

HEALTHY EATING for Young Children



Guidelines for Children 3 to 5 Years Old

Your children need meals and snacks that will give them enough energy to help them grow, learn, and be active.

MEAL PLANNING FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Good nutrition is important for your child's health. As a parent or caregiver, you play a big role in helping your child form healthy eating habits.

- Offer your child three meals and two snacks a day to help him or her grow, learn, and be active.
- Your child's daily diet should include foods from all the food groups.
- Offer foods with different colors, tastes, shapes, and textures.
- Include some new or disliked foods with old favorites.
- Refer to Kaiser Permanente's *Feeding Challenges* booklet if your child refuses to eat.

Fuel up from the start

Be sure to offer healthy meals to your child every day, especially breakfast.

Children who skip breakfast do not do as well in school as children who eat breakfast.

Young children need 11 to 13 hours of sleep a day to stay healthy and be able to learn and grow.



Model good choices

Forming healthy eating habits at an early age can prevent future health problems such as heart disease, obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure.

- Teach good eating habits by making eating fun and pleasant.
- Eat meals with your child when you can and be a role model.
- Let your child see you enjoying fruits, vegetables, and whole grains at meals and snacks.

Young children have small stomachs and get full easily. Serve food using smaller bowls, plates, and utensils. Small, easy-to-eat amounts make eating easier and more enjoyable.

BRING A “DEMOCRATIC” PARENTING STYLE TO THE TABLE

When it comes to feeding your child, how do you know when to set limits and when to give choices? The “Ps and Cs” that follow will give you some guidelines to get you started. (Some of them may surprise you!)

Parents plan, prepare, and provide

- Plan what, when, and where food will be served.
- Prepare healthy choices for meals and snacks.
- Provide a positive environment.
- Plan physical activity and set the rules for inactive behaviors, such as playing video games and watching TV, to no more than 1 hour a day.

Children choose whether, what, and how much to eat

- Choose whether or not to eat.
- Choose what to eat from a variety of healthy food choices.
- Choose how much to eat at scheduled meals and snack times.



HEALTHY HABITS

Young children are always trying to do more for themselves and do things their way. They may refuse to eat a certain food or refuse to eat at all. You may think your child is a picky eater. Don't worry. This is a normal part of growing up.

Check off the things you are willing to try to involve your child in meal planning.

- Let your child tear lettuce and salad greens.
- Let your child pick a vegetable or fruit for a snack or to serve with a meal.
- Ask your child to make guacamole using a potato masher on a peeled and pitted avocado in a bowl.
- Give your child a timer. Ask him or her to tell you when it's time to take a dish out of the oven.
- Have your child rinse fruits and vegetables.
- Let your child pick from healthy toppings for homemade pizza.
- Ask your child to set the table, wipe up after cleaning, or clear the table with some help from you.
- Children are great at sorting, dumping, and mixing ingredients.
- Make sure to tell others at the table what the "kitchen helper" did to make the meal!

ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT FEEDING YOUNG CHILDREN

What if my child only wants to eat one kind of food?

- This is normal at this age.
- Let your child eat the food he or she wants if it is a healthy food.
- Offer your child other foods, too.
- After a few days, your child will probably try other foods.

What if my child wants something other than what I serve?

- Try to have at least one food your child likes at each meal along with the other foods.
- Let your child help with meals. Children like to eat foods they helped to prepare.
- Offer two choices and let your child pick one.



What should I do if my child doesn't want to eat at all?

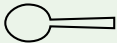
- Take the food away until the next meal or snack. Snacks and meals should be about every 2 to 3 hours.
- Make sure your child does not fill up on juice, sweet drinks, or milk between meals.

Should I worry if my child doesn't eat much or skips meals?

- Do not worry if your child sometimes skips a meal. He or she will make up for it at the next meal.
- Young children are smart eaters. They eat when they are hungry and stop when they are full.
- Remember, it is normal for children to eat less after the first year. They are not growing as fast.

WHAT'S IN YOUR DRINK?

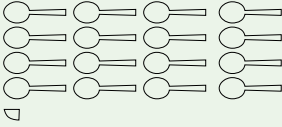
Sugary drinks are one of the main causes of weight gain and obesity.

