

Is A Vegetarian Diet Safe For My Child?

If you are vegetarian parent, you have probably considered putting your child on a vegetarian diet. Not only would it save time and make meal-planning easier, but for dietary and ethical reasons, you believe it is a better choice for your child.

Conversely, you might not be a vegetarian yourself, but have a child who is going through a vegetarian "phase," where she rejects meat, but doesn't consume enough healthy foods to compensate for the nutritional gap.

Whatever the case is, you may have wondered whether or not a vegetarian diet is sustainable, healthy choice for your child. You may have heard that putting your child on a vegetarian diet could potentially stunt her growth.

These concerns probably prevented you from putting your child on a vegetarian diet up to this point.

And all of these concerns are legitimate. In fact, if a vegetarian diet is poorly planned, it can cause serious short and long term health problems, especially for children, who are growing and developing--and who do not yet have sufficient stores of vitamins.

If you aren't well-prepared to put your child on a vegetarian diet, you definitely shouldn't. However, if you have done your nutritional research and you are familiar with the nutrients vegetarians commonly lack, then you know that these problems can easily be overcome with some meal planning.

You also know that putting your child on a healthful vegetarian diet can greatly improve her health in both the short and long term. It can also reduce her exposure to animal products that contain hormones and preservatives, which have been linked to developmental problems and cancer.

If you haven't researched vegetarian diets thoroughly, but you are anxious to start your child on one now, you should start by ensuring that you plan meals to boost amounts of the following nutrients (that most vegetarians lack):

1. Protein. Make sure your child is consuming enough protein by adding additional sources, such as wheat,

soybeans, isolated soy protein, and nuts.

2. Calcium. Ensure your child is consuming enough calcium by adding calcium-fortified processed foods and leafy green vegetables to his diet.

3. Iron. Add more iron to your child's diet by increasing servings of soybeans, pinto beans, tofu, and cereals.

4. Zinc. Enhance your child's zinc intake by increasing his servings of almonds, peanut butter, and mushrooms.

If you concentrate on compensating for all of these common nutritional deficiencies, you absolutely can put your child on a vegetarian diet without any negative health consequences.

Just ignore the mythology surrounding vegetarian diets and instead focus on research and meal-planning.