

Healthy Eating Tips for Young Children

Be Sure to Give Child-Size Servings. Children 2 to 3 years of age need the same variety of foods as 4 to 6 year-olds, but may need fewer calories. Use the charts on the back of this page to determine how much your toddler or school-age child needs.

Be Patient. Young children may not be interested in trying new foods. Offer a new food more than once. Show cautious children how the other children enjoy the new food. The food may be accepted when it becomes more familiar to children.

Be a Planner. Most young children need a snack or two in addition to three regular daily meals.

1. Offer foods from three or more of the five major food groups for breakfast and lunch.
2. Offer foods from four or more of the five major food groups for the “main meal.”
3. Plan snacks so they are not served too close to mealtime, and offer foods from two or more of the five major food groups.

Be a Good Role Model. What you do can mean more than what you say. Children learn about how and what to eat from you.

1. Eat meals as a family whenever possible.
2. Try new foods and new ways of preparing them with the children.
3. Both you and your children can be healthier by eating more dark green leafy vegetables, deep yellow vegetables, fruits and whole grain foods.
4. Walk, run and play with the children; don't just sit on the sidelines. A family that is physically active together has lots of fun!

Be adventurous. Take a field trip to the grocery store or farmers' market. Ask the children to choose a new vegetable or fruit, from two or three choices, for a weekly “try-a-new-food” day. Let the children help you wash and prepare the food.

Be creative. Encourage children to invent a new snack or sandwich from three or four healthful ingredients you provide. Try a new bread or whole grain cracker. Talk about what food groups the new snack includes and why it tastes good. Is the snack smooth, crunchy, sweet, juicy, chewy or colorful?

HOW MUCH Do Kids Need to Eat Every Day?

Look at the chart below and determine the approximate number of calories your child needs each day.

Boys		Girls	
Age	Calories	Age	Calories
2	1,000-1,400	2	1,000-1,400
3	1,000-1,400	3	1,000-1,400
4	1,200-1,600	4	1,200-1,400
5	1,200-1,600	5	1,200-1,600
6	1,400-1,800	6	1,200-1,600
7	1,400-1,800	7	1,200-1,800
8	1,400-2,000	8	1,400-1,800
9	1,600-2,000	9	1,600-1,800
10	1,600-2,200	10	1,600-2,000
11	1,800-2,200	11	1,600-2,000

Refer to the chart below to see the daily amount needed from each food group, for each calorie level.

Daily Amount of Food From Each Group						
Calorie Level	1,200	1,400	1,600	1,800	2,000	2,200
Fruits	1 cup	1½ cups	1½ cups	1½ cups	2 cups	2 cups
Vegetables	1½ cups	1½ cups	2 cups	2½ cups	2½ cups	3 cups
Grains	4 oz.-eq.*	5 oz.-eq.*	5 oz.-eq.*	6 oz.-eq.*	6 oz.-eq.*	7 oz.-eq.*
Meat and Beans	3 oz.-eq.*	4 oz.-eq.*	5 oz.-eq.*	5 oz.-eq.*	5½ oz.-eq.*	6 oz.-eq.*
Milk	2 cups	2 cups	3 cups**	3 cups**	3 cups**	3 cups

* Oz.-eq. means ounce equivalents. See the information below for the Grains and Meat and Beans groups' ounce equivalents.

** Children 8 years and younger need 2 cups of milk.

Fruits: 1 cup fruit or 100% fruit juice or ½ cup dried fruit = 1 cup fruit.

Vegetables: 1 cup raw or cooked vegetables or vegetable juice, or 2 cups of raw leafy greens = 1 cup vegetables.

Grains: 1 slice of bread, 1 cup ready-to-eat cereal or ½ cup cooked rice, pasta or cooked cereal = 1 ounce equivalent of grains. At least half of all grains consumed should be whole grains.

Meat and Beans: 1 ounce lean meat, poultry or fish, 1 egg, 1 tablespoon peanut butter, ¼ cup cooked dry beans, or ½ ounce of nuts or seeds = 1 ounce equivalent of meat and beans.

Milk: Choose low fat or fat-free milk, yogurt and cheese. 1 cup of milk or yogurt, 1½ ounces of natural cheese or 2 ounces of processed cheese = 1 cup milk.

References

Team Nutrition. USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

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