

Adventures in Grandparenting

Healthy Eating Tips for Young Children

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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?

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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.

Calcium and Iron

Many grandparents worry when children won't drink milk and don't eat enough meat. However, you shouldn't force a toddler to drink milk or eat meat. Even though a toddler may refuse to eat meat, he or she will probably still get plenty of protein in his or her diet. The nutrient that he or she may not get enough of is iron. Likewise, if a toddler won't drink milk, his or her diet may be low in calcium. However, there are other ways to sneak calcium and iron in without a food fight.

Adding extra calcium to a toddler's food:

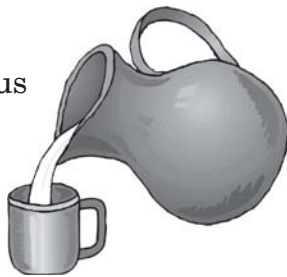
- Make fortified milk: combine 2 cups fluid milk, 1/3 cup powdered milk and refrigerate. Use in anything that calls for milk.

- Add flavorings to milk to encourage toddlers to drink it.
- Make a smoothie: blend milk or yogurt with fruit or frozen fruit to make a milkshake-like beverage.
- Use milk instead of water in gravies, cooked cereal and soups.
- Put powdered milk in baking: add 2 tablespoons powdered milk to each cup of flour.
- Make desserts with fortified milk: custard, pudding, rice pudding, pumpkin custard, etc.
- Use cheese in cooking: macaroni and cheese, lasagna, tacos, grilled cheese sandwiches, cheeseburgers and pizza.

Good Sources of Iron

- beef, pork, lamb
- poultry
- liver
- egg
- nuts and seeds (choking hazard for young children)
- enriched noodles, cereals and other grains
- green leafy vegetables
- prunes

If you are concerned about iron, be sure the toddler gets enough vitamin C from fortified fruit juices, citrus fruits and tomatoes. Vitamin C helps your body absorb iron from your food when they are contained in foods in the same meal.



Encouraging Toddlers to Eat

The way we serve foods can affect whether or not a toddler will try them. Here is a list of suggestions for making eating easier and more enticing for toddlers:

- Cut foods in bite-size pieces, preferably before he gets there. Toddlers cannot use knives but may have a tantrum about not being allowed to try.

- Make some foods soft and moist.
- Allow him to eat his food at room temperature.
- Give salads without dressing and serve them as finger food.
- Either make soups thin enough to drink from a cup or thick enough to eat from a spoon easily.
- Put a little extra color in foods.



- Children are interested in a little parsley in the hot dish or some carrot grated into the coleslaw.
- Cater to their preferences on shapes. Children may insist on having their sandwiches quartered or prefer carrot rounds to sticks. Orange wedges with the skins attached are often eaten better than sections.

Foods in “Never, Never!” Land

It is important to watch for signs of allergy each time you introduce a new food to an infant. Be sure to introduce a new food one week at a time so that you can identify the offending food if the baby has an allergic reaction. If a baby has an allergic reaction, contact Emergency Services immediately.

Signs of an allergic reaction:

- diarrhea
- vomiting
- coughing and wheezing
- congestion or stuffiness
- ear infection
- stomach pain
- hives
- skin rash
- extreme irritability
- severe reactions like shock or difficulty breathing



Some foods are more likely to cause an allergic reaction than others. Because of this, you should not feed these foods to babies less than 12 months old.

Due to risk of allergies, never feed an infant less than 12 months these foods:

- shrimp
- lobster
- crab
- crawfish
- scallops
- oysters
- clams
- egg whites or whole egg
- cow's milk
- peanuts or other nuts
- casseroles (unless all ingredients have been introduced previously with no reaction)

...Other foods in "Never! Never!" Land

Never feed these foods to infants because they are a choking hazard:

- snack potato or corn chips, pretzels or cheese twists
- cookies or granola bars

- whole kernels of cooked rice, barley or wheat
- raw vegetables (including green peas and string beans)
- whole pieces of canned fruit
- hard pieces of raw fruit
- whole grapes, berries, cherries, melon balls or cherry and grape tomatoes (cut these foods into quarters, with pits removed, before feeding to older babies)
- uncooked dried fruit

Due to illness or other reasons

- honey or anything made with honey, including honey graham crackers
- artificial sweeteners: sucralose, aspartame, saccharin or acesulfame K

References

Team Nutrition. USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

Feeding Infants: A Guide for Use in the Child Nutrition Programs, United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, FNS-258

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