

VEGETARIAN DIETS

Plant-based or vegetarian diets have become more popular in recent years. According to a YouGov poll done by the Vegetarian Resource Group, there are approximately 2 million 8–17-year-olds who are vegetarian or vegan, with about 820,000 being vegan (Stahler, C., & Mangels, PhD, RD, R., 2021). Although a plant-based diet is more popular than ever, vegetarian diets can vary greatly between people, and this makes providing vegetarian options confusing for food service staff in nutrition programs such as the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) encourages CACFP and NSLP sponsors to provide participants a variety of foods in the meals and snacks served, and whenever reasonably possible, accommodate food preferences to increase participation and customer satisfaction. A vegetarian meal accommodation is a preference request if not related to a medical condition that limits the diet. Meal modifications to accommodate a personal or family food preference or modifications made for religious, ethnic, moral, or other reasons may be reimbursed if the modifications are made within the program's meal pattern requirements. The information and resources below can help in the understanding, preparation, and serving of plant-based meals in schools, child and adult care centers, and afterschool programs.

Types of Vegetarian Diets:

- ◆ **Vegan (sometimes called total vegetarian):** An all plant-based diet with no animal products or food items containing animal byproducts. This diet is the most restrictive type of the plant-based diets.
- ◆ **Pescetarian:** Fish is the only animal source consumed. No other meat, poultry, or dairy items are consumed.
- ◆ **Lactovegetarian:** A primarily plant-based diet is consumed with the additions of cheese and dairy products.
- ◆ **Lacto-ovo vegetarian:** Same diet as lactovegetarian but also includes eggs.
- ◆ **Semi-vegetarian:** No consumption of red meat, but chicken, fish, dairy, eggs, may be consumed along with plant foods.

Why Plant-Based?

The reasons people follow a plant-based diet vary. Some people choose to follow a plant-based diet for health reasons, others to spare animals or the environment, some for religious reasons. Plant-based diets have been shown to lower the risk of overweight/obesity and chronic diseases such as heart disease, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, and some cancers. Plant-based diets can be lower in saturated fats, dietary cholesterol, and total fats primarily found in animal-based foods. Persons following a plant-based diet typically consume higher amounts of fruits and vegetables, which contain low or no fat and are high in dietary fiber, nutrients, and phytochemicals.

Key Nutrients to Keep in Mind:

Certain nutrients need to be monitored because vegetarians, especially vegans, can become deficient in the following:

- ◆ **Protein:** needs to be monitored carefully because of the elimination of animal proteins, so plant proteins need to be heavily varied and calorie intake high enough to ensure proper amount is being taken in. Beans, legumes, nuts, seeds, nut/seed butters are examples of plant-based protein sources along with non-dairy beverages that meet the USDA nutrient standards.
- ◆ **Iron:** non-heme iron in plant sources may not absorb as well as iron from animal sources. Eating Vitamin C rich-foods with non-heme iron foods will help with iron absorption. A bean and tomato vegetarian chili is an example of an iron and vitamin c rich entrée.
- ◆ **Vitamin B-12:** This vitamin is primarily found in animal sources. Fortified nutritional yeast is a good dietary source. This could be sprinkled on top of dishes to add a cheesy taste enhancement.
- ◆ **Vitamin D:** if dairy is eliminated, vitamin D fortified foods and/or supplements are needed. Non-dairy beverages that meet the USDA Nutrient Standards and vitamin D fortified orange juices are good options.
- ◆ **Calcium:** if dairy is eliminated, other calcium rich foods need to be eaten. Non-dairy beverages that meet the USDA Nutrient Standards is a good option, as are greens such as collard, bok choy, kale, mustard and turnip greens, fortified tofu or tempeh, navy beans.

