

VEGAN CHILDREN: HEALTHY AND HAPPY

Children raised as vegans, who consume no animal products, including meat, eggs, and dairy products, 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.

Hot Wings, Heart Disease, and Sick Stomachs

Many children raised on the "traditional" American diet of cholesterol and saturated fat-laden chicken nuggets, hot dogs, and pepperoni pizza are already showing symptoms of heart disease, the number one killer of adults. A study in *The New England Journal of Medicine* found that at least 60 percent of children and young adults have early atherosclerotic (hardened artery) damage.¹ It's no wonder, considering that hot dogs, sausage, and bacon are on the daily menu for a stunning 25 percent of kids between the ages of 19 months and 2 years.²

The number of obese adolescents has tripled since 1990.³ Pediatricians are reporting an alarming increase in the number of children diagnosed with type 2 diabetes (a typically adult disease), and 85 percent of those cases involve overweight kids.⁴

According to the late Dr. Benjamin Spock, in the latest edition of his book *Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care*, "Children who grow up getting their nutrition from plant foods rather than meats ... are less likely to develop weight problems, diabetes, high blood pressure, and some forms of cancer."⁵

Food-related illnesses strike more than 75 million people annually and kill more than 5,000.⁶ Farmed animals are fed 20 million pounds of antibiotics a year, which are designed to promote growth and prevent them from getting sick but which also are retained in the flesh that people eat. Scientists believe that such involuntary consumption of these drugs by meat-eaters is giving rise to strains of bacteria against which antibiotics are ineffective when consumers become ill.⁷

Salmonella poisoning alone affects at least 40,000 people every year (the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suspects that unreported cases may increase that number 30 times), yet only one in 16 million

chickens is tested for it.^{8,9} A *Consumer Reports* study of supermarket chickens found that 49 percent were contaminated with salmonella or campylobacter (which causes illness in millions of people every year) or both, and 90 percent of the campylobacter bacteria were resistant to antibiotics.^{10,11} Eggs pose a salmonella threat to about one out of every 50 people each year in affected areas of the U.S.¹² *E. coli* is a type of bacteria that can be deadly to children and sickens more than 73,000 people every year, and the USDA reports that probably half of the cattle slaughtered for food are infected with it.^{13,14}

Fish flesh is not health food, either. Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), residual industrial compounds that can still be found in the environment, have caused cancer in animals and skin problems and liver damage in humans.¹⁵ Fish flesh has been found to harbor levels of PCBs thousands of times higher than those in the water in which they live.¹⁶ Fish also accumulate methylmercury in their bodies, and pregnant women and children have been cautioned not to eat fish that may contain high levels of this toxic substance.¹⁷

Dangers of Dairy Products

Children do not need dairy products in order to grow up strong and healthy. The former director of pediatrics at Johns Hopkins University, Dr. Frank Oski, says, "There is no reason to drink cow's milk at any time in your life. It was designed for calves, it was not designed for humans, and we should all stop drinking it today, this afternoon."¹⁸ Dr. Benjamin Spock agreed, saying, "[T]here was a time when cow's milk was considered very desirable. But research, along with clinical experience, has forced doctors and nutritionists to rethink this recommendation."¹⁹

Cow's milk is the number one cause of food allergies in infants and children, according to the American Gastroenterological Association.²⁰ Millions of Americans are lactose-intolerant, and an estimated 90 percent of Asian-Americans and 75 percent of Native and African-Americans suffer from the condition, which can include symptoms such as bloating, gas, cramps, vomiting, headaches,

rashes, or asthma.²¹ As early as 2 years of age, most people begin to produce less lactase, the enzyme that helps with the digestion of milk. This reduction can lead to lactose intolerance.²² Breast-feeding mothers should shun cow's milk from their diets, too, as the proteins can be transferred to the infant and upset the baby's intestines.²³

Milk is suspected of triggering juvenile diabetes, a disease that causes blindness and other serious health problems.²⁴ Some children's bodies treat cow's milk protein as a foreign substance and produce high levels of antibodies to fend off this "invader." These antibodies also destroy the cells that produce insulin in the pancreas, leading to diabetes. Studies have also found that autism and schizophrenia in children may be linked to the body's inability to digest the milk protein casein; symptoms of these diseases diminished or disappeared in 80 percent of the children who were switched to milk-free diets.²⁵

Other common childhood ailments such as chronic ear infections, asthma, and skin conditions can be eliminated, too, if cow's milk is avoided.²⁶

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. The American Dietetic Association states, "Well-planned vegan ... diets are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including during pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence."²⁷

•**Protein**—Consumption of too much protein is a much bigger issue than not getting enough. Protein deficiency is common only in countries suffering from famine. Eating too much protein, however, can lead to cancers of the colon and liver.^{28,29} Children can get all the protein that their bodies need from whole grains in the form of oats, brown rice, and pasta; from nuts and seeds, including sunflower seeds, almonds, walnuts, and spreads such as tahini; and from legumes, including tofu, lentils, beans, and peanut butter.

