

Nutrition Tips for
Ages 2-5



Healthy Eating for Your Young Child



How can I raise a healthy preschooler?

Starting healthy eating habits early can help kids prefer nutritious foods. Serve foods from all five food groups and fewer foods high in added sugar or salt. Your child will be less likely to gain too much weight, get diabetes or heart disease.



Tips for family eating:

- Make time for breakfast, lunch and dinner every day.
- Offer everyone the same foods to choose from.
- Think of meals and snacks as enjoyable times to relax at the table together and talk.



Encourage activity and play throughout the day.



Provide sleep and nap time for a total of 11-13 hours a day.



Limit screen time to less than one hour a day.

More tips for raising healthy preschoolers.

You are your child's best teacher.



Learn more about how to role model good choices:

HealthyEating.org/Healthy-Kids

How can I help my child make healthy choices?

Young children often refuse new foods. This is normal and common.



Your job:



Set regular **TIMES** for when to eat.



Set an **EXAMPLE** by eating the same foods as your child at the table.



SERVE foods from all 5 food groups.

Your child's job:



Choose **WHAT** to eat or not eat.



Choose **HOW MUCH** to eat.



Leave the dinnertime struggles behind.



Learn more about this new way of feeding:

HealthyEating.org/Preschool

How much food should I offer every

How many servings each day?*

What counts as one serving?

Dairy

Milk, Yogurt, Cheese

Age 2: **4 servings**

Age 3: **4 servings**

Ages 4–5: **5 servings**

½ cup fat-free or 1% milk
4 ounces yogurt
1 string cheese
1 cup cottage cheese
¾ ounce cheese

Vegetables

Age 2: **2 servings**

Age 3: **2 servings**

Ages 4–5: **3 servings**

1 cup leafy greens
1 small pepper
6 baby carrots
½ cup vegetables like broccoli, corn
⅕ medium avocado

Fruits

Age 2: **2 servings**

Age 3: **2 servings**

Ages 4–5: **2 servings**

½ medium banana
1 small orange or apple
½ cup berries, mango, cantaloupe
16 grapes (cut in half to prevent choking)
¼ cup raisins or other dried fruit

Grains

Breads, Cereals, Pasta

Age 2: **4 servings**

Age 3: **4 servings**

Ages 4–5: **4 servings**

1 slice bread
1 cup dry cereal
½ cup cooked oatmeal, rice, pasta
1 small tortilla (6 inches across)
6 small crackers

Protein

Meat, Beans, Nuts

Age 2: **4 servings**

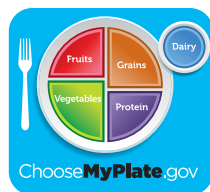
Age 3: **4 servings**

Ages 4–5: **4 servings**

2 tablespoons meat, chicken, turkey, fish
4 tablespoons cooked beans, tofu
1 egg
1 tablespoon peanut butter

* Based on 1,200 calories. Your child may need more or less depending on size and activity level.

day?



What small changes can I make each day?

- Offer yogurt or cheese at snack time.
- Offer children with lactose intolerance small amounts of milk at meals.
- Drinking milk now may help children reach full height potential in the future.



Offer fat-free or 1% milk + dairy foods every day.

- Let your child see you eating vegetables.
- Try vegetables raw with a dip or cooked with butter for flavor.
- Have kids help prepare vegetables for snack time.



Eat many different colors every day.

- Offer fruit more often than fruit juice.
- Slice fruit so it is easier to eat.
- Fruit is nature's candy. Serve it for dessert.



Eat more fresh, frozen and canned fruits in their own juices.

- Switch to whole grains. Look for 100% whole wheat on the label.
- Keep your child busy with toys rather than dry cereals or crackers.



Make at least half your grains whole grain.

- Remove skin and fat that you can see on meat or poultry.
- Change it up and offer beans, fish and nuts sometimes in place of meats. These foods have healthy fats.



Choose lean meats and poultry, beans, peas, nuts and seeds.

What if my child is a picky eater?

Young children often seem like they are being picky eaters. This is normal because they are trying to do more for themselves.

Tips for picky eaters



Introduce one new food at a time without pressure to eat.



Put a serving dish on the table of foods you want to encourage.

Give everyone an empty plate and offer very small portions.



Serve familiar foods like bread, fruit and milk at meals and snack time so you know there is something your child can eat.



Keep offering what you eat.

By seeing you enjoy foods, your child is more likely to try them.

What beverages should I provide for my child?



Serve water between meals so your child stays hydrated.



Limit 100% juice to ½ cup (4 ounces) a day. Serve fruit rather than juice most of the time. Keep a fruit bowl on your kitchen counter.



Avoid offering sugar-sweetened beverages like sports drinks, soft drinks or fruit-flavored drinks. They provide extra sugar and lack good nutrition.

Serve ½ cup of milk at meals and snack time. It's a natural source of protein that keeps you and your child fuller, for longer.

Milk's 9 essential nutrients provide balanced nutrition for your child.

Under one year:
Breastfeed (preferred) or serve iron-fortified formula.

1–2 years old:
Serve whole milk needed for brain development.

Over 2 years old:
Serve low-fat (1%) or fat-free milk.



½ cup = 4 ounces

Need ideas to make quick, balanced meals for good nutrition?



No-cook rainbow meal

Dairy: Cheese

Vegetables: Carrots and lettuce

Fruits: Blueberries

Grains: Whole grain bread

Protein: Nuts and turkey



Colorful vegetables and pasta

Dairy: Plain yogurt dressing

Vegetables: Peas and carrots

Grains: Pasta

Protein: Chicken



Meat, veggie and cheese burritos

Dairy: Cheese

Vegetables: Lettuce and tomato

Grains: Tortilla

Protein: Ground beef or beans

Children have small stomachs and are growing rapidly, so they need to eat often.

Planning meals and snacks can make it easier to provide balanced nutrition from all 5 food groups every day.

This program aligns with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. It is one of many nutrition education resources offered by Dairy Council of California for students and adults to improve eating habits. For more information and additional resources, visit [HealthyEating.org](https://www.healthyeating.org).

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