Recipes Resources:

[Child Nutrition Recipe Box](#)
[USDA CACFP Recipes](#)
[Forward Food Recipes](#)
[Eatright Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#)
[The Lunch Box | Recipes](#)
[Protein Foundations Archives - Forward Food](#)

Menu Substitution Suggestions

- ◆ Schools or childcare facilities can use creditable non-dairy soy beverage with a signed parent request. Ripple, 8th Continent, Silk and West Soy are some brand examples of this type of beverage. Creditable beverages meet the standards found in 7 CFR 226.20(a) (10) and 7 CFR 226.20(g)(3). Please see [Nutrition Requirements for Fluid Milk and Fluid Milk Substitutions in the CACFP, Q&As](#) for more information. Always double check products as manufacturers may change product formulations.
- ◆ Flavored non-dairy soy beverages may be offered to children 6 years and older.

- ◆ Dairy yogurt (including Greek) may be used as a meat alternate, as well as a soy yogurt for those who don't consume dairy foods. CACFP has a sugar limit on yogurt of no more than 23 grams of sugar per 6 ounces.
- ◆ To replace meat, please see the section with popular vegetarian analogs.

Popular Vegetarian Analogs:

- ◆ According to the Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition, dried beans, peas, and legumes can be used as a meat/meat alternate item, as well as tofu and tempeh.
- ◆ Some Michigan-based grocery stores (Spartan Foods, Meijer), as well as other chains, such as Kroger, Costco, etc. also have options such as Beyond Burger patty meat, frozen options such as meatless popcorn chicken, and vegan hot dogs.
- ◆ Additional technical information on how to ensure alternative protein products credit from the [USDA](#).

Vegan Substitutions

Foods to be omitted	Substitute with	No substitution needed
Cow's milk	Soy milk	Cereal
Yogurt	Vegan yogurt	100% Juice
Lunches (all lunches contain meat, most contain dairy)	Vegan microwave meal	Fruit and vegetables
Cheese sticks	Nut butter	Ritz crackers
Baked goods	Vegan baked goods	Graham crackers

CN Labeled items

- ◆ Child Nutrition (CN) labeled products provide the meal equivalents and serving size so you know how much to serve to meet the meal pattern. More and more vegetarian items are becoming CN labeled.
- ◆ Examples of CN Labeled products (not an endorsement):
 - Impossible Burger Bulk, 60-00010, 4/5 lbs (16 oz = 11.09 oz eq MA)
 - Impossible Burger Patty, 60-00011, 10 lbs (4 oz = 2.75 oz eq MA)
 - Impossible Sausage Made From Plants, 60-00022, 10 lbs (1.6 oz = 0.5 oz eq meat alternate)

- MorningStar® Farms Spicy Black Bean Burger, 000-28989-49938-7, 48 count (2.9 oz = 2.25 oz eq meat alternate)
- MorningStar® Farms Veggie Breakfast Sausage Patties, 000-28989-97152-4, 112 count (1.34 oz = 1.0 oz eq meat alternate)
- MorningStar® Farms Sausage Style Crumbles, 000-28989-10230-0, 80 oz/2 ct (1.94 oz = 1.0 oz eq meat alternate)
- MorningStar® Farms Veggie Classics Chik'n Nugget, 000-28989-97762-5, 212 ct (4 0.75 oz = 1.75 oz eq meat alternate)
- Gardenburger® Hamburger Style Classic, 100-84059-71116-9, 48 ct (2.5 oz = 2.25 oz eq meat alternate)

WHAT ARE DIFFERENT BEANS THAT QUALIFY AS A MEAT ALTERNATE?

Black beans
Great Northern beans
Pea beans
Fresh soybeans
Baked beans

Black eyed peas
Kidney beans
Pink beans
Edamame
Refried beans

Garbanzo beans
Lima beans
Pinto beans
Soybeans
Dry peas

Chickpeas
Navy beans
Red beans
Lentils

Nuts and Seeds

- ◆ Serving size: 1 oz nuts or seeds = 1 oz meat alternate
- ◆ Nuts and seeds are generally not recommended to be served to children ages 1-3 since they present a choking hazard. If served, nuts and seeds should be finely minced.
- ◆ Nuts and seeds may be used to meet no more than one-half of the meat/meat alternate component to fulfill the lunch or supper requirement in Child Nutrition Programs.
- ◆ Beware of tree nut and peanut allergies.
- ◆ Tree nuts include almonds, Brazil nuts, cashew nuts, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, pecans, pine nuts, walnuts.
- ◆ Peanuts also contribute to meat/meat alternate component.
- ◆ Creditable seeds include pumpkin, squash, sesame, and sunflower.

