



A vegetarian diet for babies and toddlers – What’s important to know?

Are you a vegetarian and want to feed your baby a vegetarian diet as well? That’s possible. However, there are a few aspects you need to consider. If entire food groups are missing from a baby’s diet, they might lack certain nutrients that are necessary for their healthy development.

Particularly during the critical phase of infancy and toddlerhood they need nutrient-rich foods in their diet. This way, you can ensure your child’s healthy growth and healthy physical and mental development.

Which forms of vegetarianism are most common?

Vegetarian diets	What they do eat and and what they don’t eat	Which nutrients are scarcely present?
Ovo-lacto vegetarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Meat <input type="checkbox"/> Fish <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Eggs <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Milk and dairy products 	Vitamin B ₁₂ , animal protein, iron, zinc, iodine, long-chain polyunsaturated omega-3 fatty acids like DHA* *Docosahexaenoic acid
Lacto vegetarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Meat <input type="checkbox"/> Fish <input type="checkbox"/> Eggs <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Milk and dairy products 	In addition to those mentioned above: Vitamins D and A
Ovo vegetarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Meat <input type="checkbox"/> Fish <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Eggs <input type="checkbox"/> Milk and dairy products 	In addition to those mentioned above: Calcium, vitamins B ₂ , D and A
Veganism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Meat <input type="checkbox"/> Fish <input type="checkbox"/> Eggs <input type="checkbox"/> Milk and dairy products <input type="checkbox"/> Honey 	All of the above mentioned nutrients → <i>vitamin B₁₂ in particular!</i>

Which nutrients are critical and what should you watch out for?

VITAMIN B₁₂

... is an essential vitamin that can only be ingested with animal-based foods. Plant-based sources such as shiitake mushrooms or seaweed contain a biologically ineffective form of the vitamin and do not adequately cover the nutrient requirement. It is essential that vegans of all ages should take a vitamin B₁₂ supplement. A deficiency in mothers during pregnancy and breastfeeding can have adverse effects on their baby's healthy development.

Experts advise against feeding a vegan diet to infants and toddlers without consistent supplementation!

IRON

... supply needs special attention with all forms of vegetarianism. Infants aged 6 to 12 months and toddlers, in particular, need lots of iron, which can only be ingested with food. Iron from meat can be absorbed better by the body than iron from plant-based sources.

Tip: Cereals – especially whole grain – are rich in iron. In a vegetarian diet, the meat in an infant's weaning food diet should be replaced with whole grain cereals (ideally amaranth or oatmeal). Additionally, iron absorption should be improved by adding ingredients that are rich in vitamin C such as juice, fruits and vegetables to the meal or by feeding them as a dessert.

VITAMIN D

... the "sun vitamin" is a critical nutrient regardless of diet during pregnancy, breastfeeding and early infancy. An extra dose of vitamin D is therefore recommended during all these stages – especially when there is a lack of sun exposure. This is why, for example, growing-up milk serves as a good source of vitamin D during the first year of life and beyond.

DHA

(a long-chain polyunsaturated omega-3 fatty acid; LCP)

... is a nutrient the body can only absorb in small amounts from plant-based omega-3 fatty acids. The most important animal source is fish.

If the mother absorbs sufficient amounts from food and nutritional supplements during pregnancy and breastfeeding, the child will be provided with sufficient amounts of DHA via the mother. When feeding infant formula, be sure to use one with added DHA!

IODINE

... is hardly present in plant-based foods, which is why vegetarians should make sure that they get enough. You and your family should always use iodised salt and consume milk and dairy products on a regular basis. Pregnant and breastfeeding women should also take iodine supplements. This way, breastfed children get adequate amounts from breast milk while non-breastfed infants get enough from their formula.

Since salt should only be used for babies when they start switching to family food, you should select weaning food products that are fortified with iodine, such as ready-to-eat milk cereals. If you only feed homemade baby food, babies should receive an additional 50µg of iodine per day in tablet form.

A balanced vegetarian diet with milk and dairy products, legumes and cereals provides your child with sufficient amounts of protein, zinc and calcium. On our website hipp.de you will find a large selection of vegetarian meals for all ages.

If you do choose a vegetarian diet for your child, please consult your paediatrician and consider specialised nutritional advice.