•**Iron**—Some babies' intestines bleed after drinking cow's milk, increasing their risk of developing iron-deficiency anemia since the blood that they're losing contains iron.³⁰ 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 body absorb iron, so foods rich in both, such as green, leafy vegetables, are particularly valuable.³¹

•**Calcium**—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.

•**Vitamin D**—Cow's milk does not naturally contain vitamin D; it's added later. Vitamin D-enriched soy milk provides this nutrient without the animal fat. A child who spends as little as 10 to 15 minutes three times a week playing in the sunshine, with arms and face exposed, will get sufficient vitamin D because it is synthesized in the skin when the skin is exposed to sunlight.³²

•**Vitamin B12**—Whereas other primates get their necessary vitamin B12 from feces, dirt, unchlorinated water, and insects, any commercially available multivitamin will ensure an adequate amount of the vitamin for your child.³³ Vitamin B12 is also found in fortified soy milk and many cereals.

Related Books

- *The Compassionate Cook* by PETA and Ingrid Newkirk (Warner, 1993)
- *Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care* by Benjamin Spock, M.D., and Steven J. Parker, M.D. (Pocket Books, 1998)
- *Pregnancy, Children, and the Vegan Diet* by Michael Klaper, M.D. (Gentle World, Inc., P.O. Box U, Paia, Maui, HI 96779, 1994)
- *Raising Vegetarian Children: A Guide to Good Health and Family Harmony* by Joanne Stepaniak, M.S.Ed., and Vesanto Melina, M.S., R.D. (McGraw-Hill, 2002)
- *Vegetarian Baby* (McBooks Press, 1984) and *Vegetarian Children* by Sharon Yntema (McBooks Press, 1987)
- *The Vegetarian Mother and Baby Book* by Rose Elliot (Pantheon Books, 1986)

Related Web Sites

- lalecheleague.org (La Leche League, 1-800-LA-LECHE)
- pcrm.org (Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, 202-686-2210)
- vegetariantimes.com (*Vegetarian Times* magazine, 804-346-1223 to fax a question)
- vrg.org/journal (*Vegetarian Journal*, 410-366-8343)

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²T.A. Badger, "Infants, Toddlers Developing Bad Eat-

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³Julie Deardorff, "Girth Control Is a Losing Battle for Americans," *The Virginian-Pilot*, 13 Jan. 2002.

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⁹Marian Burros, "Eating Well; A Vulnerable Food Supply, A Call for More Safety," *The New York Times*, 31 Oct. 2001.

¹⁰Sandra G. Boodman, "Poultry Peril: What Is Campylobacter and Why Is It the Leading Cause of Food Poisoning?" *The Washington Post*, 9 Dec. 1997.

¹¹"Food Safety. Tests. Of Birds and Bacteria," *Consumer Reports*, Jan. 2003.

¹²Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Salmonella Enteritidis," Division of Bacterial and Mycotic Diseases, 7 Mar. 2003.

¹³Philip Brasher, "Weekly Farm: Meat Industry Eyes Government Technology to Make Meat Safer," Associated Press, 26 Oct. 2001.

¹⁴Meat Trade Institute, "Deadly *E. Coli* Bug May Affect Half of Cattle," Meat Industry Internet News Service, 15 Nov. 1999.

¹⁵Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, "ToxFAQs for Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs)," 16 Sep. 2003 <<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts17.html>>.

¹⁶Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

¹⁷U.S. Food and Drug Administration, "Important Message for Pregnant Women and Women of Child-bearing Age Who May Become Pregnant About the Risks of Mercury in Fish," Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, Mar. 2001.

¹⁸"Dr. Spock Joins Milk's Detractors; Nutritional Value, Safety Are Questioned," *The Washington Post*, 30 Sep. 1992.

¹⁹Spock and Parker, 331.

²⁰American Gastroenterological Association, "American Gastroenterological Association Medical Position Statement: Guidelines for the Evaluation of Food Allergies," *Gastroenterology* 120 (2001): 1023-5.

²¹Courtney Taylor, "Got Milk (Intolerance)? Diverse Ethnic Groups Affected Most by Digestive Malady," *The Clarion-Ledger*, 1 Aug. 2003.

²²National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse, "Lactose Intolerance," National Institute of

Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, Mar. 2003.

²³Spock and Parker, 113.

²⁴"Study Explores Link Between Cow's Milk, Juvenile Diabetes," *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, 20 Sep. 2002.

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²⁶Spock and Parker, 332.

²⁷American Dietetic Association, "Position of the American Dietetic Association and Dietitians of Canada: Vegetarian Diets," *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, Jun. 2003.

²⁸Gary C. Curhan *et al.*, "A Prospective Study of Dietary Calcium and Other Nutrients and the Risk of Symptomatic Kidney Stones," *New England Journal of Medicine* 328 (1993): 833-8.

²⁹Kathleen M. Stadler, "The Diet and Cancer Connection," Virginia Tech, Nov. 1997.

³⁰University of Michigan Health System, "Cow's Milk: Pros and Cons," McKesson Health Solutions LLC, 2003 <http://www.med.umich.edu/llibr/pa/pa_milk_hhg.htm>.

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