

OPTIMUM NUTRITION FOR RAISING A CHILD ON A VEGAN DIET

CHECKLIST: BIRTH TO 6 MONTHS

Evidence-based advice from Amanda Benham, vegan paediatric dietitian with over 25 years experience

AFTER YOUR BABY IS BORN:

*The ideal milk for infants is breastmilk from a healthy, well-nourished mother. A consultation with a lactation consultant can be helpful if you experience problems with breastfeeding. If breastmilk is not an option, the **only** safe alternative is a commercial infant formula. Both commercial soy and rice-based infant formulae are available. Homemade "formula", nut milks, juices, coconut water and commercial plants milks are NOT suitable for infants as an alternative to breastmilk or formula, and can result in serious health consequences, including growth retardation, nutrient deficiencies, developmental delay and even death.



*If breastfeeding, continue healthy lifestyle practices and continue supplementing with a Prenatal supplement, additional vitamin B12 (100+ mcg) and 200 mg DHA¹. Take 1000-2000 IU vitamin D¹ (on days when exposure to sun on bare skin is limited) and consider calcium supplementation if having less than 2 cups of calcium-fortified plant milk daily. Have your iron retested and adjust iron supplementation according to the result. Use iodised salt.

*Vitamin D: Supplementing your baby directly with 400 IU liquid vitamin D daily from birth is recommended¹, at least on the days that exposure to sunlight on bare skin is limited.

*Vitamin B12: If you did not supplement vitamin B12 adequately during pregnancy or experienced low vitamin B12 (below 300 pmol/L), supplement your baby directly with liquid vitamin B12 from birth², at a rate of 5 mcg per day¹.

*Ensure that your baby's weight, length and head circumference are recorded and plotted on a growth chart from birth. Visit a child health clinic regularly for checkups and have these measurements done and recorded on the growth chart. (Not following a growth curve can be an early sign of issues that are best promptly addressed.)

AGE 4-6 MONTHS:

Readiness for food: Your baby is ready to start complimentary feeding ("solids") when s/he can sit supported, has good head control, watches others eat, opens mouth when food is offered and tries to grab at food. Do not start solids before 4 months of age. Most babies are ready by 6 months of age, and it is generally recommended that solids be introduced by or at this age. Continue with breastfeeding (or formula) at this stage, until at least 12 months of age.



*Introduce one new food at a time, every 2-3 days at first. If a food is refused, try again in a few days' time. Offer foods about 30-60 minutes after breastfeeding. Do not add salt, sugar, margarine or oil to baby's food.

*Iron: Iron is vital for brain development and breastmilk is a poor source of iron, and babies' stores of iron deplete by about 6 months of age. Therefore, first foods should include iron-rich foods, such as iron-fortified baby cereal, cooked tofu and green vegetables.

*Reduce risk of choking: Offer foods of appropriate texture, ranging from pureed at first and gradually getting lumpier. If wanting to try baby led weaning, see further information to reduce choking risk. Avoid giving large chunks of food, whole grapes, nuts, seeds, whole cherry tomatoes. Cook or grate hard fruit and vegetables such as carrot and apple. Ensure legumes are very well cooked and pureed or mashed to assist digestion.

*From 6 months of age, supplement your baby directly with 5 mcg of liquid vitamin B12¹ and 400 IU of vitamin D¹, if not doing so already. Also give your baby 100 mg of liquid DHA and one teaspoon of flaxseed oil (for omega-3) daily¹.

*Continue to have your baby's growth and development monitored by a child health nurse or doctor.

- KEY REFERENCES:** 1. Baroni L, Goggi S, Battaglino R, Berveglieri M, Fasan I, Filippin D, et al. Vegan Nutrition for Mothers and Children: Practical Tools for Healthcare Providers. *Nutrients*. 2018;11(1):5. <https://www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/11/1/5/htm>, accessed 1/1/19.
2. Amit M. Canadian Pediatric Society. Position Statement: Vegetarian Diets in Children and Adolescents. *Paediatr Child Health* 2010;15(5):303-314. <https://www.cps.ca/en/documents/position/vegetarian-diets>, accessed 1/1/19.

This information is not intended to replace individualised dietary or medical advice. If you want help with nutrition and dietary planning, see an Accredited Practising Dietitian experienced in plant-based nutrition. If you have health issues or concerns, see your doctor. © 2019 Amanda Benham, APD, AN, FASLM www.humanherbivore.com