

To Be a Vegetarian...



Your child arrives home one day and proudly declares that he or she is no longer eating meat, or any other animal products for that matter. “What?!” may be the first thing that may enter your mind.

Or, you may have just watched the David Attenborough film ‘Life on Our Planet’ and thought, ‘this is what we should be doing’?

There can be no doubt that mass farming is damaging our world and whether you and your family become a full ‘Veggie’ or simply reduce your meat intake we at TCS are here to ensure that the vegetarian meals at your child’s school are well balanced and healthy.

More often than not, parents don’t choose a vegetarian diet for their children and the declaration of new veggie ways has the potential to stir up some anxiety. But it is more than possible for our kids (and us) to reap the benefits of a healthy vegetarian style of eating, and love it too!

Don’t worry! TCS will continue to produce a daily meat dish as normal, but what we are doing is making sure there is an appealing, nutritious, vegetarian option. We know that food is only healthy if your child actually eats it so we will keep it simple.

Many infant school children simply don’t like the taste or texture of meat, while older children may choose to go veggie for social, ethical or environmental reasons. Whatever the reason, it’s important to consider the nutritional adequacy of your child’s food choices within an overall healthy eating plan.

Vegetarian Basics

You probably already know this, but for the sake of review, let’s cover the basics. There are different kinds of vegetarians, depending on what they choose to eat. Broadly speaking, someone who calls them self, “a vegetarian” does not eat meat, fish, or poultry, or by products of these items. There are some specific categories as well.

SEMI-VEGETARIAN: This may be a good place to start if your family are keen to reduce your meat intake. A semi-vegetarian is someone who eats meat on an occasional basis. You may have also heard the terms, pollo vegetarian – someone who avoids red meat and fish but eats chicken, and pesco pollo vegetarian – someone who avoids red meat but eats chicken and fish.

LACTO-OVO VEGETARIAN: A lacto-ovo vegetarian (most common) excludes meat, fish, and poultry, but enjoys eating dairy products and eggs. Cheese, ice cream, yogurt, milk, eggs, and the like, may be part of a lacto-ovo’s day.

LACTO VEGETARIAN: A lacto vegetarian takes it one step further than the lacto-ovo and excludes eggs. All dairy foods are considered acceptable.

VEGAN: A vegan is a vegetarian who avoids eating ALL animal products – meat, fish, poultry, dairy, eggs, honey, and any foods that contain by-products of these items.

TCS cater mainly for the lacto-ovo vegetarian, but are more than happy to supply any of the other diets on request. (gill@tcsinfo.co.uk).



Variety & Simplicity

A vegetarian diet can be healthy at any age, it doesn't have to be complex but it does need initial care and planning until it becomes second nature.

You could choose to eat the many different types of available meat substitutes on the market such as veggie sausage or veggie chicken but perhaps the idea of this sounds a little bit too much like eating meat. The key is to include a wide variety of foods, and the appropriate amount to meet calorie and nutrient needs.

Nuts are good sources of protein and healthy fats, however TCS and most schools have a nut free policy, as so many children have allergic reactions to them, therefore they are not included in any of our dishes.

Beans and legumes, seeds, fruits, leafy greens and other vegetables, and whole grains can help you get all you need. Dairy foods and eggs may also be included for the lacto-ovos among us. Many popular dishes are already, or can be made to be vegetarian with the replacement of animal protein – bean burritos, veggie pizza, or vegetable lasagne (made with soy cheese for our vegans), cowboy bean casserole, and hummus wraps are just a few examples. Replace chicken with beans on a salad, or beef with tofu in a stir-fry. Veggie burgers and hotdogs are simple favourites that children will always eat.

Start with roasted vegetables, wholegrain rice and pasta, jacket or roast potato as the centrepiece of your meals, and accent with vegetarian sources of protein and whole grains. Finish it off with fresh fruit or yoghurt for dessert, and you can't go wrong.

Considerations

Nutritional adequacy and disordered eating or weight concerns are also things for parents of vegetarian children to consider, our menus will always be compiled with that in mind, we build meals around protein sources that are naturally low in fat, such as beans, lentils, and rice. We do not overload meals with high-fat cheeses to replace the meat.

Nutritional Adequacy

There are a few key nutrients to attend to.

