

Vegan Children: Happy and Healthy

Most people have been taught that children must eat animal flesh and dairy products to grow up strong and healthy. The truth is that children raised as vegans, who consume no animal products, including meat, eggs, and dairy, can derive all the nutrients essential for optimum growth from plant-based sources. Children not only don't need animal products, they're much better off without them.

Consider this: Many children raised on the "traditional" American diet of cholesterol- and saturated fat-laden hamburgers, hot dogs, and pizza are already showing symptoms of heart disease -- the number one killer of adults -- by the time they reach first grade. One epidemiological study found significant levels of cholesterol and fat in the arteries of most children under the age of five.(1) Children raised as vegans can be protected from this condition. They are less likely to suffer from childhood illnesses such as asthma, iron-deficiency anemia, and diabetes and will be less prone to ear infections and colic.(2)

A vegan diet has other benefits, too. E. coli, the deadly bacteria that killed four children and sickened more than 600 people in Washington state in 1993, was traced to tainted meat in a fast food restaurant. According to the Centers for Disease Control, there are more than 20,000 E. coli infections from meat every year in the United States (3). A vegan diet protects children from the pesticides, hormones, and antibiotics that are fed to animals in huge amounts and concentrate in animals' fatty tissue and milk.(4)

Nutrition in Vegan Diets

Nutritionists and physicians have learned that plant products are good sources of protein, iron, calcium, and vitamin D because they can be easily absorbed by the body and don't contain artery-clogging fat.

- Protein--Contrary to popular opinion, the real concern about protein is that we will feed our children too much, not too little. Nutritional biochemist Dr. T. Colin Campbell, author of the ground-breaking China Study, has shown that excess animal protein actually promotes the growth of tumors--and most people on a meat-based diet consume three to 10 times more protein than their bodies need!(5)

Children can get all the protein their bodies need from whole grains in the form of oats, brown rice, and pasta; from nuts and seeds, including spreads such as tahini and peanut butter; and legumes, including tofu, lentils, and beans.(6)

- Iron--Few parents know that some babies' intestines bleed after drinking cow's milk. This increases their risk of developing iron-deficiency anemia since the blood they're losing contains iron.(7) Breast-fed infants under the age of one year get sufficient iron from mother's milk (and are less prone to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). Formula-fed babies should be fed a soy-based formula with added iron to minimize the risk of intestinal bleeding. Iron-rich foods such as raisins, almonds, dried apricots, blackstrap molasses and fortified grain cereals will meet the needs of toddlers and children 12 months and older. Vitamin C helps the

Vegan Children

body absorb iron, so foods rich in both, such as green, leafy vegetables are particularly valuable.(8)

- Calcium--Drinking cow's milk is one of the least effective ways to strengthen bones. Too much protein, such as the animal protein fed to children in dairy products, actually causes the body to lose calcium.(9) In countries where calcium intake is low but where protein intake is also very low, osteoporosis is almost non-existent.(10)

Cornbread, broccoli, kale, tofu, dried figs, tahini, great northern beans, and fortified orange juice and soy milk are all excellent sources of calcium. As with iron, vitamin C will help your child's system absorb calcium efficiently. (11)

- Vitamin D--This is not really a "vitamin" but a hormone our bodies manufacture when our skin is exposed to sunlight. Cow's milk does not naturally contain vitamin D; it's added later. Vitamin D-enriched soy milk provides this nutrient without the added animal fat. A child who spends as little as 15 minutes a day playing in the sunshine, with arms and face exposed, will get sufficient vitamin D.(12)
- Vitamin B-12--This essential vitamin once occurred naturally on the surfaces of potatoes, beets, and other root vegetables, but the move away from natural fertilizers has caused it to disappear from our soil. Any commercially available multivitamin will assure adequate B-12 for your child. B-12 is also found in nutritional yeast (not to be confused with brewer's or active dry yeast) and many fortified cereals. (13)

Dangers of Dairy Products

Children do not need dairy products to grow up strong and healthy. The director of pediatrics at Johns Hopkins University, Dr. Frank Oski, says, "There's no reason to drink cow's milk at any time. It was designed for calves, it was not designed for humans, and we should all stop drinking it today, this afternoon."(14) Dr. Benjamin Spock agrees that although milk is the ideal food for baby cows, it can be dangerous for human infants: "I want to pass the word to parents that cow's milk . . . has definite faults for some babies. It causes allergies, indigestion, and contributes to some cases of childhood diabetes."(15)

