they are not prepared with lard or animal fat.

✓ **Offer Alternate Protein Products (APP)**

Alternate protein products include some vegetarian products such as non-meat patties and burgers. Check with your sponsoring agency or state agency to see which commercial products meet the APP requirements.

✓ **Notes on nuts and seeds**

The CACFP meal pattern specifies that nuts and seeds may meet only one-half of the total meat/meat alternate serving and must be combined with another meat/meat alternate to fulfill the lunch or supper requirement. Whole nuts and seeds pose a choking hazard.

Recipe to Try

“Egg”cellent sandwich for lunch, dinner or snack.

Egg Salad Sandwich F-10¹

Fresh large eggs, hard-cooked peeled, chilled	25 each	Reduced calorie salad dressing	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup 2 Tbsp
Fresh onions, chopped	$\frac{2}{3}$ cup	OR	OR
OR	OR	Lowfat mayonnaise	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup 2 Tbsp
Dehydrated onions	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup 2 Tbsp	Sweet pickle relish, undrained	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup
Fresh celery, $\frac{1}{4}$ " diced	1 $\frac{2}{3}$ cups	Enriched white bread	50 slices
Ground black or white pepper	$\frac{3}{4}$ tsp		
Dry mustard	$\frac{3}{4}$ tsp		

Finely chop eggs. Combine eggs, onions, celery, pepper, mustard, salad dressing or mayonnaise, and pickle relish. Mix lightly until well blended.

CCP: Cool to 70 °F within 2 hours and from 70 °F to 40 °F or lower within an additional 4 hours.

Cover. Refrigerate until ready to use. Spread No. 12 scoop ($\frac{1}{3}$ cup) of egg salad onto 1 slice of bread. Top with second slice of bread. Cut each sandwich diagonally in half. Cover. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Number of servings: 25

Serving size: 1 sandwich provides 1 large egg or the equivalent of 2 oz cooked lean meat and 2 slices of bread.

¹USDA Recipes for Child Care. Available online at www.nfsmi.org.

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Breakfast Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Fresh orange slices Cut Biscuit Using Master Mix A-09B ¹ Milk	Fruit on a Raft ² Milk	Fresh strawberries, diced Oatmeal Milk	Fresh banana slices Whole-grain cereal variety Milk	Peach half Pumpkin muffin Milk

Lunch Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Bean Burrito D-21A ¹ Carrot sticks Milk	Broccoli Cheese Soup H-05A ¹ Pear slices Whole-wheat pita bread with hummus Milk	Egg Salad Sandwich F-10 ¹ Roasted Butternut Squash ² Grape halves Milk	Spanish Zucchini Frittata ² Brown rice Lowfat yogurt, plain Milk	Black bean mini pizza on whole- grain English muffin Shredded lettuce and carrots Fresh apple slices Milk

Snack Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Graham crackers with peanut butter ³ Water ⁴	Lowfat yogurt, plain Apricots, diced Water ⁴	Cheddar cheese cubes Wheat crackers Water ⁴	Banana Bread Squares A-13 ¹ Milk Water ⁴	Hard cooked egg Fresh orange sections Water ⁴

¹USDA Recipes for Child Care. Available online at www.nfsmi.org.

²5 a Day Quantity Recipe Cookbook. Available online at www.ed.state.nh.us/education/doe/orientation/programsupport/bnps/cookbook.pdf

³Sunflower butter can be substituted for peanut butter.

⁴Water is suggested as a beverage for all snacks even when other beverages are offered to encourage children to drink water.

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Sources

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