

Yes, I am going to raise my baby *vegan*

Helen Rossiter looks at the challenges and triumphs of raising a vegan baby, and shares her favourite recipes



As someone who hasn't eaten meat or dairy for the last five years, I'm used to batting off questions from others about why I choose to live the way I do. But when meat eating friends and family found out that I planned on sticking to veganism through pregnancy, childbirth and beyond, the conversations started to get noticeably more intense.

Suddenly, everyone was an expert on nutrition, and even complete strangers seemed to have a problem with what I put on my plate. Friends of friends, family members and health professionals would all ask the same questions, their voices heavy with judgement. "So, are you going to stay vegan?"

What follows is a summary of what I have learned so far as a vegan parent, including a couple of my favourite recipes for pregnancy and childbirth. I hope that I can help more people to have the confidence to "stay vegan"!

Journalist, food photographer, and vegan mother, Helen Rossiter hasn't eaten meat since she was 10 years old. Today, she is vegan and proud!

Proud to have given my baby the best start in life

We've all read bad reports about vegan parents in the media. Stories of malnutrition and neglect are common; very rarely are we offered the chance to read about healthy, happy, well-nourished vegan babies. Because that wouldn't be news, would it?

Vegan sceptics, I have news for you. My son lolo was born a thriving 9lb 5oz. I produced so much breast milk I could easily donate to a milk bank. Many people say he is living proof that vegan babies can be perfectly healthy – actually glowing. He's firmly in the top percentile for weight and height and is often complimented for looking incredibly happy and alert – even more so since we began weaning.

People's interest in our diet hasn't waned over the months; several parents continue to ask, "so, are you going to feed him meat?"

I find this question quite hard to believe at times. I simply cannot comprehend why anyone would want to feed their baby the flesh of a dead animal. Or milk from another species. The sad thing is, I know many people believe it's what children need to be healthy. I know this isn't true.



For more information about vegan nutrition for your baby, go to our website: vegansociety.com/lifestyle

Recipes

Nutrients, nutrients, nutrients. Are you getting enough?

During pregnancy, your daily nutrient requirements increase considerably. You need more: iron, folic acid, B12 and other B vitamins, vitamins A, C and D, plus extra protein and calcium. I made sure I ate around ten portions of fruit and vegetables a day, including lots of leafy green vegetables, whole grains, nuts, pulses, seeds, yeast extract, and fortified soya products. I also took Higher Nature's Mum-to-Be supplement and Floradix Liquid Iron Formula, to ensure all bases were covered. That way, when my midwife asked about what I ate, she was left in no doubt that a vegan diet provided everything I needed.

From six months onwards, babies can enjoy fruit and vegetable purées, enriched with a variety of vegan protein, calcium and good fat sources. These include: lentils, mashed beans, quinoa, tofu, tahini, yeast extract, finely milled nuts and seeds and fortified soya products like milk or plain soya yoghurt.



In a rush? Top tips for a quick dinner

Add quinoa to vegetables as they are cooking for a great source of protein. Almond butter on fingers of wholemeal bread makes a quick, calcium-packed snack. Cook polenta grain for just a minute on the hob with boiling water, then mix in readymade vegetable purée. Delicious and nutritious!

The foods I dreamed about while pregnant... and ate in abundance!

Kale with tahini and olive oil dressing, yeast extract on wholemeal bread, garlic mushrooms on toast, vegetable and chickpea curry with brown rice, and muesli with soya yoghurt, chopped fruit and mixed nuts.



How to Survive an Interrogation about What You Choose to Feed Your Child

1 Answer calmly

My first reaction was to be defensive, but I learned quickly that this was not the most effective way to win people over. Remember that if someone is questioning your choices, it's probably because they care deeply about you and the health of your baby.

2 Know your stuff

Arm yourself with as much information as possible about veganism and nutrition so that you can speak with confidence about your choices. Sandra Hood's *Feeding Your Vegan Infant with Confidence* and Rose Elliot's *Mother, Baby and Toddler Book* are both excellent resources.

3 Speak the truth

Throughout my life, I have felt healthy, satisfied, and energised. I enjoy the foods that I cook and eat immensely, and have never been more adventurous and creative with food. Most importantly, I understand how a well-planned vegan diet can provide all the nutrition anyone ever needs. Including my baby.

4 Stand your ground

As a child, I turned to my mother one day and said "I don't want to eat cows anymore." Now a mother myself, I know that I can't lie to my baby about what I believe to be right and wrong. Be in no doubt that your vegan diet is right for your baby, both pre- and post-natal. It's just about education, confidence... and holding your head high.

Tofu and Rocket Salad

Serves 2

For the salad

- ½ packet rocket and spinach salad, or other mixed leaves
- ½ block firm tofu (or about 120g), cubed
- 6 radishes, sliced
- 2 tomatoes, sliced
- 4 mushrooms, sliced
- ½ yellow pepper, sliced
- 4 tbsp sunflower seeds

For the dressing

- 1 tsp sweet chilli sauce
- 2 tbsp olive or linseed oil
- 1 tsp tamari or good quality soya sauce
- 1 tsp light tahini
- 1 tsp cider vinegar
- Sea salt and ground black pepper

Method

- 1 Mix all salad ingredients together in a serving bowl.
- 2 Make the dressing by placing all ingredients in a jug and beating together with a fork until smooth and the tahini is fully mixed.
- 3 Pour dressing over the salad and serve with hummous and wholemeal bread.



