

# Feeding Your Child

## A Guide to Your Child's Nutritional Needs



## The School-Age Child Kindergarten through 5th Grade



# The School-Age Child, K through 5th Grade

## Establishing a Healthy Lifestyle

To keep growth during childhood and adolescence in a healthy state, parents are encouraged to be good role models for their children by practicing healthy lifestyle habits that include regular physical activity and good eating habits.

When children grow up in homes where healthy family meals, exercise and good sleeping habits are practiced regularly, they are more likely to develop into healthy adults. The following tips can assist you in setting a good foundation so your child will establish a healthy lifestyle and maintain it into adulthood.

### Dietary Guidelines for Individuals Ages 2 Years and Older:

-  Offer fruits and vegetables to your child daily, especially those that are deep in color like spinach, broccoli, carrots and berries.
-  Limit intake of processed foods, incorporating a variety of real, whole foods into meals and snacks.
-  Choose healthy fats like nuts and seeds, nut butters, avocado and olive oil and quality proteins like meats, fish or beans.
-  Offer your child whole grains like brown rice, oatmeal, whole wheat bread, whole grain cereal and whole wheat pasta rather than refined grains.
-  Eat more fish, especially low-mercury, oily fish like wild Alaskan salmon prepared either broiled, baked or grilled to provide omega-3 fatty acids.
-  Limit intake of sugar-sweetened beverages and foods in your household and at school.
-  Limit juice to 0-4 ounces per day. Children should be encouraged to eat whole fruits which have more nutrients and fiber than fruit juice.
-  Limit intake of Added Sugars to less than 6 teaspoons or 25 grams daily.
-  Avoid trans fats. Typically found in processed foods, look for the words *partially hydrogenated* in the ingredients to determine if there are trans fat in the product.

## Create a Healthy Eating Environment:

-  Implement the same healthy diet (rich in vegetables, fruits, proteins and whole grains) for your entire family, not just for select individuals.
-  Plan times when you prepare foods together. Children enjoy participating and can learn about healthy cooking and food preparation.
-  Eat meals together at the table at regular times.
-  Take time to enjoy meals. Eating too quickly does not allow enough time to digest and to feel a sense of fullness.
-  Avoid other activities during mealtimes such as watching television.
-  Limit foods that are high in processed carbohydrates and sugar. Avoid beverages with added sugar or artificial sweeteners.
-  Have nutritious snack foods available. Designate areas in the pantry and refrigerator as snack shelves and keep them stocked with foods from the snack shelf suggestion list found on the page 7.
-  Avoid serving portions that are too large. Children's meals do not need supersizing. If they are still hungry, they can always ask for more.
-  Do not force your child to eat if they are not hungry. If you have concerns about your child's eating habits, consult your healthcare provider or registered dietitian nutritionist.
-  Limit the frequency of fast food and fried foods.
-  Avoid using food as a reward or the lack of food as punishment.

## Create an Active Environment:

-  Make time for the entire family to participate in regular physical activities that everyone enjoys. Try walking, bicycling or rollerblading.
-  Plan special active family outings such as hiking or a ski trip.
-  Start an active neighborhood program. Join other families for group activities like touch football, basketball, tag or hide-and-seek.
-  Assign active chores to every family member such as vacuuming, washing the car or mowing the lawn. Rotate the schedule to avoid boredom.
-  Enroll your child in a structured activity that they enjoy, such as tennis, dancing, gymnastics, martial arts, soccer, swimming, etc.
-  Encourage your child to try a new sport by joining a team at school or in your community.
-  Limit the amount of screen time (television, computer, iPad, phone, video games) to no more than 2 hours per day.

## Tips for Getting Kids to Eat Healthy

Try these tips to help even the pickiest eaters become healthier eaters:

- **Eat healthy foods along with your children.**

Present positive messages about healthy foods. Avoid making negative comments about healthy foods. Tastes are individual. Your child may love spinach, even if you dislike it.

- **Plan volumetric dinner plates.**

Serve your family's plates so that 50% of the plate is non-starchy vegetables, 25% is quality protein and 25% is nutrient dense carbohydrate with a little healthy fat.

This ensures that everyone will have a proper balance of nutrition and calories for satiety and appropriate growth.

- **Encourage your child to start with vegetables.**

When you are hungry, foods taste best. To assist children in developing a taste for vegetables, suggest that they start their meal with vegetables on their plates so that these foods will be more likely to taste better to them.

