

# OPTIMUM NUTRITION FOR RAISING A CHILD ON A VEGAN DIET

## CHECKLIST: CONCEPTION TO BIRTH

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

### BEFORE CONCEPTION:

\*Eat a nutritious diet. Eating well will help enhance the health and fertility of both partners, as well as being important for the health of the baby-to-be. This means eating mostly “whole” plant foods, including eating whole grains, legumes (which includes soy products such as tofu and tempeh), green vegetables, other colourful vegetables, fresh fruit and calcium-fortified plant milk every day.

\*Limit intake of “empty calorie” foods such as highly processed foods with added oils/fats and refined sugars. Choose all or mostly whole grains rather than refined grains.

\*Aim to be in the “healthy weight range” for your height (BMI 18.5-24.9) if possible, as being overweight can increase pregnancy risks and complications. (Consider seeing a dietitian for help with weight control and healthy eating to prepare for a healthy pregnancy.)

\*Practise other healthy lifestyle practices, such as avoiding tobacco, recreational drugs and alcohol and exercising regularly.

\*Supplement daily with 150 – 220 mcg iodine and at least 400 mcg folate<sup>1</sup>. A Prenatal supplement is recommended as it will boost intake of additional key nutrients, such as selenium, iron, zinc, vitamin D and vitamin A.

\*In addition to the vitamin B12 in any prenatal or multivitamin supplement, take a vitamin B12 (50+ mcg<sup>1</sup>) supplement daily. (Take one that is not formulated with vitamin C or copper, as these can inactivate the vitamin B12.)

\*See your GP for a pre-conception checkup and have blood tests, including vitamin B12, folate, vitamin D, iron studies, thyroid function and the other tests your doctor recommends. Take steps to correct any deficiencies or issues identified prior to trying to conceive.



### DURING PREGNANCY:

\*Continue with healthy eating and other healthy lifestyle practices. Limit caffeine intake to 200-300 mg per day<sup>1</sup>. If using salt, use iodised salt (to boost iodine intake). Avoid eating seaweed.

\*Continue supplementing with a daily prenatal multivitamin and additional vitamin B12. Have your iron levels monitored and take extra iron if haemoglobin level falls below 105-110 g/L<sup>2</sup>.

\*Supplement with 1000-2000 IU vitamin D<sup>(1)</sup>, at least on days when exposure to sun on bare skin is limited. Have at least 2 cups of calcium-fortified plant milk daily or consider taking a calcium supplement<sup>1</sup> (e.g. 600 - 1000<sup>1</sup> mg per day, in 2-3 doses.)

\* Supplement daily with 200 mg omega-3 DHA<sup>2</sup>. (Algal-derived are suitable for vegans.) Also eat 1.5 -2 tablespoons of ground flax or chia seeds daily, 3 tsp flaxseed oil or 50 g walnuts<sup>2</sup>.

\*Be extra careful with food hygiene, wear gloves if gardening and do not handle cat litter. Avoid eating raw sprouts, unwashed produce, eating at buffets or having salads or fresh (unpasteurized) juices when out.

\*See your GP or specialist (or visit pre-natal outpatient clinic) as often as recommended and have all recommended tests. Consult with a doctor if you have any queries or concerns about your health or that of your unborn infant.



### KEY REFERENCES: 1.

Baroni L, Goggi S, Battaglini 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.

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