Feeding the Vegetarian Child
Advice for feeding vegetarian children aged 1-5 years

Children need to eat a variety of foods for good health. Mealtimes should be fun and enjoyed by all.

A guide for families
Meals

- Have regular mealtimes so your child is not too hungry or too tired to eat.
- Sit down and eat together so everyone can enjoy the meal.
- Eating a wide variety of foods provides more nutrients so offer a main course and a pudding at lunch and for your evening meal. Good choices for puddings include yoghurt, custard or rice pudding and/or fruit.
- Make meals colourful and interesting.
- Offer small portions of food on a small plate as many children are put off by large portions.
- Children’s food preferences will vary. Some like food moist with sauce or gravy; others prefer dry food, while others like the different foods separated.
- Limit mealtimes to a maximum of 30 minutes.

Breakfast

- Breakfast is a very important meal as it gives the energy boost we all need in the morning. Remember it is not good for your child to go for long periods without food.
- Good choices for breakfast include: cereal (fortified with vitamins and iron) with fruit and milk, toast/chapatti/crumpets/muffins/pancakes spread with peanut butter*, jam, marmalade or cheese with a piece of fruit and milk, or a boiled or scrambled egg with bread/toast and fruit juice.

Snacks

- Offer your child a small, nutritious snack in between meals. This will help them to meet their requirements for energy and growth.
- Avoid giving large snacks or a snack too close to a mealtime as this will reduce your child’s appetite for main meals.
- Healthy snacks include:
  - Fresh fruit e.g. pears, apple slices, satsuma, banana, seedless grapes,
  - slices of mango, melon or pineapple
  - Cheese cubes and crackers
  - Toasted bread fingers/breadsticks/pitta bread with cream cheese, hummus or peanut butter*
  - Small sandwiches with fillers such as peanut butter*, cheese or egg
  - Yoghurt or fromage frais

Drinks

- Children should be offered 6-8 drinks each day from a cup.
- In very hot weather children may need extra water.
- Water and milk are the most appropriate drinks to offer your child.
- Milk is a very nutritious drink. Up to 1 pint per day may be offered. Drinking more than this may reduce your child’s appetite for food.
- Limit sugary squashes and fizzy drinks as these can harm your child’s teeth and fill them up, reducing their appetite for food at mealtimes.

*Whole nuts, including peanuts, may cause choking in children under 5 years. If mum, dad, brothers or sisters have allergy, eczema, asthma or hay fever, do not give foods containing peanuts until your child is 3 years old.
Iron
- It is important to offer iron-containing foods regularly. The best sources for the vegetarian child include pulses, beans, egg yolks, iron-fortified breakfast cereals and dark green leafy vegetables e.g., broccoli.
- Iron is absorbed better from meals which include foods rich in Vitamin C. Oranges, tomatoes, some vegetables and fruit juice are particularly high.
- Avoid giving tea with meals as it reduces the absorption of iron.

Salty foods
- Do not add salt to your child’s food. Use mild spices and herbs to flavour foods rather than adding salt at the table or in cooking.
- Snacks high in salt, such as crisps, should be limited. Salt is usually included as sodium on food labels.

Fats and Oils
- Young, active children need some fats and oils for energy and growth but use them in moderation.

Allergies
- Very few children are allergic to foods or food additives and restricting foods unnecessarily may be harmful. If you think your child is intolerant to any food, consult your Health Visitor or GP, who may refer your child to a Dietitian.

Vitamins and Minerals
- If your child accepts a wide variety of foods from all five food groups, vitamin and mineral supplements may not be needed.
- If your child eats a limited variety of foods or is from an Asian, African or Middle Eastern background, vitamin and mineral supplements may be needed. If you are concerned, seek advice from your health visitor or GP.
- If your child is taking additional vitamins and minerals, check that the correct dose is being given according to the recommendations on the label.

Sugary foods
- Do not add sugar to your child’s food.
- Limit the amount of sugary drinks, sugar and sweets eaten. This will help look after your child’s teeth. Remember to brush your child’s teeth twice a day and visit the dentist regularly.

