

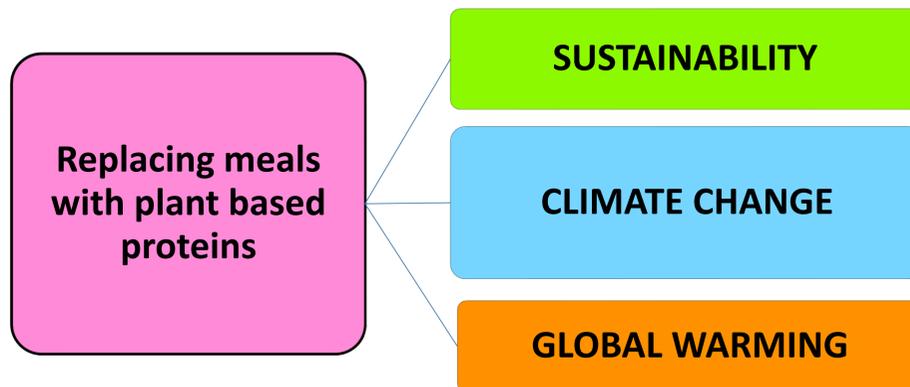
# Are there any risks associated with a vegetarian diet in children?

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## Introduction



**Parents Decisions**  
Will they grow up healthy and strong ??

Literature evidences that a **well-planned vegetarian diet can be a healthy way to eat, in any part of the life cycle, including children.**

Vegetarians do not consume any food that involves the killing of an animal such as meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, or even insects.

The majority of parents may wonder if kids can assume a vegetarian diet and still get all the nutrition they need to grow up healthy and strong. Literature evidences that a well-planned vegetarian diet can be a healthy way to eat, in any part of the life cycle, including children.

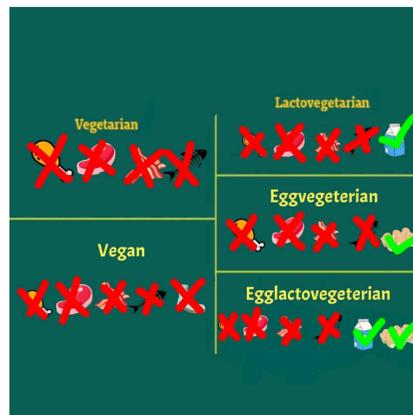


Figure 1. Different kinds of vegetarian diets

The production of vegetarian meals (Figure 1) using local and regional vegetables does not mean increased costs or the need to purchase new technical equipment or the use different cooking methods; it is possible to adapt traditional Portuguese dishes and transform them into vegetarian options, with controlled costs and adequate nutritional composition.



## THE VEGAN PLATE

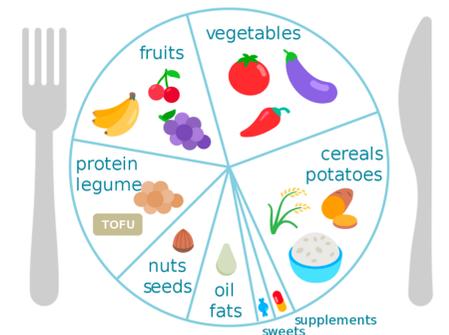


Figure 2. Composition of the vegan plate

Caregivers of children who practice a vegetarian diet should present particular attention to



Vit B12; proteins, Fe.



Vit D; Ca, Fe



Vit D, Ca, Fe, Zn



Vit B12, Vit D, proteins



In the first 6 months of life the main sources of protein and nutrients for infants are breast milk and formula (soy formula for vegan infants). Vitamin D recommendations are the same for vegetarian and non-vegetarian kids. The Guidelines for the introduction of solid foods are the same for vegetarian and non-vegetarian infants. After a child starts eating solids, protein-rich vegetarian foods can include tofu, soy yogurt, cottage cheese and legumes (such as beans, chickpeas, and lentils).

## Conclusions

The positive results accumulating for adults are encouraging for exploring the vegetarian meals for children. However, an interesting approach may be "flexitarianism" that consists in a plant-based diet, with small amounts of meat and dairy included. However, appropriate caloric intake should be ensured and monitored by parents, nutritionists and pediatricians, in order to screen for eating disorders.

## References

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