

## Vegan diets present challenges for kids

*Eat healthy, be physically active, make sure you and your children have clean hands and mask up with the right sized face covering.*

Q My daughter-in-law is visiting and asked us to provide them vegan food. Is it OK for me to feed the children a vegan diet? — G.G. Winterville.

A It takes planning to ensure infants, children and teens get the right nutrients for growth and development while following a vegan plan. The parents I work with think it's easier and safer to follow a vegetarian rather than vegan eating plan for their children.

It would be helpful to have a guide. One resource I like, written by colleagues of mine, Dr. Mark and Virginia Messina is "The Vegetarian Way: Total Health for You and Your Family." My go-to website for information and



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recipes is the Vegetarian Resource Group. It has resources for vegans, too. Jayati S. Vyas, a fourth-year Brody medical student has more information to share. Here is what she wants you to know.

Alternative diets have been embraced by some people for centuries, with vegetarianism and veganism being among the most popular approaches. Experts from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and the American Academy of Pediatrics acknowledge that a well-balanced vegetarian diet can provide for the needs of a growing child and an adolescent.

However, diets that vary from the mainstream omnivore way of eating may cause problems of malnutrition in children since they have some greater nutrient requirements than adults. Here are a few tips on

how to ensure your grandchildren get the right nutrition to grow and develop in a healthy way. If they are going vegan it would be important to have a visit with a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) to be sure your plan is adequate.

Let's start with some definitions. Broadly, vegetarians consume a plant-based diet and refrain from eating any animal flesh. People can be lacto-ovo-vegetarians meaning they include eggs, milk and dairy products and plant-based foods in their diet. Lacto-vegetarians don't eat eggs but use dairy products. Vegans refrain from eating all foods and drinks of animal origin.

Since dairy foods are a major source of important nutrients including protein, calcium, vitamin D and potassium for most children in the USA, it takes less effort to ensure a healthy diet if dairy is included. Planned well, however, adults and children following a vegetarian diet have healthier intakes of total fat, saturated fat, servings of vegetables and fruits, and lower intakes of fast foods, salt, sugary and fruit drinks than those who eat the traditional American diet.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans has meal planning advice for vegetarian toddlers 12-23 months and also for those over the age of 2 years ([www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dietary\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_Americans\\_2020-2025.pdf](http://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans_2020-2025.pdf)). The guidelines do not have a plan for vegans of any age. Dairy typically provides protein for children, but your grandchildren's protein needs, and concentrated sources of energy can be met with soy products, nuts and nut butters. Other plant food sources of protein include legumes like beans and lentils, and cereals.

High intake of dairy products and infant formula by lacto-vegetarians makes calcium and vitamin D and A deficiencies unlikely.

Vegans should ask their doctor if they need supplemental vitamins and minerals or if they get enough by consuming fortified soy products, cereals and juices. Be sure to read the Nutrition Facts labels on plant based "milks" like almond, oat, coconut, cashew or hemp — they are not all the same. Low-oxalate greens including Bok choy, Chinese cabbage, kale and collards provide highly bioavailable calcium for adolescents.

I can't cover all the nutritional needs of a vegan toddler, child, or teen in this column but a few other essential nutrients to plan for include iron, zinc, fat and fatty acids, and vitamin B12. For example, vegans need almost twice as much iron as omnivores. Options to help increase your grandchild's iron intake include iron-fortified cereals, grain products, dried beans, and peas.

We have seen children in our clinic, following a vegan diet, that often lacks the essential fatty acids including DHA and EPA, the long-chain omega-3 fatty acid important for many bodily functions and brain development. One way to meet at least part of the need is to incorporate sources of the precursor linolenic acid which is found in flaxseed, canola oils, walnuts, and soy products. They can then be converted to DHA and EPA.

Vitamin B12, a nutrient only found in animal products, is a concern. While vegetarians have less risk of a deficiency because they can get it from dairy products and eggs, strict vegans are at a higher risk of vitamin B12 deficiency. It is important to plan to get B12 through fortified foods like fortified soy formula and beverages, cereals, yeasts or dietary supplements. As we stated, depending on the age of your grandchildren, unless you have the time and knowledge to provide a vegan eating plan, we would advise providing a lacto-vegetarian foods and drinks.

## Use up last tomatoes in a year-round sauce

If you are like me and enjoy homemade tomato sauce year-round, this recipe is for you. It's a great way to use up any lingering tomatoes at the end of the season. If the season has already finished, you can still manage a decent sauce with your supermarket variety.

The key to developing the flavor is to slow-roast the tomatoes to coax out and concentrate their



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flavor — and don't hold back on the seasoning. If decent plum tomatoes are nowhere to be found, you can make the sauce with the ubiquitous grape

tomatoes readily found year-round in most shops.

This sauce gets an extra boost of flavor from a roasted red bell pepper, which adds smoky sweetness and a pleasing burst of color. Crushed red pepper flakes and black pepper add further dimension to the sauce with a nice kick. Be sure to taste the sauce for seasoning, then let it rest for a few moments to allow the flavors to meld before tasting again. Don't be bashful when it comes to the salt, and a spoonful of sugar will add any summer sweetness you may miss.

You will be pleased with the results: This no-nonsense, faux summer sauce is a bright and fresh condiment to splash on pasta, smear on pizza, or layer into baked dishes at any time of year. It can also be used as a sauce for meatballs or even as a base for a soup.

Note that if you substitute grape tomatoes for the plum tomatoes, you will not be able to remove their skins, which will yield a chunkier sauce. The sauce may be refrigerat-



LYNDA BALSLEV/TASTEFOOD

### Roasted tomato pepper sauce.

ed for up to four days.