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that infants under one year of age not be fed whole cow's milk. Dairy products are the leading cause of food allergies. In addition, more than two-thirds of Native Americans and people from Asian and Mexican ancestry and as many as 15 percent of Caucasians are lactose intolerant and suffer symptoms such as bloating, gas, cramps, vomiting, headaches, rashes, or asthma.(16) Many people become lactose intolerant after age four. For these people, animal proteins seep into the immune system and can result in chronic runny noses, sore throats, hoarseness, bronchitis, and recurring ear infections.(17)

Milk is suspected of triggering juvenile diabetes, a disease that causes blindness and other serious effects.(18) Some children's bodies see cow's milk protein as a foreign substance and produce high levels of antibodies to fend off this "invader." These

Vegan Children

antibodies also destroy the cells which produce insulin in the pancreas, leading to diabetes.

An estimated 20 percent of U.S. dairy cows are infected with leukemia viruses that are resistant to killing by pasteurization.(19) These viruses have been found in supermarket supplies of milk and dairy products. It may not be merely coincidence that the highest rates of leukemia are found in children ages 3-13, who consume the most dairy products.(20)

Resources

- *Pregnancy, Children, and the Vegan Diet* by Michael Klaper, M.D. (Gentle World, Inc., P.O. Box U, Paia, Maui, HI 96779, 1994)
- *The Vegetarian Mother and Baby Book* by Ross Elliot (Pantheon Books, 1986)
- *Vegetarian Baby* (McBooks Press, 1984) and *Vegetarian Children* (McBooks Press, 1987) by Sharon Yntema
- *The Compassionate Cook* by PETA and Ingrid Newkirk (Warner, 1993)
- *Vegetarian Times* magazine (4 High Ridge Park, Stamford, CT 06905)
- *Vegetarian Journal* (P.O. Box 1463, Baltimore, MD 21204)
- Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), 5100 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Suite 404, Washington, DC 20015; 202-686-2210
- La Leche League, 1-800-LA LECHE

References

1. Akman, D., et al. "Heart Disease in a Total Population of Children: The Bogalusa Heart Study," *Southern Medical Journal*, Oct. 1982, 75(10), pp. 1177-81, and G.S. Berenson, et al., "Cardiovascular Risk Factors in Children. Should They Concern the Pediatrician?" *American Journal of Diseases of Children*, Sep. 1982, 136(9), pp. 855-62.
2. Klaper, Michael, M.D., *Pregnancy, Children, and the Vegan Diet*, 1994 edition, pp. 2-3, 36, and Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, news release: "Top Doctors Warn: Milk Can Cause Health Problems," September 29, 1992.
3. "A Disease That's a Bite Away," *Washington Post*, February 13, 1994.
4. Klaper, Michael, M.D., *Pregnancy, Children, and the Vegan Diet*, 1994 edition, p. 2.
5. "Want Long Life? Lay Off Meat," *Tucson Citizen*, October 4, 1991.
6. Klaper, op.cit., pp. 12-14.
7. "Doctor Spock Adds Clout to Warnings About Cow's Milk," *Wall Street Journal*, September 30, 1992.
8. Klaper, op.cit., pp. 17-18.
9. Ibid., pp. 15-16.
10. "Don't Believe Everything Dairy Industry Tells You," *San Luis Obispo Telegram-Tribune*, February 10, 1993.
11. Klaper, op.cit., pp. 15-16.
12. Klaper, ibid., p. 58.
13. Klaper, ibid.
14. "Dr. Spock Joins Milk's Detractors," *Washington Post*, September 30, 1992.

Vegan Children

15. Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, news release: "Top Doctors Warn: Milk Can Cause Health Problems," September 29, 1992.
16. "Don't Believe Everything Dairy Industry Tells You," op. cit.
17. Ibid.
18. "Don't Drink Milk?," *Washington Post*, February 9, 1993.
19. Klaper, op.cit., p. 42.
20. "Vegan From the Cradle: A Medical Doctor Explains Why an Animal-Free Diet for Babies Is His First Choice," *Vegetarian Times*, Sept. 1987.