Following a Vegetarian Diet
Advice for 5-16 year olds

A vegetarian diet is one which does not include any meat or fish. A vegetarian diet can be healthy, but you need to find suitable alternatives to meat and fish. It is important to choose the right variety of foods to provide all the essential nutrients to stay fit and healthy.

A guide for families
Combining foods from all the food groups will provide the nutrients you need to grow and be healthy. See inside for how much to eat from each food group each day.

- Regular meals rather than grazing on snacks through the day usually gives a better balance of foods and nutrients.
- Eating a wide variety of foods provides more nutrients so have a main course and a pudding at lunch and for your evening meal.
- Eat together as a family and make meals fun social occasions.
- Convenience foods, chosen carefully, can be part of a healthy meal. Select those with lower amounts of salt, fat and sugar.
- Include a high protein food such as eggs, beans, dahl, lentils, nuts or tofu at each meal.

**Breakfast**

- Leave enough time for breakfast because concentrating on school work is more difficult if you haven’t eaten.

**Good choices include:**

- High fibre cereals e.g. Weetabix, Muesli, Cheerios, Shreddies and Shredded Wheat - with fruit and milk. Try fresh, canned or dried fruit.
- Boiled egg with wholemeal toast spread thinly with butter or margarine. Plus a glass of fruit juice or a piece of fruit.
- Porridge with milk and a glass of fruit juice.
- Toast with peanut butter or jam and a glass of milk or hot chocolate to drink. Instead of toast, try chapatti, crumpets, muffins or pancakes.  
  If you are running late, have a sandwich and carton of milk or fruit juice on the way to school.

**Packed Lunches**

- Choose different types of bread for more variety: sliced bread, bread rolls, pitta bread, chapatti, naan, bagels, baps, baguette, crispbread, crackers and tortilla wraps. Wholemeal, granary and wheatgerm varieties have more iron and fibre.

- For sandwich fillings select from cheese, egg, hummus, peanut butter, vegetable pate or bean spread. Low fat mayonnaise and spreads will keep the fat content down. Include vegetables in sandwiches, or as a salad.

- Alternatives to sandwiches: pizza slices, pasta or rice salad, vegetable samosas, slices of vegetable quiche or crackers with cheese and vegetable sticks.

- Include fresh or dried fruit, or fruit juice and a pudding such as yoghurt, fromage frais, a biscuit, small slice of cake, fruit and nut cereal bar or a piece of chocolate.
Snacks

- Nuts, pumpkin and sunflower seeds, sandwiches, yoghurt, breakfast cereals with milk or fruit are good choices because they give you energy and nutrients. Eat them rather than crisps, chocolates, sweets and fizzy drinks which contain a lot of fat, salt and sugar but do not contain many vitamins or minerals.

Drinks

- 6-8 drinks each day and more in very hot weather will keep you well hydrated and feeling good. Between meals, water and milk are best as they do not damage your teeth. Have pure fruit juice with meals as the vitamin C helps iron absorption. Tea inhibits iron absorption so have it between meals, not with them.

Meal ideas for a vegetarian child in a non-vegetarian family

- Cook an extra portion when making a vegetarian dish - freeze and use later when the family meal is not suitable.
- Remove a portion of sauce for bolognase, casserole, curry or chilli before meat is added. Add beans, lentils, tofu, TVP, Quorn or nuts as alternative protein for the vegetarian portion.
- Leave a portion of pizza meat free and add extra vegetables.
- Have rice dishes such as vegetable risotto with grated cheese, bean paella or vegetable pilau with dahl.
- Use tinned beans (these are quick to prepare as they do not need soaking) for sauces to be served with pasta or for filling a jacket potato.
- Veggie burgers, vegetarian sausages and nut cutlets are easy to buy ready made and are handy to serve instead of meat. Choose lower salt varieties and grill rather than fry.
- Try vegetable stir fry with Quorn or tofu strips and noodles or rice.
- Make or buy individual vegetable flans or quiches.
- Choose puddings, cakes, biscuits, buns and pastries which contain nuts and dried fruit as these contain more iron.

Remember the whole family can enjoy vegetarian dishes.

Iron

- You need iron-containing foods regularly. Adolescent girls need the most. The best vegetarian sources are found in food group 3 and some in groups 1 and 2. See inside.

Vitamin D – the sunshine vitamin

- Vitamin D is made in your skin when you are outside in daylight April – September. Very few foods contain this vitamin so spend time outside every day - take care not to get sunburnt.
Food Groups
As well as energy (calories), the nutrients you need each day are provided by phytochemicals. It is particularly important when following a vegetarian diet to ensure you are eating foods that provide you with sufficient vitamin B12 and vitamin D. Eating a combination of foods from all the food groups will give you all the nutrients you need.

Putting most foods into the food groups is easy. BUT some foods are made up of ingredients from more than one food group. For example, a bag of frozen peas contains vegetables from the fruit and vegetable group and beans which are from the starchy vegetables group. It also has tomatoes and tomato sauce from the fruit and vegetable group and cheese from the dairy group.

Fruit and vegetables
Always have fruit and vegetables at every meal and aim for at least 5 servings a day. Fruit and vegetables give you Vitamins C and A, fibre, flavanoids and some have a little iron.

