Feeding Your Baby
a varied & balanced
Vegetarian Diet

Use this guide in conjunction with "Wattie's Guide to Baby Feeding" for more information on foods and textures for each stage of baby's development.

Breast milk is the ideal food for your baby, breastfeed for up to 2 years or longer if you can. Breast milk (or infant formula) is all baby needs for around the first 6 months.

There are different types of vegetarian or plant-based eating styles which exclude meat, chicken and fish.

Lacto-ovo Vegetarian: This diet includes milk products and eggs. As these foods make it easier to provide baby with a balanced diet, the advice in this guide is for a lacto-ovo vegetarian eating style.

Vegan: This diet consists entirely of plant-based foods and needs careful planning. A vegan diet for a young child requires close involvement of a qualified health professional to ensure it is nutritionally adequate, as at the very least, it may require vitamin B_{12} supplementation.

At around 6 months, when baby is showing signs of readiness, solid foods can be introduced. Gradually introduce a variety of foods, in an age-appropriate texture, from the four food groups each day: Vegetables and fruit; Legumes, smooth nut/seed butters and eggs; Grain foods; and Milk products. Babies have high energy and nutrient needs to fuel their growth and development. As they have small tummies, they need to eat small amounts often.

Protein

Offer a variety of protein containing foods each day so baby's protein requirements for growth and development can be met.

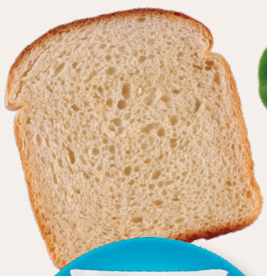
Vegetarian protein sources include: Breast milk or infant formula; Legumes (cooked puréed beans, lentils, split peas) e.g. hummus, dhal; Milk and soy products e.g. full-fat yoghurt, cheese, tofu; Smooth nut and seed butters e.g. peanut, almond, chia; Eggs; Wholemeal grains e.g. pasta, rice, quinoa.

Fibre

Plant foods can be high in dietary fibre, which can fill baby's small tummy quickly. They may also contain phytates, which can reduce the absorption of some minerals, such as iron and zinc. Avoid high fibre foods e.g. bran cereals, heavy grain breads. Babies get all the fibre they need from vegetables, fruit, legumes, infant cereals and breads (start with white or wholemeal).

Fat and Omega-3

To support your baby's energy needs and provide omega-3 fats, offer foods such as avocado and smooth nut and seed butters. Vegetables oils (such as olive or canola oils) can also be used in cooking.



Iron

Iron is an essential mineral. Young children have increased iron needs for their rapid growth, so offer a variety of iron rich foods every day: Breast milk or infant formula; Iron fortified baby cereals; Eggs; Legumes (e.g. soy beans, split peas, lentils); Green leafy vegetables.

Non-haem iron found mainly in plant foods is not as well absorbed as haem iron found in meat, poultry and fish. Include foods containing Vitamin C (e.g. tomato, broccoli, kiwifruit) with meals, as this helps non-haem iron absorption.

Some babies may still not get enough iron from food. Signs of iron deficiency are developmental and behavioural problems, reduced immunity and tiredness. See your doctor for diagnosis and treatment.

Zinc

Sources of zinc in a vegetarian diet include legumes, wholemeal grains, ground nuts and seeds, milk products and eggs. Zinc supports normal immune function and growth in children.

Iodine

New Zealand soils are low in iodine, so include milk products, eggs and iodine fortified bread. Avoid iodised salt as babies don't need added salt in their food.



Vitamin D

Vitamin D is important for helping absorption of calcium for strong bones. Some foods like eggs contain small amounts of vitamin D, the rest comes from sunshine. As their skin is sensitive, babies can't safely get the required vitamin D from the sun. If your baby is at risk of vitamin D deficiency, discuss supplementation with your health professional.





Vitamin B_{12}

Vitamin B_{12} is an essential vitamin only found naturally in animal foods.

Babies born to vegan mothers can have a vitamin B_{12} deficiency. Both mother and baby are likely to need supplementation as prescribed by a health professional.

Sources include: Breast milk (if the mother has adequate vitamin B_{12} status) and infant formula; Eggs; Milk products e.g. full-fat yoghurt, cheese; Foods fortified with vitamin B_{12} e.g. soy products, meat alternatives (check salt suitability for babies).

For further advice, call **PlunketLine on 0800 933 922**, or speak with your Dietitian or Health Professional.

For questions about Wattie's products, call **Wattie's for Baby on 0800 55 66 66**.



Wattie's®

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These lacto-ovo vegetarian menus are a suggested guide only – as individual needs will vary. Offer a wide variety of foods from the four food groups each day to provide the essential nutrients baby needs. Ensure infants and children are sitting down and actively supervised when eating and drinking.

For further advice, call **PlunketLine on 0800 933 922**, or speak with your Dietitian or Health Professional.

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Sample Menu around 7 months

Continue to offer milk BEFORE solids. Breast milk (or formula) is still the most important food.

Offer baby 2 or 3 meals per day.

Breakfast

Breast milk or infant formula

Iron fortified baby cereal

Mashed fruit e.g. peeled cooked apple or pear

Lunch

Breast milk or infant formula

Cooked puréed pumpkin & bean casserole

Mashed banana

Dinner

Breast milk or infant formula

Cooked mashed plain tofu, rice & vegetables (e.g. cooked puréed tomato, peas & broccoli)

Natural full-fat yoghurt

Sample Menu around 9 months

Breast milk (or formula) feeds are still important, but from 8-9 months offer AFTER solids.

Offer baby 2-3 meals a day with 1 or 2 snacks in between.

Breakfast

Iron fortified baby cereal

Wholemeal toast finger topped with mashed avocado

Breast milk or infant formula

Snack

Smooth nut butter (thin spread) or cheese slice on puffed crispbread

Soft cooked fruit or veggie pieces

Lunch

Cooked mashed lentil & veggie dhal (e.g. carrot, potato, courgette)

Soft peeled seasonal fruit slices e.g. ripe kiwifruit or peach

Breast milk or infant formula

Snack

Hummus or homemade legume based dips with cooked penne pasta

Dinner

Scrambled eggs, sprinkled with grated cheese or mini vegetable quiches or patties with soft cooked green beans & cauliflower

Milk pudding with chia

Helpful Tips

Breast Milk

Babies need breast milk (or infant formula) as their main milk drink until at least 12 months. Cow's milk and plant-based milks don't provide the correct balance of nutrients and are not a suitable replacement for breast milk or infant formula.

Toddlers over 12 months old can be offered whole-fat cow's milk or soy milk fortified with calcium and vitamin B_{12} (as soy milk is higher in protein and fat than other plant-based milks).

Legumes

Canned legumes can be a convenient alternative to soaking and cooking dried beans. Choose varieties with no added salt, drain and rinse before use.

Food Texture

To avoid any type of food being a choking hazard always ensure you offer foods that are an age-appropriate texture. See the 'Wattie's Guide to Baby Feeding' for more information on food textures for each stage of baby's development. For example, offer cooked puréed legumes at around 6 months, then progress to cooked mashed legumes at 7–8 months. Avoid small hard, round, sticky, or stringy foods.

Choose and prepare foods for baby with no added sugar or salt.

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