## Glenn's Strategies for Well-Being: Vegetarian Children

Written by Forward Times Staff Friday, 08 June 2012 19:42

With the poor quality of many of today's conventional meat products, a vegetarian diet just might be an appropriate fit for some modern children, one of three that are now overweight in the US.

A new study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition suggests that people of all ages, including children, that adhere to a vegetarian diet generally have lower average body mass indexes (BMI) than others, and are generally leaner than their meat-eating counterparts. The report explains that obesity is less prevalent among vegetarians, and that average BMI increases progressively higher depending on how much meat a person eats. Vegans, for instance, generally have the lowest BMI, while vegetarians that eat dairy and eggs have a slightly higher average BMI.

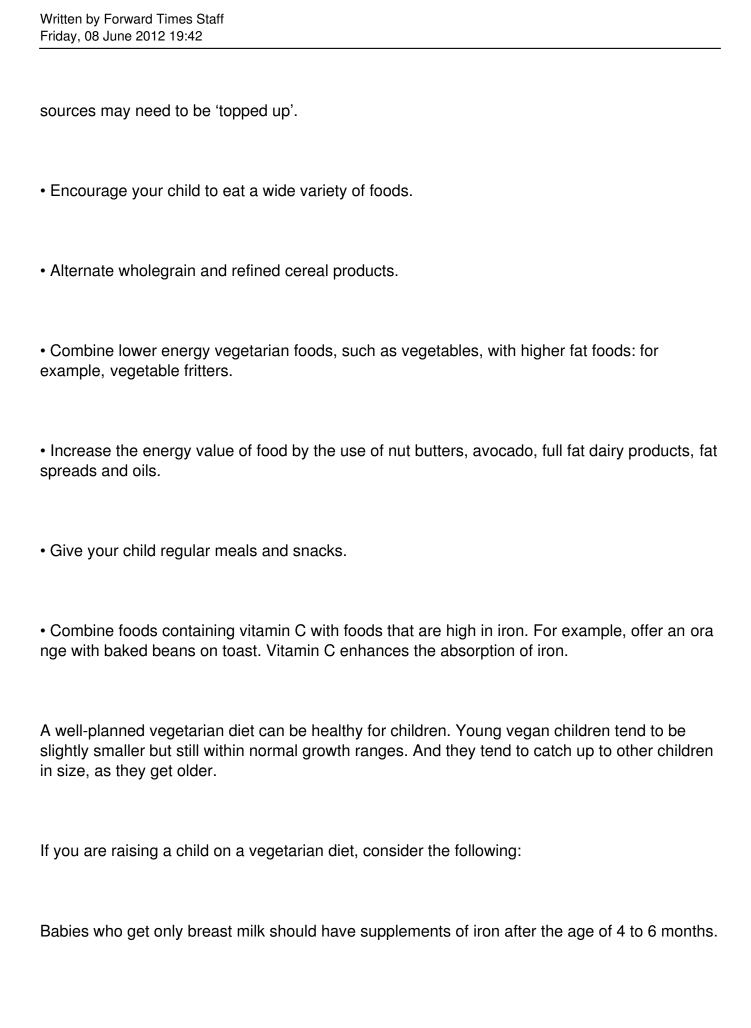
Meat eaters, suggest study authors, have the highest average BMI of all. Besides simply the visible weight benefits, adhering to a vegetarian diet may also improve lipid profile, say the authors, which means that a person is less likely to experience coronary heart disease. This means that vegetarians may have a lowered risk of developing high cholesterol, or having a heart attack or stroke.

Because a plant-based diet can contain far more nutrients, complex carbohydrates, fiber, and water, than a meat-based diet, it is more likely to promote lean body mass rather than added fat, says the team. The extra fiber found in plant-based diets also contributes to making a person feel "full" more quickly than a meat-based diet would, which results in less food being eaten. "Obesity represents a significant threat to the present and future health of children and leads to a wide range of physical and psychological consequences," write the study authors. "A plant based diet appears to be a sensible approach for the prevention of obesity in children."

For a family considering a change to a vegetarian diet, or for those who want to bring up a child on a vegetarian diet, it is important to:

• Understand what foods need to be substituted in the diet as energy, protein and vitamin

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(This is not necessary if you add iron-fortified infant cereal to the child's diet at this age.)

A vitamin D supplement may be appropriate for children under 1 year of age. Talk with your doctor about how much and what sources of vitamin D are right for your child.

Breast-fed babies of vegan mothers need vitamin B12 supplements if the mother's diet is not fortified.

Children younger than 2 years need the extra fat in whole milk for brain and nerve development.

Don't give them low-fat or fat-free milk. If you are using soy milk instead of cow's milk, make sure that it's full-fat soy milk, and talk to your doctor or a registered dietitian to make sure your child is getting enough fat.