- **When cooking vegetables, cut them into small pieces before cooking.**

Since children have very sensitive taste buds, some vegetable flavors may be overpowering. Cutting vegetables into small pieces before cooking offers tiny bits of flavor instead of an overpowering flavor in a larger chunk. This also provides a more subtle texture for younger children who are still adjusting to different textures.

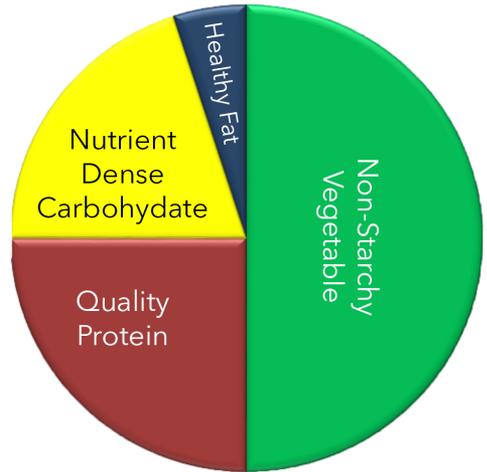
- **Make vegetables user-friendly: play the color game at mealtime.**

Dinner plates that contain bright colors of the rainbow are packed with good nutrition. By placing a positive spin on the colors of foods, vegetables and fruits can become more appealing to children.

**Ask these questions at mealtime:**

1. How many bright colors are in this meal?
2. Who has the most bright colors on their plate?
3. How many bright colors have you eaten today? Name the colors you ate today and the foods that contained them.

**Note: For this exercise to be successful, parents need to make sure that meals contain a variety of bright colors on a regular basis.**



Parents are encouraged to choose the proper number of servings from each food group for their child each day. **Portion sizes vary with age.** Younger children often eat smaller portions. Offering smaller servings and allowing them to ask for more satisfies their hunger, does not waste food and allows them to stay in tune with their hunger/fullness cues.

## Non-Starchy Vegetables

Color your plate with great-tasting, colorful veggies

Asparagus  
Cabbage  
Green Beans  
Summer Squash

Bell Peppers  
Carrots  
Kale  
Tomatoes

Broccoli  
Cauliflower  
Spinach  
Zucchini

## Quality Protein

Vary your protein foods

Wild Salmon  
Fish or Shellfish  
Shrimp  
Natural Deli Meats

Beans, Lentils  
Hummus  
Plain Greek Yogurt  
Cottage Cheese

Tofu, Tempeh, Edamame  
Eggs  
Poultry  
Beef or Pork

## Nutrient Dense Carbohydrates

Choose minimally processed, intact grains

Whole, Intact Grains:  
Steel Cut Oats,  
Wild or Brown Rice,  
Quinoa, Amaranth

Potatoes  
Winter Squash  
Whole Wheat Bread  
Whole Wheat Tortillas

Popcorn  
Whole Fruit  
Whole Grain Cereal  
(watch for added sugar!)

## Healthy Fats

Include quality fats at meals and snacks

Nuts and Seeds  
Natural  
Nut/Seed Butters  
(no added sugar)

Avocado  
Olives  
Extra Virgin Olive Oil  
Tahini

Small Amounts of:  
Virgin Coconut Oil  
Butter  
Ghee

## Know Your "Sometimes" Foods

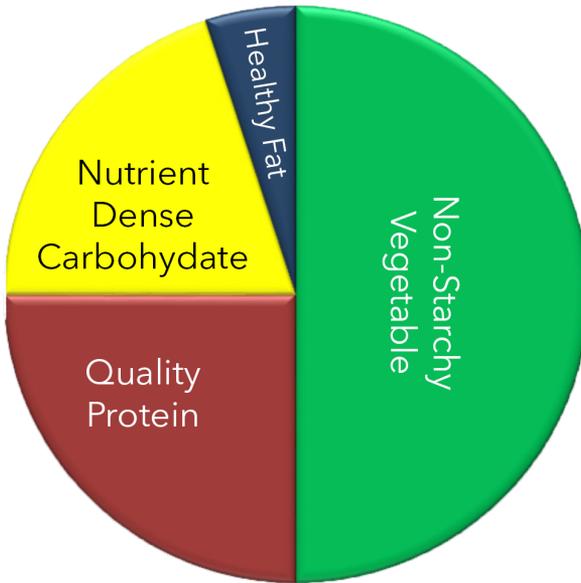
Look out for foods with added sugars and processed carbohydrates. These foods can fill you up, leaving no room for foods that help you eat smart and play hard.

