

Is A Vegetarian Diet Safe For My Infant?

If, for dietary or ethical reasons, you have decided that you want to put your infant on a vegetarian diet, you should be very careful in choosing formulas and solid food for your child.

If you plan to breastfeed the infant and you are also a vegetarian, you may need to supplement breastmilk with additional sources of nutrition, depending on your dietary restrictions. If you are a vegan, or an ovo-vegetarian, you should add sources of vitamin B-12 to your child's diet.

Other than the B-12 supplements, your infant should be able to receive all micro and macronutrients through breastfeeding, even if you are on a strictly vegan diet.

If you plan to use formula rather than breastmilk, you should stick to commercial formulas, which contain the proper amounts and ratios of nutrients. If you opt for a homemade formula or soymilk over a commercial product, your child could experience developmental problems from a lack of proper nutrition.

If you want to keep your infant on a vegan diet, you can select a soy commercial formula, as long as it is nutritionally-adequate.

After about a year, you can begin to supplement formula or breastmilk with other sources of nutrition, such as homemade formulas, soymilk, yogurt, and cow's milk (if you are not a vegan).

Nutritionists suggest that you keep your infant on a full-fat, high protein diet after age one, which includes vegetarian-friendly foods, such as mashed and pureed avocados, soy milk, nutrient-fortified tofu, and yogurt.

When you are ready to switch your infant to solid vegetarian foods, you can introduce solid tofu, pieces of vegetarian burgers, eggs, and cheese.

If you supplement what a nonvegetarian diet lacks, maintain a full-fat diet, and increase your infant's sources of protein, you should have no problem maintaining a healthful vegetarian diet during your child's crucial developmental stages.