Other Tips and Suggestions:

- ◆ Provide a variety of fruit and vegetables with good sources of vitamins and minerals, especially the key nutrients mentioned above.
- ◆ Avoid processed "high protein" foods. Avoid highly processed foods that market themselves as vegan and high in important nutrients. Fresh food sources can easily supply necessary protein.
- ◆ Intake of sweets and fatty foods should be minimum.
- ◆ If a diet incorporates milk, keep it low-fat or fat-free.

Food Sources:

Protein:

- ◆ Dried Beans, peas, and legumes
- ◆ Tofu (commercially prepared)
- ◆ Meat analogs
- ◆ Nuts and nut butters
- ◆ Cheese, cottage cheese, and yogurt (non-vegan)
- ◆ Eggs (non-vegan)
- ◆ Grains (cannot count towards meat/meat alternate serving)

Vitamin D:

- ◆ Fortified foods: milk, non-dairy beverages, orange juice, cereals, etc.
- ◆ Eggs
- ◆ Skin exposure

Iron:

- ◆ Whole grains
- ◆ Dried fruits
- ◆ Fortified cereals
- ◆ Beans
- ◆ Green leafy vegetables

(Including vitamin C foods like tomatoes, oranges, or strawberries, can also increase iron absorption)

Vitamin B-12:

- ◆ Fortified soymilk
- ◆ Nutritional yeast
- ◆ Eggs
- ◆ Dairy products
- ◆ Fortified ready to eat cereals

Sample Breakfast Menu for Vegan/Vegetarian Meals

	Vegan Breakfast	CACFP Ages 1-2	CACFP Ages 3-5	School Breakfast 9-12
Monday	Whole Grain (WG) Cheerios, fresh apricots, soy milk, tofu scramble	4 fluid ounces whole soy milk (Unflavored), ¼ cup apricots, ½ cup ready to eat WG Cheerios, ¼ cup tofu scramble	6 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (unflavored), ½ cup apricots, ½ cup ready to eat WG Cheerios, ¼ cup tofu scramble	8 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (flavored or unflavored), 1 cup apricots, 1 cup ready to eat WG Cheerios, ¼ cup tofu scramble
Tuesday	Soy yogurt, WG breakfast muffin, fresh strawberries, soy milk	4 fluid ounces whole soy milk (unflavored), ¼ cup strawberries, ½ cup soy yogurt, ½ WG breakfast muffin	6 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (unflavored), ½ cup strawberries, ¾ cup soy yogurt, ½ WG breakfast muffin	8 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (flavored or unflavored), 1 cup strawberries, 1 cup soy yogurt, 1 WG breakfast muffin
Wednesday	Whole grain bread, vegan peanut butter, apple sauce, soy milk	4 fluid ounces whole soy milk (unflavored), ¼ cup apple sauce, ½ slice WG bread, 1 tbsp peanut butter	6 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (unflavored), ½ cup apple sauce, ½ slice WG bread, 2 tbsp peanut butter	8 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (flavored or unflavored), 1 cup apple sauce, 1 slice WG bread, 2 tbsp peanut butter
Thursday	Oatmeal, diced peaches, soy milk	4 fluid ounces whole soy milk (unflavored), ¼ cup peaches, ¼ cup oatmeal	6 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (unflavored), ½ cup peaches, ¼ cup oatmeal	8 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (flavored or unflavored), 1 cup peaches, ½ cup oatmeal
Friday	WG Kix cereal, pineapple tidbits, soy milk	4 fluid ounces whole soy milk (unflavored), ¼ cup pineapple, ¾ cup WG Kix cereal (ready to eat)	6 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (unflavored), ½ cup pineapple, ¾ cup WG Kix cereal (ready to eat)	8 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (flavored or unflavored), 1 cup pineapple, 1 ¼ cup WG Kix cereal (ready to eat) +1 cup yogurt for HS kids.