 = 1 teaspoon of sugar



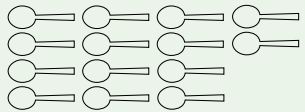
Cola

20 ounces =
240 calories
16¼ teaspoons of sugar



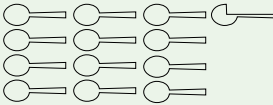
100% Orange Juice

16 ounces =
240 calories
14 teaspoons of sugar



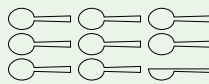
Fruit Juice Drink

16 ounces =
210 calories
12¾ teaspoons of sugar



Sports Drink

20 ounces =
130 calories
8½ teaspoons of sugar



WHAT YOUR CHILD SHOULD DRINK

Instead of sugary drinks, make healthier choices

- Make sure your child drinks plenty of water throughout the day, especially between meals and snacks.
- Choose zero-calorie flavored mineral water or essence water.
- Your child needs about 2 to 3 cups (16 to 24 ounces) of fat-free or 1% low-fat milk a day.
- Limit chocolate milk.
- Avoid 100% fruit juice. Choose whole fruit instead.
- Avoid punch, soda, juice drinks, sports drinks, smoothies, milk shakes, and other drinks with added sugar.
- Your child should drink from a cup, not a bottle.

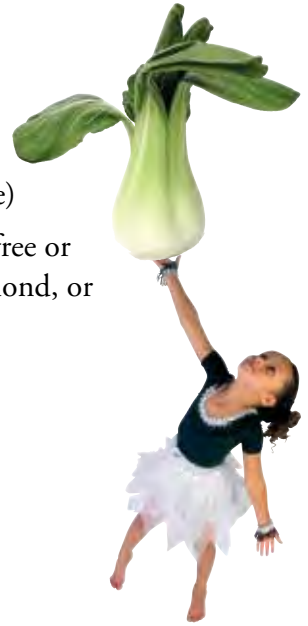
CALCIUM REQUIREMENTS

Age 3: 700 mg (four ½ cup servings of fat-free or 1% milk, yogurt, cheese, or unsweetened soy, almond, or other calcium-fortified milk substitute)

Ages 4 to 5: 1,000 mg (six ½ cup servings of fat-free or 1% milk, yogurt, cheese, or unsweetened soy, almond, or other calcium-fortified milk substitute)

You can also offer other foods rich in calcium:

- Tofu (calcium set)
- Roasted soybeans
- Broccoli, kale, bok choy, and collard greens



IF YOUR CHILD IS OVERWEIGHT

- Children should not be put on a diet. For many children, the goal is to maintain their weight as they grow.
- Provide three healthy meals and healthy snacks as needed.
- **Avoid extra calories from sodas, fruit drinks, sports drinks, and smoothies.**
- Avoid fried and overly sweetened foods.
- Choose foods from “Choose More Often” on the “Healthy Eating Food Guide.”
- Serve food using smaller plates, bowls, and glasses.
- Support your child’s self-esteem by accepting, praising, supporting, valuing, and listening to your child.
- Physical activity is very important. See the “Physical Activity” section.

SNACK TIME

Here are some healthy snacks you can try instead of chips, cheese puffs, nachos, french fries, cookies, or candy. **For 3-year-olds, avoid whole grapes, popcorn, and nuts to prevent choking.**

Check off what you are willing to try.

- Any fresh fruit or vegetable
- Apples with almond butter
- Blueberries and walnuts
- Carrot and celery sticks with hummus
- Carrot sticks with low-fat ranch dressing
- Celery sticks or whole-grain crackers with peanut butter and raisins
- Baked tortilla chips with salsa
- Cereal (low sugar) with fat-free milk
- Cottage cheese with pineapple
- Dried apricots
- Handful of nuts or trail mix
- Hardboiled egg with whole-grain toast
- Fruit blended with unsweetened vanilla almond milk
- Frozen bananas or grapes
- Pita bread (½) with tuna salad
- Plain Greek yogurt (fat-free or 1%) with berries
- Popcorn (air-popped or popped in a small amount of oil)
- Raw zucchini or jicama sticks with salsa
- Smoothie with banana, berries, nuts, spinach, and unsweetened almond milk
- Soup with whole-grain crackers
- String cheese with whole-grain crackers
- Turkey slice with whole-grain bread
- Whole-grain tortilla with bean dip
- Whole-grain tortilla with vegetables and hummus



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Help your child develop healthy habits

- Encourage your child to be active and play for at least 1 hour a day.
- Be a role model and be active as a family.
- Focus on fun activities and games that develop simple physical skills, such as running, skipping, swimming, tumbling, dancing, and throwing and catching a ball.
- Limit TV and screen time to no more than 1 hour a day.
- Do not put a TV in your child's bedroom.
- Turn off TVs, tablets, and phones during meals.
- Do not use TV, DVDs, computer games, or electronic baby games as a babysitter. Play with your child.



