

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 perfect 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 B₁₂ 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 appropriate texture, from the four food groups each day: Vegetables and fruit; Legumes, nuts, seeds and eggs; Breads and cereals; 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 pureed 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 and phytates and bulky for baby's small tummy. Phytates can also interfere with mineral absorption (iron, zinc, calcium).

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).



Omega-3 fatty acids

Include a variety of vegetable oils (e.g. canola, soy), ground linseeds, chia and walnuts to provide omega 3 fatty acids from alpha-linolenic acid (ALA).



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 growth and immune function.

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 B₁₂

Vitamin B₁₂ is an essential vitamin only found naturally in animal foods.

Babies born to vegan mothers can have a vitamin B₁₂ 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 B₁₂ status) and infant formula; Eggs; Milk products e.g. full-fat yoghurt, cheese; Foods fortified with vitamin B₁₂ e.g. soy products, meat alternatives (check salt suitability for babies).

Wattie's

See your Plunket Nurse, Dietitian or Health Professional for further advice.

For other baby feeding questions visit forbaby.co.nz or call the Careline on 0800 55 66 66 or call PlunketLine on 0800 933 922

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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.

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Sample Menu around 7 months

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
Wattie's® Little Sprouts™
White Beans, Kumara, Pumpkin & Olive Oil pouch or 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

Before Bed

Breast milk or infant formula

Sample Menu around 9 months

Offer baby 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 veggies 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

Wattie's® Little Dippers™
Hummus Dip or homemade dips with cooked penne pasta and peeled cucumber sticks

Dinner

Scrambled eggs, sprinkled with grated cheese or mini vegetable quiches or patties with soft cooked green beans and cauliflower
Milk pudding with chia

Before Bed

Breast milk or infant formula

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 full-fat cow's milk or soy milk fortified with calcium, vitamin B₁₂ and D (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

Always offer food in a soft texture that is safe and appropriate for your baby's developmental stage. Small hard, round, sticky or stringy foods need to have the texture altered by cooking or cutting to reduce the choking risk e.g. offer thinly spread smooth nut butters (rather than whole nuts) and cooked mashed legumes.

Wattie's baby food recipes are prepared in our specialist baby food facility with carefully selected, quality ingredients.