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# PEDIATRIC VEGETARIAN DIETS ARE HEALTHFUL, NUTRITIONALLY ADEQUATE AND MAY PROVIDE HEALTH BENEFITS IN THE PREVENTION OF OBESITY

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**Pediatric Vegetarian Diets:** Well-planned vegetarian diets are appropriate for individuals during all stages of the lifecycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence.

**Vegetarian Diets in Perspective:** According to a nationwide polling in 2016, approximately 3.3% of American adults are vegetarians or vegan and about 46% of vegetarians are vegan. Plant-based diets are becoming well accepted. The American Institute for Cancer Research encourages a plant-based diet. The 2015–2020 dietary guidelines for Americans recommend a vegetarian approach for the National School Lunch Program. A vegetarian is a person who consumes all plant foods, does not eat animal foods, including fowl or seafood, or products containing animal foods. The eating patterns of vegetarians may vary considerably. There are basically three types of vegetarian diets. 1. The lacto-ovo-vegetarian eating pattern, the most common type is based on grains, vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts, seeds, dairy products, and eggs. 2. Lacto-vegetarian diet includes milk with plant foods but excludes any other food from animals, such as eggs. 3. Total vegetarian or plant based diet is made of grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds, excludes the use of all animal products. Vegan means no animal products excluding the wearing of leather products.

**Pediatric Vegetarian Diets:** There are many reasons for the rising interest in vegetarian diets. Health, economic, ecological, ethical or religious reasons are at the top five. Scientific research continues to document the health advantages of the vegetarian diet with lower risk of heart related diseases, obesity, and cancer. Many are starting their children on a vegetarian lifestyle for the major reason to maintain good health and to prevent diet related diseases. The number of vegetarians in the United States and Canada is expected to increase during the next decade. Food and nutrition professionals can assist vegetarian clients by providing current, accurate information to parents about vegetarian nutrition, diet and resources.

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