

# Vegetarian Eating

## For growing children

Vegetarian eating can provide foods needed for children to keep well and grow.

It is important to eat a mix of different whole grains, fruit, vegetables, tofu, nuts and seeds as well as legumes for example lentils, pulses, and beans. Eggs and dairy foods if eaten provide nutrition too.

Offer children foods containing:

- protein for growth and development
- iron for brain development and healthy red blood cells
- vitamin B12 for brain and nerves to work
- calcium for bones and teeth
- zinc for healing, immune system and healthy skin.

### How to eat well

#### Protein foods

Food sources include tofu, legumes for example lentils, pulses, and beans, nuts and seeds. If you eat dairy foods, eggs and fish these are sources of protein.

#### Iron in foods

Food sources include legumes, iron fortified foods such as breads and cereals, tofu, seeds, nuts, whole grains, dried fruit and leafy green vegetables.

Eating foods rich in vitamin C such as citrus fruit, strawberries, kiwi fruit, tomatoes and broccoli helps iron be absorbed better.

#### Vitamin B12 in foods

Non animal sources of B12 are soy milks fortified with vitamin B12, some 'meat substitutes' such as soy based burgers and sausages with added vitamin B12 and yeast extracts such as Marmite™.

If a child is following a vegetarian eating plan (or a vegan eating pattern) and does not eat these foods or eat enough of them regularly, a vitamin B12 supplement may need to be taken.

#### Calcium in foods

Non-dairy food sources of calcium include calcium added milk substitutes (choose ones with 100 mg per 100 ml), sesame seeds, Asian greens, almonds and Brazil nuts.

#### Zinc in foods

Food sources of zinc include legumes, grains, nuts seeds, eggs, cheese, cow's milk and soy products such as tofu, soy milk and soya yoghurts.

Zinc can be absorbed from food better by eating foods such as sprouted beans, grains and seeds, yeast breads, fruits and vegetables. Soaking legumes before cooking (or using canned types) also helps.

## **Growth and development checks**

All children should have their growth and development checked by a child health nurse or GP regularly. Ask your GP or child health nurse for more information.

## **Want to know more**

Ask your GP or child health nurse.