## Eat Smart to Play Hard!

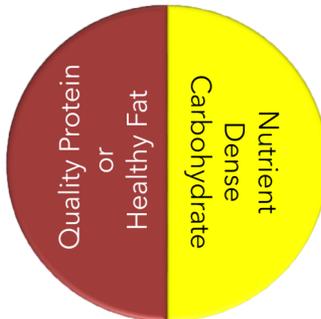
Children need at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day. Whether that includes tossing a ball, playing tag or riding bikes, by eating the right type and combinations of food, your child will have the energy they need to play hard!

Fuel up with well-balanced, nutritious meals and snacks throughout the day. Choose a wide variety of foods from each food group and limit intake of processed, refined carbohydrates and added sugars.

**EACH MEAL:** Vegetable + Carbohydrate + Protein + Healthy Fat



**EACH SNACK:** Carbohydrate + Protein or Healthy Fat



## Snack Power

Children often need snacks throughout the day since it can be difficult to meet their total calorie and nutrient requirements within 3 meals. It is important to think of snacks as “mini-meals” and offer your child the same healthy choices at snack time that you would offer at mealtime.



- **Space snacks about 2-3 hours from meals.**

When kids are appropriately hungry, they are more likely to accept healthy meals. Offer nutritious snacks at appropriate times.

- **Choose strategic snacks.**

Offer your child balanced snacks that contain a protein and/or healthy fat (anchor) paired with a nutrient dense carbohydrate (fuel) such as a piece of fruit with cheese.

- **Designate a snack shelf in the refrigerator and pantry.**

To assist your child in making healthy snack choices, designate a special snack shelf in the refrigerator and pantry and load them with quality proteins, healthy fats and nutrient dense carbohydrates so your child can serve themselves quality snacks. Teach your child to reach for a protein or fat plus a carbohydrate at each snack, like these tasty suggestions:

Quality Proteins	Healthy Fats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🍏 Clean deli meat (turkey, ham, etc.) with no added sugar/preservatives</li> <li>🍏 Individually wrapped cheese balls, wedges or sticks</li> <li>🍏 Plain Greek yogurt</li> <li>🍏 Boiled eggs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🍏 Pre-portioned bags of mixed nuts (2 Tbsp each)</li> <li>🍏 Pre-portioned cups of nut butters (1-2 Tbsp each)</li> <li>🍏 Guacamole</li> <li>🍏 Hummus</li> </ul>
Nutrient Dense Carbohydrates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🍏 Fresh fruit</li> <li>🍏 Fruit cups in natural juice</li> <li>🍏 Granola bars (watch for added sugar)</li> <li>🍏 Air-popped popcorn</li> <li>🍏 Whole wheat bread, tortilla or English muffin</li> <li>🍏 Pre-portioned bags of whole grain cereal (watch for added sugar)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🍏 Unsweetened applesauce cups</li> <li>🍏 V-8 or tomato juice</li> <li>🍏 Fresh vegetables: baby carrots, grape tomatoes, celery sticks</li> <li>🍏 Whole wheat crackers</li> <li>🍏 Whole wheat waffles (serve with cheese, fruit or nut butter—no syrup)</li> </ul>

## Areas Needing Extra Attention

### Calcium

As children grow, their calcium needs increase. Since calcium is essential for the healthy development of the skeletal system, it is important to make sure your child's eating plan is rich in calcium.

Daily Calcium Requirements	
4-8 years	1,000 mg
9-18 years	1,300 mg

Dairy products provide the most calcium per serving, averaging about 300 mg per:

- ◆ 8 ounces of milk
- ◆ 1½ ounces of cheese
- ◆ 8 ounces of yogurt

If your child does not enjoy milk or dairy products or has allergies that restrict consumption of dairy products, many foods are now fortified with calcium such as non-dairy milk alternatives and some cereals, breads and crackers. Beans, peas and dark green leafy vegetables are also a source of calcium, but provide smaller amounts compared to dairy products.

Non-Dairy Calcium Sources			
Sardines, with bones (3 oz)	325 mg	Okra, cooked (1 cup)	123 mg
Tofu, firm (½ cup)	253 mg	Kale, cooked (1 cup)	94 mg
Spinach, cooked (1 cup)	146 mg	Soybeans, cooked (½ cup)	88 mg
Navy beans, cooked (1 cup)	126 mg	Almonds (1 oz)	75 mg

If you find that it is a daily struggle to get your child to eat enough calcium-rich foods to meet their calcium needs, you can supplement your child's eating plan with a calcium supplement.

