



**For the week of
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Editor:

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Vegetarian teens might eat better

A few months ago, my 15-year-old son decided he wanted to follow a vegetarian diet. I've been skeptical about the wisdom of his choice. Should I be concerned?

Actually, a University of Minnesota study recently found that teenage vegetarians often have better diets than their meat-eating counterparts.

The study was published recently in the journal *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*. It included more than 4,500 teenagers, and about 6 percent were vegetarians.

The teenage vegetarians were more than twice as likely to meet the goal of getting less than 30 percent of daily calories from fat. They were three times as likely to get less than 10 percent of their calories from saturated fat. They were also more likely to eat at least two servings of fruit and three servings of vegetables a day.

The vegetarians also consumed more iron, vitamin A, folate and fiber, but it's important to note that neither group met recommendations for calcium. Teens need 1,300 milligrams of calcium a day. A cup of milk has about 300 milligrams of calcium. An ounce of cheddar

cheese has 200 milligrams. A cup of raw spinach or half-cup of cooked broccoli each have 30 milligrams. Calcium-fortified foods like orange juice, breads, cereals and breakfast bars also can help — check the labels. You might also consider encouraging him to take a supplement to make sure he gets enough calcium.

You didn't say what type of vegetarian your son is, but if he has sworn off all food from animals — if he's a vegan — you also should make sure he has found a reliable source of vitamin B-12, which is found naturally only in animal products. Fortified breakfast cereals and soy beverages can supply that.

In the meantime, if you're like most Americans, you might take a page from your son's book and increase the fruits and vegetables in the rest of the family's diet. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals, American adults still consume only about 4.5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day, and most children eat less than that — only 3.5 servings a day.

Chow Line is a service of The Ohio State University. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.