

# A Nutrition Guide for 5-10 year old vegans



Well-planned vegan diets can meet the nutritional needs of every family member. You can give your child a great start in life by introducing them to a wide variety of plant foods, and teaching them to make compassionate choices. As a starting point, have a look at the general advice about vegan nutrition on [The Vegan Society's website](#).

This guide will help you to learn more about vegan for children. However, it is not designed to replace advice from health professionals. Please speak to a health professional about supplements to ensure that they are appropriate for your child. If you have any concerns about your child's diet, ask your doctor for a referral to a registered dietitian.

## Getting the balance right

By the time your child is five years old, they should be eating a varied and balanced diet that is similar to yours. This table gives you an idea of how to balance different food groups:

Food group	Suggested intake
<b>Fruit and vegetables</b> (fresh, frozen, tinned or dried), including orange varieties and leafy greens	<b>Five portions daily</b> (one portion is roughly the amount that your child can fit in their hand)
<b>Starchy foods</b> , ideally higher fibre choices, such as oats, sweet potato, wholemeal bread, wholewheat pasta and brown rice	<b>Every meal</b>
<b>Protein-rich foods</b> such as beans, chickpeas, lentils, tofu, soya milk and yoghurt alternatives and peanuts	<b>Most meals</b>
<b>Nuts and seeds</b> , especially those rich in omega-3 fat (see below)	<b>Daily</b>
<b>Calcium-rich foods</b> such as calcium-fortified foods and calcium-set tofu	<b>Most meals</b>

Be careful to limit your child's intake of salt and sugar, and make sure that their daily diet includes calcium-rich foods and plenty of iron-rich options combined with good sources of vitamin C.

## Calcium

Calcium is important for teeth and bones. Fortified alternatives to milk and yoghurt, bread fortified with extra calcium and calcium-set tofu are valuable sources because both the content and absorbability are good. Ensure that most of your child's meals contain these foods. Other sources include kale, pak choi, okra, spring greens, dried figs, chia seeds and almonds.

## Iron

It's also important to make sure that your child's daily diet contains plenty of foods that are rich in iron. Beans, chickpeas, lentils, tofu, cashew nuts, chia seeds, ground linseed, hemp seeds, pumpkin seeds, quinoa, kale, raisins, dried figs, dried apricots and fortified breakfast cereals provide good amounts of iron. Recommended daily iron intakes are 6.1mg (milligrams) for four to six year olds, and 8.7mg for seven to ten year olds<sup>1</sup>. You can find out more about the iron contents of plant foods [here](#).

Adding vitamin C-rich food to meals helps with iron absorption. Good sources of vitamin C include pepper, broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, kiwi fruits, oranges, strawberries and pineapple.

## Vitamin B12

Every vegan needs a reliable source of vitamin B12 in their diet, either from fortified foods or a supplement. Here are some examples of foods that might be fortified (check the label):

- Unsweetened soya milk
- Plain soya yoghurt
- Breakfast cereal
- Vegan spread
- Nutritional yeast flakes (available from health food retailers)

Our suggestions about vitamin B12 for children have been worked out using UK recommended intakes and our recommendations for adults<sup>1,2</sup>. If you are offering fortified foods to your child as a source of vitamin B12, aim for a daily intake of 1mcg (microgram) from one year of age, increasing to 2mcg by the time they are seven years old. These intakes are safe, and will help your child to absorb enough vitamin B12, especially if their intake of fortified foods is spread out across the day as much as possible. Alternatively, provide a supplement.

## Vitamin D

A daily vitamin D supplement containing 10 micrograms is recommended during autumn and winter as a minimum. Year-round supplementation is recommended for children with darker skin and those who do not regularly expose their skin to sunlight<sup>3</sup>. Vitamin D2 and vitamin D3 from lichen are vegan-friendly.

## Iodine

The iodine content of most plant foods is variable and may be low. Ensure that there is a reliable source of iodine in your child's diet. The recommended daily intake of iodine is 100mcg (micrograms) for four to six year olds and 110mcg for seven to ten year olds<sup>1</sup>. The use of a supplement is recommended.

## Omega-3 fats

Ensure that your child's daily diet contains a source of the omega-3 fat alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), such as ground linseed, walnuts, hemp seeds or chia seeds. Seeds can be stirred into cereal or soya yoghurt, or blended into smoothies. You can also use vegetable (rapeseed) oil as your main cooking oil. Our bodies can convert ALA into long chain omega-3 fats called eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). European guidance suggests a daily intake of 250milligrams of EPA and DHA<sup>4</sup>, which are not found in plant foods. These fats can be obtained from microalgae by taking a supplement. However, there is a need for research into the health benefits of supplementation for vegans.

## Summary

- Provide your child with a balanced and varied diet that is similar to yours (be careful to limit salt and sugar)
- Include rich sources of calcium in your child's daily diet, such as fortified alternatives to milk and yoghurt, bread fortified with extra calcium and calcium-set tofu
- Offer plenty of iron-rich foods daily, such as beans, chickpeas, lentils, tofu, cashew nuts, chia seeds, ground linseed, hemp seeds, pumpkin seeds, quinoa, kale, raisins, dried figs, dried apricots and fortified breakfast cereals, and improve iron absorption by adding good sources of vitamin C, such as pepper, broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, kiwi fruits, oranges, strawberries and pineapple
- Provide a reliable intake of vitamin B12 from fortified foods or a supplement
- Provide a daily vitamin D supplement during autumn and winter as a minimum (year-round supplementation is recommended for people who do not expose their skin to sunlight and those with darker skin)
- Provide a reliable source of iodine (a supplement is recommended)
- Consider supplementation of long chain omega-3 fats from microalgae

## References

1. COMMITTEE ON MEDICAL ASPECTS OF FOOD AND NUTRITION POLICY (1991) *Dietary Reference Values for Food Energy and Nutrients for the United Kingdom*, London: HMSO
2. WALSH, S (2001) *What Every Vegan Should Know About Vitamin B12* available from: <https://www.vegansociety.com/resources/nutrition-and-health/vitamins-minerals-and-nutrients/vitamin-b12-your-key-facts/what-every-vegan-should-know-about-vitamin-b12> (viewed 25-OCT-2016)

3. PUBLIC HEALTH ENGLAND (2016) *PHE publishes new advice on vitamin D* available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/phe-publishes-new-advice-on-vitamin-d> (viewed 02-AUG-2016)
4. EFSA (2010) *Scientific Opinion on Dietary Reference Values for fats, including saturated fatty acids, polyunsaturated fatty acids, monounsaturated fatty acids, trans fatty acids, and cholesterol* available from: [http://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/scientific\\_output/files/main\\_documents/1461.pdf](http://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/scientific_output/files/main_documents/1461.pdf) (viewed 03-OCT-2016)