- ◆ **Our bodies can only absorb 500mg of calcium at a time.** Space calcium servings apart throughout the day instead of having them all at one time.
- ◆ To ensure maximum absorption, give your child one calcium supplement at a time when they are not having another calcium source. For example, if your child has milk with breakfast, give the calcium supplement at snack or another meal when they are not having a calcium-rich food.



## Areas Needing Extra Attention (continued)

### Vitamin D

Adequate vitamin D status is important for health. Extreme lack of vitamin D can result in rickets in children. Adequate vitamin D can also help reduce the risk of bone fractures. **Children 1 year and older should receive a supplement of 600 IU of vitamin D3 daily unless they are consuming it through food.**

Vitamin D is unique in that sunlight on the skin enables the body to make vitamin D. However, this is not a reliable, predictable source of vitamin D and concerns about skin cancer have led to recommendations to limit sun exposure in all ages.

True food sources of vitamin D are limited, but fatty fish like salmon, tuna and sardines are good food sources, as well as pasture-raised egg yolks. There are also many vitamin D-fortified food sources, like milk, non-dairy milk and certain cereals. Vitamin D is also available in the form of dietary supplements.

### Fiber

With fast food and convenience foods making up a large part of the American diet, many children do not get enough fiber on a daily basis. Fiber is found in plant foods like fruits, vegetables, legumes and whole grains. It is important to plan these foods into your child's eating plan daily along with plenty of fluids.

#### Daily Fiber Recommendation for Children

**Age of the Child + 5 - 10 grams of fiber**

Using the above fiber recommendation equation, a 5 year old child would need approximately 10-15 grams of fiber daily (5 years old + 5-10 grams of fiber).

### Iron

Iron is an important part of red blood cells. Iron carries oxygen to every cell in the body and plays a role in brain development and function. Your child depends on iron to grow.

Both animal and plant foods provide iron.

- Animal products (red meat, dark meat poultry and seafood) supply iron in a form that the body absorbs best.
- Plant foods (spinach and legumes) and fortified grains (breads, cereals, pasta and rice) supply iron in a form that is not as easily absorbed.
- **Boost iron absorption** from plant foods and grains by combining them with a vitamin C-rich food such as oranges, tomatoes, kiwi, strawberries or colorful bell peppers.

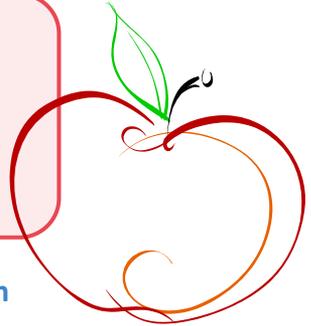


## Sources

American Heart Association  
American Obesity Association  
USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025

### Nutrition Websites for Kids

[choosemyplate.gov/kids](http://choosemyplate.gov/kids)  
[superkidsnutrition.com](http://superkidsnutrition.com)  
[eatright.org/kids](http://eatright.org/kids)  
[eatsmartmovemorenc.com](http://eatsmartmovemorenc.com)



## Resources for Parents of School-Age Children

### ***Fearless Feeding: How to Raise Healthy Eaters from High Chair to High School***

[Jill Castle, MS, RD & Maryann Jacobsen, MS, RDN](#)

This comprehensive nutrition guide gives parents the tools for encouraging kids of any age on the path to healthy eating as well as understanding and improving any child's eating habits.

### ***Try New Food: How to Help Picky Eaters Taste, Eat & Like New Foods***

[Jill Castle, MS, RD](#)

Learn a systematic and strategic approach to make trying new food fun, enjoyable and pressure-free and help kids overcome their fussy eating tendencies.

### ***Where Does Broccoli Come From?***

[Arielle Dani Lebovitz, MS, RDN, CSSD, CDE](#)

Read this playful and colorful book with your children! Learn fun facts from farm to table, vegetable seasonality, nutrition information and an intro to cooking with simple, tasty recipes. It also includes a "5 Senses" exercise to do while trying new vegetables.

### ***Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family: How to Eat, How to Raise Good Eaters, How to Cook***

[Ellyn Satter, MS, RD](#)

More a cooking primer than a cookbook, this book encourages movement back to the family table and provides simple, delicious recipes, ways to involve kids in the kitchen and guidelines for adapting menus for young children.