

[Return to Contents](#)

13. Pregnancy warning over vegan diets

Interstate Print

28/06/2021

Pregnancy warning over vegan diets

Plant-based trend has GPs concerned

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DOCTORS are warning pregnant women to consult their GP before embracing a vegan diet or risk complications to their health and that of their unborn child.

Veganism has never been more popular, with the plant-based diet even extending to infant formula.

Social sites such as the Instagram page @veganpregnancyandparenting promote vegan living as a "community for the 21st century" to their more than 26,000 followers.

Celebrities including Hollywood actors Natalie Portman and Alicia Silverstone have got on board, using their star power to promote the trend.

But doctors warn veganism complicates the body's ability to access essential nutrients needed to function properly.

Australian Medical Association vice-president Chris Moy urged all women to get an expert opinion first.

"What we can say is we highly recommend all women take advice and talk to their GPs throughout pregnancy to achieve the right balance of nutrition for their own health needs and the needs of their baby," he said.

"Veganism may add com-

plexity to dietary intake in regards to accessing certain nutrients and minerals, such as iron, which is another good reason to work carefully with your doctor."

The introduction of vegan baby formulas has also raised alarms, with the AMA advising parents to discuss their child's health needs and dietary requirements with their GP.

"The AMA does not endorse any commercial products and we have no specific position on veganism or any dietary preference," Mr Moy said.

"Infants should be breastfed or formula-fed for the first few months of life, until around six months. When the infant is ready, but not before four months, it is appropriate for parents to introduce complementary foods."

Gold Coast mum Jen Berdie followed a plant-based diet throughout her pregnancies without complication to her and sons Ellis, 6, and Kingston, 3.

"I have followed a plant-based diet during both my pregnancies as I had been plant-based several years before being pregnant with our first son Ellis, so this was quite nor-

mal," Ms Berdie, 37, said. "Both my boys are very healthy and happy kids."

Ms Berdie and her husband Selasi have worked with food technologists and scientists to create a new vegan baby formula.

The Sprout Organic formula range was launched on June 1 across Australia after achieving Food Standards Australia New Zealand compliance.

Mr Berdie, 35, said what sets the pair's formula apart is that the vast majority of formulas on the market are either dairy or soy-based, which are both common allergens among children, while theirs doesn't contain either.

"Breastfeeding is always the best option, yet breastfeeding is not always an available option or even a mum's preferred choice. Having different formulas on the market is all about choice," he said.

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists recommends pregnant women stick to a "balanced diet" that includes eating plenty of vegetables, fruit, grain foods, lean meat, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts and dairy products.

The organisation advises: "You can replace meat or ani-

mal products with lentils, beans, tofu and soy milk. Talk to your health professional about whether you need supplements to ensure you get the right nutrients for your baby's development."

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