

Catering to Vegetarian Children



If you have a child in your care who is a vegetarian, it may seem difficult to provide nutritious meals and snacks that follow the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) guidelines. Learn more about what vegetarians eat and how to cater to their nutritional needs while also fulfilling the CACFP requirements.

Types of Vegetarians

Vegetarians eat fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds. There are various types of vegetarians. You may need to ask the child's parents which foods the child is allowed to eat. The list below describes different types of vegetarians.

- ◇ **Lacto-ovo-vegetarian:** avoid meat, poultry, and fish; eat dairy and egg products
- ◇ **Lacto-vegetarian:** avoid meat, poultry, and fish; eat dairy products
- ◇ **Ovo-vegetarian:** avoid meat, poultry, and fish; eat eggs
- ◇ **Pesci-vegetarian:** avoid meat and poultry; eat fish
- ◇ **Semi-vegetarian:** avoid meat; eat fish and poultry
- ◇ **Vegan:** avoid all animal products including meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy, and sometimes honey

CACFP Meat Alternates

There are many meat alternate options for vegetarian children in the CACFP program:

Beans: dry beans, baked beans, refried beans, bean soup

Cheese: low-fat, ricotta, cottage, feta, and soft cheeses

Lentils and Dry Peas

Nuts*: nut butters, soy nuts, peanuts, walnuts, pistachios, hazelnuts, pine nuts, pecans, cashews, almonds

Seafood: clams, crab, fish sticks, crawfish, oysters, salmon, scallops, sardines, shrimp, calamari, tuna, etc.

Seeds*: pumpkin, squash, sesame, and sunflower seeds

Yogurt and Soy Yogurt:

Yogurts must contain no more than 23 grams of sugar per 6 ounces of yogurt.

Tofu: tofu and processed tofu products

*No more than 50% of the meat/meat alternate requirement can be met with nuts or seeds.

At Risk Nutrients

Proper nutrients are essential to child growth and development. Some nutrients may only be found in, or are more readily available in meat products. Ensure vegetarian children have adequate amounts of the following nutrients:

- ◇ **Protein:** dairy products, soy products, eggs, dried beans and legumes, nuts, and shellfish
- ◇ **Vitamin B₁₂:** only available from animal products; can be found in some fortified foods such as breakfast cereal, breads, and nutritional yeast; found in dairy products, eggs, tuna, clams, and oysters
- ◇ **Vitamin D:** dairy products, canned fish, and fortified products such as orange juice
- ◇ **Calcium:** dairy products, dark green leafy vegetables, white beans, and calcium fortified products such as orange juice, breakfast cereals, and other types of milk
- ◇ **Iron:** dry beans, eggs, leafy green vegetables, lentils, and fortified cereals. Eating iron foods with a vitamin C rich food helps increase iron absorption
- ◇ **Zinc:** nuts, fortified cereals, dry beans, dairy products, pumpkin seeds

No Fuss Meat Alternates

Make a vegetarian portion of the meal you are fixing. Try some of the ideas below:

- ◇ **Casserole:** make a corner with added dried beans, yogurt, or cheese
- ◇ **Sandwiches:** add cheese or an egg; use hummus as a spread; make an egg or tuna fish sandwich; try black bean burgers
- ◇ **Pizza:** Sprinkle on extra low-fat cheese, dried beans, eggs, nuts, or seeds; try a hummus spread
- ◇ **Spaghetti:** make white bean meatballs
- ◇ **Tacos:** add dried beans, cheese, or chili
- ◇ **Soups:** mix in dried beans, lentils, cheese, or eggs
- ◇ **Stew:** add dried beans, lentils, cheese, yogurt, nuts
- ◇ **Lasagna:** do a veggie corner with cheese and beans
- ◇ **Chicken Nuggets:** use falafel (see recipe below)

Meat Alternate Options on the Side

If you can't take the meat out of the dish, try these ideas:

- ◇ Serve beans on the side
- ◇ Provide a cheese stick
- ◇ Add yogurt to the plate
- ◇ Scramble up an egg
- ◇ Have boiled eggs on hand
- ◇ Scoop up some cottage cheese
- ◇ Add nuts or seeds to meet up to 50% of the meat alternate requirement

Chick-en Nuggets

- 1 15-ounce can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 1/2 cup onion, finely diced
- 1/2 teaspoon parsley
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 cup whole wheat bread crumbs



Mash chickpeas (garbanzo beans) in a bowl. Add onion, parsley, and garlic and blend with beans. In a separate bowl, combine egg, cumin, salt, pepper, lemon juice, baking powder, and oil. Mix with beans, and slowly pour in enough bread crumbs so the dough is not too sticky to shape. Shape into chicken nugget shapes and cook on a lightly greased fry pan or griddle, flipping halfway through the cooking. Cook until browned on both sides and cooked through. Makes 5 servings for 3-5 year olds at lunch/dinner.

✓ Meat/Meat Alternates

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