

# Current Diet Trends & Kids

By Amy Bentley



**Vanessa Chrisman, RD CLE**  
Clinical Pediatric Dietitian II

Vanessa Chrisman is a registered dietitian and certified lactation educator. She offers outpatient nutrition counseling for children of all ages at CHOC and many of its clinics. Vanessa offers an individualized nutrition assessment and diet education for kids with health issues including poor weight gain, obesity, food allergies, celiac disease, high cholesterol, kidney disease, ADHD, Down syndrome, autism, picky eaters, vegetarian nutrition and other medical diagnoses. She also teaches obesity nutrition classes.

Vanessa's philosophy of care: "My goals are to optimize the growth and development of my patients, as well as advocate lifelong health and wellness. I strive to provide individualized, evidence-based and culturally sensitive nutrition information that is relevant to the family as a whole. I treat every child like he or she is my own and I listen to parents so I may provide the best care possible. I hope I am making a difference in children's lives by promoting good nutrition and wellness from a young age."

#### EDUCATION:

Bachelor of Science degree in Nutrition from Southern Illinois University Carbondale; Dietetic Internship at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center

## VEGETARIAN DIET

A vegetarian diet excludes meat, poultry, fish, seafood and shellfish but includes eggs and dairy products. "It can be really healthy for children and teens. Vegetarian diets include a lot of healthy foods like fruit, veggies, whole grains and protein-rich foods like eggs, tofu, and dairy products. If your child is eating a variety of those foods, it can be very beneficial. On the other hand, if you have a picky eater, it can be a restrictive diet," says CHOC clinical pediatric dietitian Vanessa Chrisman. Vegetarian diets are associated with lower cholesterol and blood pressure levels, a lower risk of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, cancer and type 2 diabetes, and a lower obesity risk, she notes.

## VEGAN DIET

Vegans are vegetarians who do not eat dairy, eggs, gelatin or other animal products. "A vegan diet can be healthy for kids too but this is a diet that can be restrictive and parents should seek help from a registered dietitian to make sure their child is meeting their nutritional needs. Calcium and B12 are two micronutrients that can be low in a vegan diet. However, if you include soy milk or other non-dairy milks in the diet, most are enriched with



**1%** YOUTHS AGES 8-18 WHO IDENTIFIED AS VEGAN IN THE SAME POLL

calcium and vitamin B12. Calcium is really important for children in the development of strong bones and teeth," says Chrisman.

## PALEO AND GLUTEN-FREE DIETS

The Paleo diet is a newer diet trend that Chrisman says is less suited for children. "The paleo diet is a high-protein, high-fiber diet consisting of lean meat, fish, fruits, veggies, eggs and oil. It excludes grains, dairy, anything with sugar, salt, beans and other legumes. Supporters say it helps people lose weight. It's hard for kids to maintain their growth on this diet and get all the nutrients they need," she says. A gluten-free diet excludes wheat, barley and rye, and foods made from them. (Gluten is a protein found in those grains that some people may have an intolerance to.) "A gluten-free diet is safe for kids to follow, but if not medically necessary, there is no reason to follow it because it removes many healthy whole grain foods from the diet," says Chrisman.

**1-3 million Americans**

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF AMERICANS FOLLOWING THE PALEO DIET, OR ABOUT 1 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION



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**3%** YOUTHS AGES 8-18 WHO IDENTIFIED AS VEGETARIAN IN A 2012 POLL IN THE U.S. (THE VEGETARIAN RESOURCE GROUP)