If you liked these recipes, you can find more on Helen's website: lotsofnicethings.com

Mixed Vegetable Mash

(suitable for babies ages 6 months+)

Serves 2

Ingredients

- 1 small carrot, peeled and cubed
- 1 small potato, peeled and cubed
- ½ parsnip, peeled and cubed
- 2 broccoli or cauliflower florets
- ¼ cup red lentils or quinoa
- ¼ tsp light tahini
- Splash of fortified plant milk (soya or coconut work best)

Method

- 1 Place all the ingredients except the tahini and milk in a medium-sized saucepan of cold water and bring to the boil.
- 2 Turn it down and simmer for 25-30 minutes, until everything is soft.
- 3 Drain, then return to the pan, add the tahini and then either whizz with a hand



- blender or mash with a potato masher, to reach the consistency your baby likes.
- 4 Add a splash of milk to make the mash creamier and add extra nutrition.
- 5 Dish a portion into a small bowl and serve warm. Store the remainder in an air-tight container in the fridge until the next mealtime.

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A wonderfully
creamy and
delicious fruit,
could you imagine
anything more
rejuvenating?

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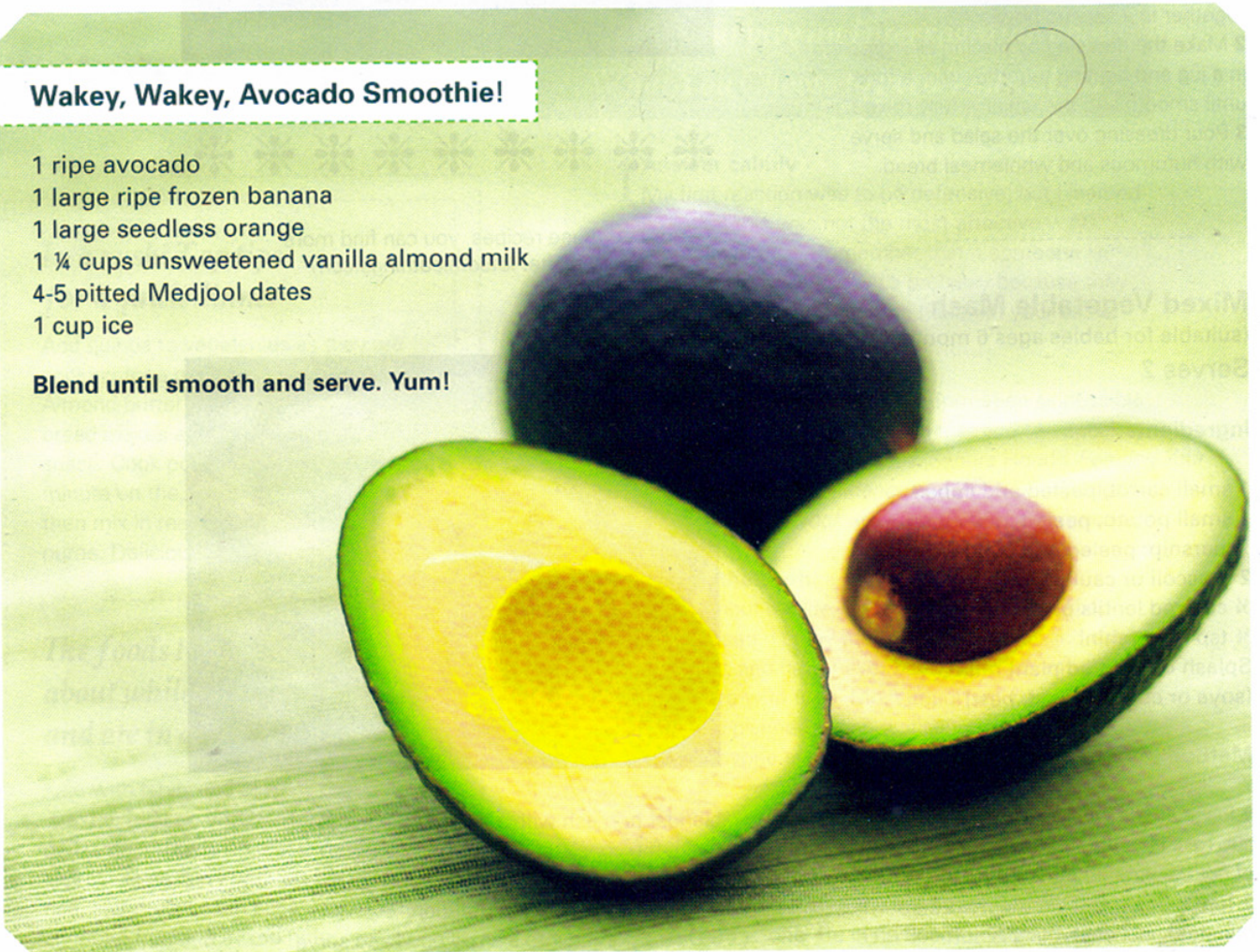
Ah, the avocado!

Avocados contain an abundance of 25 essential nutrients, including vitamins A, B, C, E and K, as well as copper, iron, phosphorus, magnesium, and potassium. They provide all 18 essential amino acids necessary for the body to form a complete protein, not to mention they have the highest protein content of any fruit. Avocados are rich in healthy fatty-acids, photochemicals, and fibre. Great for busy mums, they can reduce the signs of aging, regulate blood sugar, improve eye health, and even protect against heart disease.

Wakey, Wakey, Avocado Smoothie!

- 1 ripe avocado
- 1 large ripe frozen banana
- 1 large seedless orange
- 1 ¼ cups unsweetened vanilla almond milk
- 4-5 pitted Medjool dates
- 1 cup ice

Blend until smooth and serve. Yum!



Recipe by **Kamelia**, Certified Nutritionist and Lifestyle Coach, [facebook.com/VibrantLemonTree](https://www.facebook.com/VibrantLemonTree)