

# 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.

## 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, macadamia nuts, Brazil nuts, cashews, almonds

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

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

**Yogurt**

\*No more than 50% of the meat/meat alternate requirement can be met with nuts or seeds. Nuts or seeds must be combined with another meat/meat alternate to meet the requirement.

## 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

## 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 B<sub>12</sub>:** 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

Source and photo: [www.superhealthykids.com](http://www.superhealthykids.com)

### Michigan Office

139 W Lake Lansing Rd, Suite 120 • East Lansing, MI 48823  
Telephone: (800) 234-3287 • Fax: (517) 332-5543

### Association for Child Development

[www.acdkids.org](http://www.acdkids.org)

### Illinois Office

4415 W Harrison St, Suite 535 • Hillside, IL 60162  
Telephone: (800) 284-5273 • Fax: (708) 236-0872

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English. To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, (AD-3027) found online at: [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html), and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or, (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov). This institution is an equal opportunity provider. (Rev. 10/2015)