Constipation
- Check that your child is having 6-8 drinks from a cup each day.
- Include fruit and vegetables at each meal and aim for at least 5 servings a day.
- Offer wholemeal bread instead of white or brown.
- Encourage high fibre cereals for breakfast e.g. Weetabix, Shreddies, Shredded Wheat, Cheerio’s or Porridge.
- Do not give bran to small children.
**Meat alternatives, pulses, nuts and eggs**

**Serve 2 - 3 times each day**

- Try using meat substitutes such as Textured Vegetable Protein (TVP), Soya or Quorn in dishes such as spaghetti bolognaise, lasagne, casseroles, curries and shepherd’s pie.
- Baked beans, kidney beans, chick peas or lentils can be used instead of or as well as meat substitutes in the above dishes.
- Add lentils and beans to home-made vegetable soups.
- Use hummus, egg mayonnaise and peanut butter as sandwich fillers.
- Offer boiled, poached or scrambled eggs on toast or in sandwiches. Omelettes and eggy bread are different ways to serve eggs.
- Convenience foods chosen carefully can make healthy meals, for example vegetarian sausages and burgers. Select those with lower amounts of salt and fat; alternatively make them yourself.
- Use finely ground nuts e.g. ground almonds in puddings, cakes, biscuits and on cereals.
- Cook beans, chick peas, lentils, tofu or meat substitutes in a satay sauce.

*see note about nuts on page 2*
ian diet, it is important to offer them the right variety of foods and a variety of foods from each of the groups below:

## Milk and dairy foods

**Give 3 servings of milk, yoghurt or cheese each day**
- Give milk as a drink, on breakfast cereals, in puddings or sauces.
- Offer yoghurt, yoghurt drinks or fromage frais as a pudding or snack between meals.
- Use paneer in curries or serve a curry with yoghurt.
- Grated cheese, cheese spread or cheese portions can be used as sandwich fillers, on toast or as a snack.
- Add cheese to jacket potatoes, spaghetti, savoury flans, or use in white sauce to make macaroni cheese and cauliflower cheese.

**Which milk?**
- Give full fat/whole milk to children under 2 years – it has more vitamins and calories.
- After 2 years semi-skimmed milk may be given if your child is eating and growing well.
- Skimmed milk should not be used under the age of 5 years.
- Children following a Vegan diet should be offered suitable alternatives to milk and dairy foods to make sure they obtain enough calcium and vitamin B12. Ask your Health Visitor or GP to refer your child to a Dietitian for further advice.
Serve one of these foods with each meal: breakfast cereals, bread, potatoes, chapatti, pasta, rice, couscous, millet, yam, cornmeal, cassava or green banana.

- Encourage low sugar, vitamin and iron enriched breakfast cereals e.g. Weetabix, Shreddies, Cornflakes, Cheerios or Rice Krispies.
- Offer wholemeal, granary and rye breads as well as white as they are high in fibre.
- You can also try pitta bread, chapattis, muffins, bagels, crumpets, crackers and bread sticks.
- Many children enjoy pasta shapes served with a tomato or cheese sauce.
- Try the nutty taste of brown rice in savoury dishes as a change from white rice.
- Potatoes can be offered baked, boiled and mashed or try jacket potato with a filling such as cheese, hummus, baked beans or vegetable chilli.
Fruit and vegetables

Offer fruit and vegetables at every meal

- Vegetables may be eaten raw or cooked – preferably steamed or cooked in very small amounts of water.
- Add vegetables to soups, casseroles and pizzas.
- Serve sliced salad vegetables with sandwiches.
- Sticks of raw vegetables served with a dipping sauce makes a fun snack.
- Use fresh, frozen, tinned or dried fruit in puddings, fruit salad, crumbles and pies.
- Frozen and tinned vegetables are nutritious alternatives to fresh vegetables. Choose tinned varieties which have no added salt.
- Young children often enjoy fresh fruit cut into small pieces. Offer a wide variety.

Avoid overcooking fruit and vegetables as this reduces the vitamin content.
Further points for healthy and happy mealtimes

**Do**
- Let young children feed themselves. Offer finger foods e.g. cheese, bread, slices of fruit and vegetable sticks.
- Try to eat with your child to make it a social occasion.
- Cut food into bite sized pieces.

**Don't**
- **Do not** rush your child when eating.
- **Do not** let your child become distracted by the television when eating.
- **Do not** use food to distract, reward or punish your child.
- **Do not** worry if your child refuses to eat. We all have 'off' days and so do children. Do not force your child to eat. Speak to your Health Visitor if you are concerned.

**Poor weight gain**
If your child is not gaining weight well, talk to your Health Visitor or GP, who may refer your child to a Dietitian. As children often have small appetites, encourage your child to have a small nutritious snack between meals. Offer more fat and sugar containing foods which are high in calories. Use butter or margarine generously on bread and on vegetables. Offer full fat milk. Fry foods in vegetable oil rather than grilling or boiling. Add sugar to puddings and cereals.

**Excess weight gain**
If you child is putting on too much weight, encourage more exercise and cut down on fatty and sugary food and drinks. Seek advice from your Health Visitor or GP who may refer your child to a Dietitian.

For more information check out these websites: www.eatwell.gov.uk • www.food.gov.uk

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