

HEALTHY FOOD AND EATING

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With an Improving Understanding of MCH grant, FamilyVoices IMPACT works to develop ways to improve health and wellness for all children and families, and to encourage partnerships between families and professionals for children's good health.

www.familyvoices.org and www.brightfuturesforfamilies.org.

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Vegetarian Infants and Toddlers

Can vegetarian infants and toddlers get the nutrition they need to grow well? The answer, according to a recent article in ICAN: Infant, Child, & Adolescent Nutrition, is “Yes!” The American Dietetic Association says, “Well-planned vegetarian diets are appropriate for individuals during all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence, and for athletes.” In fact, the article points out that a well-nourished vegetarian child may fare better than a child consuming the standard American diet full of fat and sugar.

The Breastfeeding Vegetarian Mother

Vegetarian mothers are able to produce plenty of nutritious breast milk by consuming an additional 330 calories per day. Also, they may need to make sure they get enough vitamin B12, vitamin D, and omega-3 fatty acids. In addition, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends vitamin D drops for all breastfed infants starting a few weeks after birth.

Starting Solids

By around the middle of the first year, most breastfed infants need more energy, iron, zinc, and other micronutrients than they can get from breast milk alone. A good first food for the vegetarian infant is either fortified infant cereal or firm tofu. The article cautions that “the amount of lentils, silken tofu, soybeans, applesauce, or strained carrots needed to meet needs

for iron and zinc” would have too many calories for this age. Commercial infant formulas have enough iron and zinc, so the purpose of solids for these babies is to expose them to new textures and flavors.

Adding More Foods

Two to three new foods can be added each week, while looking for any allergic reaction. Introducing a growing variety of foods to babies and toddlers makes it more likely that they will eat these foods later on.

The Vegetarian Toddler

Busy toddlers need nutritious foods to keep them going! Because many vegetarian foods are typically high in fiber, these foods (whole grains, fruits, vegetables) may fill up small tummies before children get the nutrients they need. High-calorie, low-bulk foods (avocados, oils, dried fruits, nut butters (if appropriate), coconut cream, and juices) may help meet a toddler's energy needs.

Read more about vegetarian diets for young children at: <http://can.sagepub.com/content/4/1/8>.



NOTE: Talk with your health care provider about how best to meet your family's nutritional needs, whether vegetarian or not!