### Roasted tomato pepper sauce

- Active time:** 15 minutes
- Total time:** 1 hour
- Yield:** Makes about 2 1/2 cups
- Ingredients:**
- 2 pounds ripe plum (Roma) tomatoes, halved lengthwise
- 1 large red bell pepper, stemmed and seeded, quartered
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt
- 1 small yellow onion, finely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- 1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, or to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- Pinch of sugar (optional)

**Steps:**  
Heat the oven to 400 degrees. Brush the tomatoes and pepper with oil and lightly season with salt. Arrange on a rimmed baking pan, cut sides down. Roast until the vegetables soften, begin to shrivel, and turn golden at the edges, about 45 minutes. Remove from the oven and let cool to the touch, then pull away the skins. Coarsely chop.

Heat 2 tablespoons oil in a skillet. Add the onion and saute until soft and translucent without coloring, 4 to 5 minutes. Stir in the garlic, oregano and red pepper flakes and saute until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the tomatoes and red bell pepper and cook, stirring, for a few minutes to meld the flavors.

Transfer to a food processor and pulse to blend to your desired consistency. Season with 1/2 teaspoon salt, or more to your taste, the black pepper and sugar if desired.

## Suicide: Let's talk about it

Pitt Partners for Health

Let's talk about suicide. After all, September is National Suicide Prevention Month. Oh, you don't think we should be talking about suicide? I see. It's not that common, you say. And you think talking about suicide will put that thought in someone's head.

Hmmm ... Let me tell you what I know about suicide that will change your mind.

It is hard to talk about suicide. It is sad, uncomfortable, disturbing, and scary. Yet, many of us know someone who died by suicide or attempted suicide — at least 50% of us. One suicide affects dozens of people: family, friends, co-workers and fellow students.

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP — <https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics>):

- Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. 47,511 Americans died by suicide in 2019.

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death in ages 10-24.

- On the average, there are 130 suicides per day in the U.S.

Oh, it's not that bad in North Carolina, you say. Think about this information provided by AFSP (<https://aws-fetch.s3.amazonaws.com/state-fact-sheets/2021/2021-state-fact-sheets-north-carolina.pdf>):

- Suicide is the 12th, leading cause of death in North Carolina.
- For ages 10-24, it is the third leading cause of death.
- For ages 25-34, it is the second leading cause of death.
- For ages 35-44, it is the fourth leading cause of death.

So you understand why we need to talk about suicide? Good, now you need to know some of the warning signs that someone is thinking about suicide:

- Talking about wanting

### WEB RESOURCES

Web Resources on Suicide and Suicide Prevention

#### BeThe1To

[www.bethe1to.com/bethe-1to-steps-evidence/](http://www.bethe1to.com/bethe-1to-steps-evidence/)

Know the Signs

[www.suicideispreventable.org/](http://www.suicideispreventable.org/)

New Directions Behavioral Health

[www.ndbh.com/Docs/Suicide/YoungPeopleSuicide.pdf](http://www.ndbh.com/Docs/Suicide/YoungPeopleSuicide.pdf)

NAMI (National Organization on Mental Illness)

[www.nami.org/get-involved/awareness-events/suicide-prevention-awareness-month](http://www.nami.org/get-involved/awareness-events/suicide-prevention-awareness-month)

Mental Health America

<https://mhanational.org/tags/suicide-prevention>

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

<https://aws-fetch.s3.amazonaws.com/state-fact-sheets/2021/2021-state-fact-sheets-north-carolina.pdf>

Center for Disease Control

[www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sos-map/suicide-mortality/suicide.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sos-map/suicide-mortality/suicide.htm)

National Day Calendar - National Suicide Awareness Month

<https://nationaldaycalendar.com/national-suicide-awareness-month-september/>

to die

- Ongoing guilt or shame
- Feeling like a burden to others

- Feeling empty, hopeless, trapped, with no reason to live
- Feeling extremely sad, agitated, full of rage or more anxious

- Displaying unbearable emotional or physical pain
- Displaying unusual changes in eating or sleeping

- Using alcohol or drugs more often
- Displaying extreme mood swings

- Engaging in dangerous or risky behaviors
- Making a plan to die or researching ways to die

- Withdrawing from friends and family
- Giving away important items

- Saying goodbye to loved ones

You ask "How can I help someone when I see these warning signs? Is he/she really thinking about suicide?"

The National Institute of Mental Health has some answers for you. The first and most important step is to ask.

Ask: Ask the person, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" This does not lead to an increase in suicide but has been shown to decrease suicide. Remember: Do not ever promise to keep

thoughts of suicide secret.

Be there: Listen carefully. Accept the person's feelings. Research suggests that talking about suicide may reduce suicidal thoughts.

Keep them safe: Reduce access to lethal items or places. This step is really about showing support for someone during the times when he/she has thoughts of suicide. You put time and distance between the person and the chosen method. Do not leave the person alone.

Help them connect: Help the person connect with someone he or she trusts. It might be a family member, friend, spiritual advisor, or mental health professional. Have the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline phone number with you to offer: 1-800-273-8255.

Stay connected: Follow up and stay in touch after a crisis.

You want to know more about these steps? Go to "BeThe1To" website: [www.bethe1to.com/bethe-1to-steps-evidence/](http://www.bethe1to.com/bethe-1to-steps-evidence/).

Pitt Partners for Health (PPH) is a community health improvement partnership with representatives from local churches, businesses, communities, the hospital, health depart-



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