SAMPLE MENU

Breakfast

- 1/3 cup oatmeal
- 1/3 cup milk (1% or fat free) or unsweetened milk alternative
- 2 tablespoons raisins
- 1/2 cup milk (1% or fat free)

Morning Snack

- Whole-wheat crackers with nut butter
- Water

Lunch

- 1 slice whole-wheat bread (cut in half)
- 1 teaspoon mayonnaise
- Slice of tomato and lettuce
- 1 ounce roasted turkey

1/2 cup cooked broccoli

1 small apple, sliced

1/2 cup milk (1% or fat free)

Afternoon Snack

- 1/2 small mango
- 1/2 cup yogurt
- Water

Dinner

- 1/2 cup cooked brown rice
- 2 ounces chicken thigh
- 1/4 cup cooked carrots
- 1/2 cup milk (1% or fat free)

Evening Snack

- 1/2 pita bread
- 1/2 cup hummus

HEALTHY EATING FOOD GUIDE



Food Group: Nonstarchy Vegetables

(3 servings daily)

1 serving =

½ cup cooked

1 cup raw

Choose More Often

- broccoli
- carrots
- cauliflower
- celery
- green beans
- peppers
- salad
- snap peas
- spinach
- tomatoes
- zucchini

Choose Less Often

- vegetables with butter, cheese, or cream sauce
- deep-fried vegetables



Food Group: Fruits

(2 servings daily)

1 serving =

1 small piece

½ cup fresh cut, canned, or frozen

1 cup berries or melon

¼ cup dried fruits

Choose More Often

- apples
- bananas
- blueberries
- cantaloupe
- grapes
- oranges
- pears
- strawberries
- watermelon
- dried apricots
- raisins
- canned fruit in its own juice

Choose Less Often

- smoothies with juice and added sugar
- canned fruit in syrup
- dried fruit with sugar added
- juice





Food Group: Grains and Starchy Vegetables

(6 servings daily)

1 serving =

1 slice bread

½ English muffin, bagel, or bun

¾ cup cold cereal

½ cup cooked cereal

½ cup rice or noodles

½ cup starchy vegetables

1 small tortilla

6 small crackers

Choose More Often

- whole-grain: breads, pita, lavash, tortillas, bagels, English muffins
- unsweetened, whole-grain hot and cold cereals
- whole-grain crackers
- whole-wheat noodles
- brown or wild rice
- corn
- peas
- yams
- sweet potatoes
- quinoa
- amaranth
- farro

Choose Less Often

- biscuits
- croissants
- muffins
- granola
- cereals with added sugar
- white-flour tortillas
- white rice
- ramen-type noodles
- toaster pastries
- crackers (cheese, buttery, etc.)
- french fries
- hash browns
- potato tots



Food Group: Milk, Yogurt, Cheese

(4 to 6 servings daily)

1 serving =

1 ounce cheese

½ cup (4 ounces) milk or yogurt

Choose More Often

- 1% low-fat or fat-free milk
- 1% low-fat or fat-free yogurt without added sugar
- calcium-fortified, unsweetened almond, soy, or other milk alternative
- low-fat cheese
- string cheese

Choose Less Often

- cream
- whole milk
- 2% reduced-fat milk
- whole-milk yogurt with added sugar
- milk shakes
- regular cheese
- processed cheese spreads or processed cheese food



**Food Group:
Meat, Poultry,
Fish, Beans,
Nuts**

(2–4 ounces/servings daily)

1 serving =

1 ounce meat

1 egg

2 tablespoons nut butter

½ cup beans, peas, lentils, tofu, or hummus

Choose More Often

- fresh fish
- light tuna packed in water
- chicken and turkey without skin
- eggs
- old-fashioned peanut butter
- nut butters
- beans
- peas
- lentils
- tofu and soy-bean products
- hummus
- lean lunch meats

Choose Less Often

- high-fat meats
- hot dogs
- hamburgers
- lunch meats
- bologna
- fried meats, chicken, or fish
- spareribs
- corned beef
- pastrami
- sausage
- bacon



**Food Group:
Fats and
Oils**

(1 to 3 servings daily)

1 serving =

1 teaspoon oil, margarine, butter, or mayonnaise

1 tablespoon salad dressing or cream cheese

2 tablespoons avocado, nuts, or nut butter

1½ tablespoons seeds

Choose More Often

- olive or canola oil
- mayonnaise
- salad dressing
- nuts and nut butters
- seeds (chia, flax)
- avocado

Choose Less Often

- butter
- margarine
- lard
- bacon fat
- cream cheese
- sour cream
- vegetable shortening



Food Group: Fast Food

(limit to 1 or
2 times a week)

Choose More Often

- salad
- baked potato
- small roast beef, turkey, or chicken sandwich
- small hamburger
- cheese or vegetable pizza
- brown rice and veggie bowl
- bean and brown rice burrito
- water

Choose Less Often

- french fries
- chili cheese fries
- onion rings
- cheeseburger
- large hamburger
- hot dogs
- croissant or biscuit sandwich
- fried chicken or fish
- fried tacos
- pepperoni or other meat pizza
- sugary drinks
- super-sized portions