PROTEIN: Protein needs are easily met by eating a variety of plant foods. Vegetarian protein sources include beans, peas, and soy foods such as tofu and Quorn. Just two servings per day are all that's needed of these foods;

Combinations of foods are necessary to satisfy protein needs. Dairy foods and eggs are super protein sources for lacto-ovo vegetarians.

CALCIUM: This mineral is important, as you know, especially during childhood and adolescence. Three good sources each day are what we're talking about here. Cow's milk, (available at lunch time daily), and other dairy products, orange juice, leafy green vegetables like kale and cabbage, can give vegetarians what they need.

IRON: Young people have relatively high requirements for iron, and many plant foods (oats, beans, lentils, whole-wheat products, peas, dried fruits, leafy greens, tofu, and whole wheat bread) are good sources. It's important to consider that iron from plant foods is not as well-absorbed by the body as iron from meat sources. However, vitamin-C-rich foods (i.e., citrus fruits and juices, tomatoes) eaten in conjunction with these iron-containing foods can help to increase their absorption.

ZINC: is necessary for many biochemical reactions and also helps the immune system function properly. Sources of zinc for vegetarians and vegans include many types of beans (white beans, kidney beans, and chickpeas), zinc-fortified breakfast cereals, wheat germ, and pumpkin seeds. Milk products are a zinc source for lacto vegetarians.

VITAMIN B12: Since vitamin B12 is only found in animal foods, vegans should pay special attention here. Choose fortified foods such as cereal or soy products, or take a vitamins B12 and D supplement – the amount offered in a multivitamin is also considered adequate with enough sun exposure, we are not trying to teach you to 'suck eggs' but an hour outside a day in the sunlight will help your child absorb the vitamin and support their general wellbeing.

With regard to disordered eating, many children even at an early age have set foods they will not eat, we all do, but it is so important that they get the right balance of nutrients. Young children are far more likely to eat these foods at school when they are sitting with their friends than they may be at home.

Practical Tips

- Regular healthy snacks are important for all children, including vegetarian children.
- Beans, Oats and Seeds provide trace minerals, children who are three years and older, and who are vegan, should eat these foods daily.
- For little ones, try mini sandwiches with fillings like hummus, mashed avocado, Quorn slices, egg or cheese.

It's easy to adopt a vegetarian lifestyle, and with a little planning, it's healthy and nutritionally sound for any age group and it will help save the planet!

Thank you for your support for your school meal service, it would be great to have your feedback - our school meal survey will soon be available on line at: tcseducationcatering.com

In the meantime you can contact me on gill@tcsinfo.co.uk.



Gill Russell – Total Catering Solutions (SE) Ltd



Top 6 Tips: Healthy Eating for Vegetarians

A vegetarian eating pattern can be a healthy option. The key is to consume a variety of foods in the right amounts to meet your calorie and nutrient needs.

1. Think about protein

Your protein needs can easily be met by eating a variety of plant foods. Sources of protein for vegetarians include beans and peas and soy products (such as tofu, tempeh). Lacto-ovo vegetarians also get protein from eggs and dairy foods.

2. Bone up on sources of calcium

Calcium is used for building bones and teeth. Some vegetarians consume dairy products, which are excellent sources of calcium. Other sources of calcium for vegetarians include tofu made with calcium sulfate, calcium-fortified breakfast cereals and orange juice, and some dark-green leafy vegetables (cabbage, turnip, and greens).

3. Make simple changes

Many popular main dishes are or can be vegetarian — such as pasta primavera, pasta with marinara or pesto sauce, veggie pizza, vegetable lasagna, tofu-vegetable stir-fry, and bean burritos.

4. Enjoy a cookout

For barbecues, try veggie or soy burgers, soy hot dogs, and marinated tofu or tempeh, and fruit kabobs. Grilled veggies are great, too!

5. Include beans and peas

Because of their high nutrient content, consuming beans and peas is recommended for everyone, vegetarians and non-vegetarians alike. Enjoy some vegetarian chilli, three bean salad, or a hummus filled pitta sandwich.

6. Try different veggie versions

A variety of vegetarian products look, and may taste, like meat but are usually lower in saturated fat and contain no cholesterol.