Sample Lunch Menu for Vegan/Vegetarian Meals

	Vegan Lunches	CACFP Ages 1-2	CACFP Ages 3-5	School Lunch 9-12
Monday	*Black Beans with plantains, soy milk, apple sauce	4 fluid ounces whole soy milk (unflavored), 1/8 cup apple sauce, 1/2 cup black bean mixture	6 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (unflavored), 1/4 cup apple sauce, 1/2 cup black bean mixture	8 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (flavored or unflavored), 1 cup apple sauce, 10 ounces black bean mixture, (offer additional grain and vegetables in lunch line)
Tuesday	Tabouli with tofu, soy milk, banana, roasted broccoli	4 fluid ounces whole soy milk (unflavored), 1/4 cup tabouli, 1/4 cup tofu, 1/8 cup banana, 1/8 cup broccoli	6 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (unflavored), 1/4 cup banana, 1/4 cup tabouli, 1/4 cup tofu, 1/4 cup broccoli	8 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (flavored or unflavored), 1/2 cup tabouli, 1/2 cup tofu, 1 cup banana, 1 cup broccoli
Wednesday	Vegan mac and cheese with vegan chik'n pieces, watermelon cubes, steamed green beans, soy milk	4 fluid ounces whole soy milk (unflavored), 1/4 cup vegan mac, 1oz vegan chik'n, 1/8 cup watermelon, 1/8 cup green beans	6 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (unflavored), 1/4 cup vegan mac, 1oz vegan chik'n, 1/4 cup watermelon, 1/4 cup green beans	8 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (flavored or unflavored), 1 cup vegan mac, 2 oz vegan chik'n, 1 cup watermelon, 1 cup green beans
Thursday	*Enchilada chili bowl with rice, tropical fruit, soy milk	4 fluid ounces whole soy milk (unflavored), 1/4 cup rice topped with 3/4 cup chili, 1/8 cup tropical fruit	6 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (unflavored), 1/4 cup rice topped with 1 cup chili, 1/4 cup tropical fruit	8 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (flavored or unflavored), 1/2 cup rice topped with 1 3/4 cup chili, 1 cup tropical fruit
Friday	WG Spaghetti with lentil marinara, strawberries, seasoned corn, soy milk	4 fluid ounces whole soy milk (unflavored), 1/4 cup WG pasta, 1/4 cup marinara, 1/4 cup lentils, 1/8 cup strawberries, 1/8 cup corn	6 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (unflavored), 1/4 cup WG pasta, 1/4 cup marinara, 3/8 cup lentils, 1/4 cup strawberries, 1/4 cup corn	8 fluid ounces low-fat soy milk (flavored or unflavored), 1 cup WG pasta, 1 cup marinara, 3/4 cup lentils, 1 cup strawberries, 1 cup corn

***Monday:** Black Beans with plantains offer a meat/meat alternate, a vegetable, and a grain [Monday Recipe](#)

[Tuesday Recipe](#)

***Thursday:** chili bowl provides grain, meat/meat alternate, and vegetable per serving [Thursday Recipe](#)

Links Used in This Document:

https://theicn.org/cnr/recipes-cacfp-centers/?tx_category=recipes-for-centers-vegetarian&page_id=113315

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/standardized-recipes-cacfp>

<https://www.forwardfood.org/recipes/>

<https://www.eatright.org/>

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/nutrition-requirements-fluid-milk-and-fluid-milk-substitutions-cacfp-gas>

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/questions-and-answers-alternate-protein-products>

<https://theicn.org/cnr/recipes-for-centers-vegetables/black-beans-with-plantains-usda-recipe-for-cacfp/>

<https://www.forwardfood.org/terrific-tabouli/>

<https://www.forwardfood.org/enchilada-chili-bowl/>