

Menu planning for vegetarian and vegan diets

Early childhood services



The information presented in this resource is intended as a guide only. Cooks preparing food at a long day care centre should speak with a child's parents or carers about specific dietary requirements and customs.



What does a vegetarian or vegan diet look like

There are different types of vegetarian diets, which all prioritise foods that come from plants.

A vegetarian diet will also limit or exclude foods from animals.

People choose to follow a vegetarian diet for a range of reasons including religious, ethical, and environmental considerations.

Providing food and drinks to children requiring vegetarian or vegan meals

This fact sheet is for cooks and chefs working in children's education and care.

For more information about preparing and serving food for children who require a vegetarian or vegan diet, complete the Healthy Eating Advisory Service course [Managing allergies and other dietary requirements in children's education and care](#).

You will find a micro-module specific to managing [other dietary requirements and preferences](#), including kosher and halal, within this course

VEGETARIAN

Vegetarian diets exclude one or more of the following foods derived from animals.

- Meat
- Poultry
- Fish and other seafood
- Eggs
- Dairy foods

VEGAN

A vegan diet is the most restrictive and excludes all animal products, including dairy foods and eggs.

Planning meals for vegetarian and vegan diets.

Replacing animal products on your menu

Many foods that are excluded in vegetarian or vegan diets contain important nutrients needed for a child's growth and development.

Below is a list of suggested protein replacements to use for children who are vegetarian or vegan. Remember to check with the child's parents or carers which foods they cannot have.



Children who follow a vegan or vegetarian diet must be provided with suitable alternatives to ensure they receive enough nutrition.

Type of vegetarian diet	Suggested replacement
Vegetarian – no red meat, chicken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fish, salmon, tuna • Eggs • Tofu • Tempeh • Textured vegetable protein • Lentils • Chickpeas, hummus • Legumes – kidney beans, butter beans, cannellini beans
Vegetarian – no red meat, chicken, fish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eggs • Tofu • Tempeh • Textured vegetable protein • Lentils • Chickpeas, hummus • Legumes – kidney beans, butter beans, cannellini beans
Vegetarian – no red meat, chicken, fish, or eggs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tofu • Tempeh • Textured vegetable protein • Lentils • Chickpeas, hummus • Legumes – kidney beans, butter beans, cannellini beans
Vegan – no red meat, chicken, fish, eggs, or dairy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tofu • Tempeh • Textured vegetable protein • Lentils • Chickpeas, hummus • Legumes – kidney beans, butter beans, cannellini beans • Plant based milk, such as soy milk - calcium fortified • Plant based yoghurt, such as soy yoghurt - calcium fortified



When choosing a plant-based milk, or yoghurt, alternative, it's important to pick one with similar nutrition to cow's milk. Calcium fortified soy milk has similar nutrition to cow's milk.

How to change recipes

The following examples demonstrate how common recipes can be changed for children requiring a vegetarian or vegan meal.

Remember to always check for other food allergies, intolerances, and dietary requirements when replacing ingredients.

The recipes and suggested modifications are intended as a guide only. It is important to check with the child's parents or carers which foods are appropriate to serve.

When a separate meal is required, remember to make meals for children with allergies look like meal served to the rest of the children. This way, children with allergies will feel included at mealtimes.



It is important not to remove or exclude animal and animal products for children who are not following a vegetarian or vegan diet.

RECIPE	SUGGESTED MODIFICATION	SUGGESTED RECIPE
Chicken Curry	For vegetarian, follow the one recipe, using two pots, then: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> make one pot with tofu or chickpeas, and for a non-vegetarian option, make another pot with chicken or other meat. 	<u>Lubya – Afghan Kidney Bean Curry</u>
Spaghetti Bolognese	For vegetarian, follow the one recipe, using two pots, then: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> make one pot with kidney beans and lentils/ chickpeas or textured vegetable protein (TVP), and for a non-vegetarian option make another pot with beef and/or pork mince. 	<u>Vegetarian Lentil Bolognese</u> (vegetarian) <u>Vegan Lentil Bolognese</u> (vegan)
Chilli con carne	For a vegetarian, follow the one recipe, using two pots, then: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> make one pot with kidney beans and lentils/ chickpeas or textured vegetable protein (TVP), and for a non-vegetarian option make another pot with beef and/or pork mince. 	<u>Vegetarian chilli con carne</u> (vegetarian)
Pork fried rice	For vegetarian, follow the one recipe, then: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> prepare and cook all ingredients, except the pork serve the number of portions required for those who are vegetarian or vegan for the children who cannot have pork, use tofu as a protein replacement, then prepare the pork last, for the children who can eat it. 	<u>Vegetarian Fried Rice</u> (vegetarian) <u>Vegan Biryani</u> (vegan)
Beef lasagne	Prepare a separate lasagne for the children who are vegetarian or vegan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> replace mince with brown lentils include plenty of vegetables freeze leftover portions, labelled, in the freezer 	<u>Vegetarian lasagne</u> (vegetarian)
Meatballs	Swap meatballs for a vegetarian alternative all the children will love <ul style="list-style-type: none"> made with chickpeas and herbs replace egg with egg replacer for a vegan alternative 	<u>Falafel balls with tzatziki dip</u> (vegetarian)



TIP:

For more recipe ideas, visit the Healthy Eating Advisory Service [recipe](#) collection.

Additional tips

Split the meal	<p>To avoid making 2 separate meals, use a base recipe that can be used for both children who are vegetarian/ vegan, and children who are not.</p> <p>For example, Bolognese can be split between 2 pots: mince in one, and lentils in the other</p>
Add the dairy last	<p>If your recipe needs cheese or yoghurt, such as grated cheese on pasta or Greek yoghurt on a curry, add this last for the children who can have dairy.</p> <p>For children who are vegan and can't have dairy, use soy Greek yoghurt as an alternative.</p>



More helpful resources and information

For more information about preparing and serving food for children who require a vegetarian or vegan diet, see the Healthy Eating Advisory Service course [Managing allergies and other dietary requirements in children’s education and care](#).

You will find a micro-module specific to managing [other dietary requirements](#), including vegan and vegetarian, within this course.

Further information and support

Healthy Eating Advisory Service:

- Early childhood services
- Recipes
- Menu planning guidelines for long day care
- Online module: [other dietary requirements and preferences](#)



We’re here to support you

Visit our website:

heas.health.vic.gov.au

📞 1300 225 288

✉ heas@nutritionaustralia.org.au

Written and reviewed by dietitians and nutritionists at National Nutrition Foundation with support from the Victorian Government.

To receive this document in an accessible format
phone 1300 22 52 88 or email heas@nnf.org.au