Tips:
- Have a wide range.
- Avoid overcooking vegetables as this destroys some of the nutrients. Cook them in a small amount of water and for a short time so they are still ‘crisp’ when served.
- Don’t soak vegetables in water as some of the nutrients, such as Vitamin C, float away.
- Frozen fruit and vegetables are usually just as nutritious as fresh.
- Choose tinned vegetables without added salt.
- Try stir fried or roasted vegetables, using very little oil.
- Have sliced salad vegetables with sandwiches, picnics and packed lunches.
- Snack on raw vegetables and try them with hummus to dip into.
- Always choose a pudding with fruit or eat fruit with your pudding e.g. strawberries with cake.
- Add vegetables to pizzas, soups, bean stews and casseroles.
- Dried fruit is good with breakfast cereals and in puddings and cakes. It can damage your teeth, like sweets do, if you eat it on its own as a snack.
protein; vitamins; minerals, fibre; omega 3 and omega 6 fats and immune boosting
arian diet to make sure you are getting enough calcium, iron, zinc, protein, vitamin B12
ents from more than one food group e.g. pizza. The pizza base is from the cereal group.
ion the milk and dairy group. If you add beans these are from the egg, beans, nuts and

Bread, other cereals and potatoes

Have at least one food from this group with each meal. They include: breakfast cereals,
bread, chapatti, pasta, rice, couscous, millet, potatoes, yam and green banana. Foods made with flour e.g. pizza bases, buns and pancakes are also in this group.

These foods give you plenty of starch (carbohydrates) for energy. They also give you B vitamins, fibre and some iron and zinc.

Tips:
- Choose breakfast cereals with added vitamins and iron e.g. Cornflakes and Rice Krispies. Whole grain varieties e.g. Weetabix, Shreddies and Cheerios have more fibre as well.
- Oat cereals e.g. muesli and porridge are high in iron and also fibre and give you energy right through the morning.
- Have wholemeal, granary and rye breads as well as white as they are higher in fibre. You can also try pitta bread, chapattis, muffins, bagels, crumpets and bread sticks.
- Have pasta shapes with tomato and cheese or bean sauces.
- Try the nutty taste of brown rice in savoury dishes as a change from white rice.
- Have potatoes baked, boiled, mashed or try a jacket potato with a filling. Eating the potato skins gives you more fibre.
Eggs, dahl, beans, nuts and seeds

Have foods from this group two or three times a day. Foods in this group include eggs, all types of beans, dahl, lentils, nuts, nut butters, Quorn, seeds and pastes made from seeds such as tahini.
Serving these foods with a food from the cereal group will give you a good source of protein, iron, zinc, magnesium, and B vitamins.

Tips:
- Eggs can be boiled, poached or scrambled. Omelettes and eggy bread are different ways to serve eggs.
- Try vegetable flans or quiche.
- Pulse vegetables such as lentils, chick peas, red kidney, blackeye and butter beans make good curries, chillies and casseroles.
- Beans, with vegetables can be made into tasty samosas.
- Add Quorn, nuts or beans to vegetable stir fry.
- Put hummus, bean spreads, tahini or peanut or other nut butters in sandwiches or on toast.
- Vegeburgers, sausages or nut cutlets are quick and easy. Grill or bake them rather than frying.
- Add chopped nuts to salads and ground nuts to puddings for extra protein and iron e.g. nuts in the crumble topping of fruit crumble.
- Snack on nuts and pumpkin or sunflower seeds.
- Use walnuts often as they are a good source of omega 3 fats.
- Choose lentil soups or one with beans e.g. minestrone.

Foods high in:

These foods should be eaten in moderation as they are high in calories but have limited nutritional value. Eating too many of these foods may make you obese. This can cause diabetes.

Foods in this group include:
- Cooking and salad oils, margarine, mayonnaise, muesli, snacks, sweets, biscuits, cakes, ice creams, soft drinks, sweets, jam, syrup.

When using fats and oils choose healthier options such as sunflower, olive, peanut, linseed, sesame oil.

Tips:
- Spread butter and margarine thinly on bread.
- Frying foods in fat or oil is not a good idea. Try grilling, baking or steaming.
- If you have ice cream, biscuits, cakes or other foods, eat them small portions and gently.
- It is best to avoid sugary drinks as they are high in calories.
- Try your drinks without a straw as they often contain sugar.
Milk, yoghurt, cheese and soya products

Have three servings each day. Foods in this group include milk, cheese, yoghurt, fromage frais, tofu and calcium fortified soya products such as milk and yoghurt. These foods give you protein, calcium and B vitamins.

Other milks such as rice or oat milk do not contain enough protein or nutrients to be included in this group.

Tips:
- Milk is a great drink as it doesn’t damage your teeth - plain, flavoured or in a milkshake. Try yoghurt drinks.
- Have milk or calcium fortified soya milk on breakfast cereals as a snack.
- Skimmed and semi skimmed milk have less fat and calories than full fat milk but have the same amounts of protein, calcium and most nutrients.
- Have yoghurt, fromage frais or soya yoghurt as a pudding or snack between meals. Use in place of cream.
- Try paneer in curries or have yoghurt with curry.
- Grated cheese, cheese spreads or cheese portions can be used as sandwich fillers, on toast or as a snack.
- Add cheese or tofu to jacket potatoes, pasta, savoury flans, or use it in white sauce to make macaroni cheese and cauliflower cheese.
- Use tofu in stir fry dishes.