

So Your Kid's Going Veggie...

More and more children are deciding to follow a vegetarian diet. If you're worried that your child might not be getting the nutrients they need, check out our top dietary tips

If your child is thinking of joining the 1.5m people who've gone vegetarian in the UK over the last decade, you might be a little worried. As a new survey shows, more than half of parents think a veggie diet could spell nutritional problems for kids. In fact, it can provide all the nutrition anyone needs and research shows that its low fat / high fibre bias means it's actually healthier in many ways than a meaty one. There's lots of information and advice for parents of veggie kids, some of which is featured below. It can help make the switch to a veggie diet easier for them, and take the pressure off of you when it comes to cooking.

The survey published to coincide with National Vegetarian Week reveals that while some parents think kids may go veggie because of peer pressure or just to be awkward, most think they do so out of genuine concern for animals and the planet. Who could argue with that? You can support their heartfelt decision by first ensuring they get their fill of the essential nutrient groups:

- **PROTEIN:** It's in nuts, seeds, pulses, grains / cereals, dairy products like milk and cheese, free range eggs, and soya products including tofu, tempeh, veggie burgers and soya milk.
- **CARBOHYDRATES:** Complex, 'healthy' carbs are found in cereals / grains (bread, rice, pasta, oats, barley, millet, buckwheat, rye) and some root vegetables, such as potatoes and parsnips.
- **FIBRE:** Found in unrefined or wholegrain cereals, fruit (fresh and dried) and vegetables.
- **OILS AND FATS:** Use vegetable oils, which tend to be unsaturated and therefore better for a healthy heart. Mono-unsaturated fats, such as olive oil or peanut oil, are best used for frying.
- **VITAMINS:** Fruit and veg are famously rich in vitamins. Examples include Vitamin C in leafy green veg and potatoes and Vitamin A in red or orange vegetables like carrots and tomatoes.
- **MINERALS:** Essentials such as Calcium, Iron and Zinc are found in dairy produce, leafy green veg, nuts, seeds, dried fruits, cheese, sesame and pumpkin seeds, lentils and wholegrain cereals.

Going veggie means a lot more than just taking the pepperoni off your pizza. By boning up on the pointers above (and others like them), you'll ensure that your child's diet is genuinely healthy, not merely meat-free. We should probably mention 'delicious' too! If you want to dig deeper, The Vegetarian Society offers many resources for parents and kids who are interested in a vegetarian lifestyle, including free recipe booklets and nutritional advice. To find out more, just click on the link below.

Jamie Johnson, the Youth Education Officer at The Vegetarian Society says: "As a parent, the last thing I want is any more stress at meal-times, but I'm sure that you'll find supporting your budding veggie child can be an easy and healthy option. Not only do veggies have absolutely no problem getting their 5-a-day they also enjoy a good pizza, curry, chilli, burger, stew or stir fry as part of a well-balanced diet just like the rest of the population!"

For more information visit www.vegsoc.org