

# Plant-Based Kids: 4-8 Years

Evidence-based advice from Amanda Benham, vegan paediatric dietitian with over 25 years experience

## Age 4-8 years:

- By now children will be in a routine with eating three meals and two snacks per day and be happily eating family meals and behaving well at mealtimes. (If not, it is recommended that professional help be sought, from a dietitian experienced with plant-based nutrition.)
- Continue offering a range of foods from the plant food groups every day: Whole grains (e.g. oats, Weet Bix, brown rice, wholemeal bread, pasta), legumes and soy products (e.g. tofu, tempeh, lentils, chick peas, beans), green vegetables, other colourful vegetables, fresh fruit, nuts and seeds (or their pastes) and calcium-fortified plant milk.
- Keep offering iron-rich foods (e.g. legumes, soy products) with a source of vitamin C at every meal (e.g. fruit with breakfast and add raw tomato or lemon/lime juice to other meals).
- Include a calcium-fortified plant milk. E.g. with breakfast and with the morning and afternoon snack, aiming for about 1.5 to 2 cups per day in total. Avoid giving juices or soft drinks.
- Give your child the following supplements every day: Vitamin B12 (50+ mcg per day) and vitamin D (600-1500 IU) per day, especially on days when your child is not getting sun on bare arms or legs (1). Give 2 serves of omega-3 rich foods per day, where one serve = 1 tsp flaxseed oil, 3 tsp ground flaxseeds or 4 tsp chia seeds (1). Use iodised salt (app. 1/3 teaspoon per day) or consider supplementing with 75-90 mcg per day mcg iodine (1) per day.
- Suggested meal pattern for children's meals (which is also suitable for family meals):  
Breakfast: Cereal/grain + fruit + fortified soymilk + flax or chia seeds. Lunch: Grain (or potato) + legume/tofu/tempeh + green vegetables + other colourful vegetables + vitamin C source +/- high fat food (tahini, nut butter or avocado). Dinner: Same pattern as lunch. Offer a healthy am and pm snack, such as bread/crackers/rice cakes or raw vegetable sticks with nut butter/hummus, fruit, soy yoghurt, popcorn, nuts, seeds or a healthy homemade treat.
- Encourage your child to be physically active every day, as this is essential for good health.



## Tips to prevent and overcome "fussy eating":

- Keep offering a wide variety of healthy meals and snacks to your child, including foods that have been refused previously. (It can take 10 or more offerings before a child will eat a food). If your child refuses to eat at mealtime, don't stress or make a fuss. Just put their meal aside for them to have later when they are hungrier rather than offering an alternative meal. This helps them learn to eat family meals rather than expect something different.
- Remember that it is not the parents' job to "get food into" the child, but simply to offer it. Practise the ESI Division of Responsibility in Feeding (2), which states that the caregivers' role (not the child's) is to decide **what** food is offered, **where** it is offered and **when** it is offered. It is the child's job to decide whether they will eat and how much. Children will eat when hungry, but if they know they will be offered a preferred food if they refuse a meal, they will make use of this information. Offer your child 3 meals and 2 snacks per day and do not let them "graze", as this will make them less likely to eat their meals. Allow them unlimited access to water only at other times.
- Encourage your child to eat and try new foods but never try to coerce them. Avoid talking about their food likes and dislikes with them or in front of them. It is not the parents' job to find out what the child likes to eat; it is to help the child learn to enjoy a wide range of healthy foods. Model good eating habits and make mealtimes pleasant.

References: (1) Baroni L, Goggi S, Battaglini R, Berveglieri M, Fasan I, Filippin D, et al. Vegan Nutrition for Mothers and Children: Practical Tools for Healthcare Providers. *Nutrients*. 2018;11(1):5. <https://www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/11/1/5/htm>, accessed 1/1/19.

(2) Satter E. Elynn Satter's Division of Responsibility in Feeding. 2016 <https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/handout-dor-tasks-cap-2016.pdf>, accessed 1/1/19. (a useful resource for parents)

The information here is of general nature and is not intended to replace individualised dietary advice from an Accredited Practising Dietitian.  
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