

Let's Talk About...

Power packing: Increasing calorie intake

Good nutrition is important for normal growth, activity, and health. If your child doesn't feel well or doesn't want to eat, it can be hard for them to get enough nutrients. Read on for ideas to help your child grow and gain weight.

What is power packing?

Power packing is a way to add calories and protein to foods without adding volume. The easiest way to power pack foods is to add fats to foods your child already eats.

Who should power pack?

Power packing is helpful for children who:

- Need to gain weight
- Have poor appetites
- Cannot eat a normal amount of food
- Have higher nutritional needs



What do I need to know about good nutrition?

Calories	Calories are a measure of energy and come from food. Carbohydrates, protein, and fat all have calories. The more active your child is, the more energy or calories their body needs. Illness or injury may increase your child's need for calories.
Protein	The body uses protein for growth and repair. Meat, eggs, dairy, soy, legumes (such as dried beans), nuts, and seeds are good sources of protein.
Fats	Fat helps build cells and provide energy. Fat has twice the number of calories as protein and carbohydrates. Butter, margarine, oils, cream, mayonnaise, salad dressings, dairy, meats, nuts, and seeds are good sources of fat.
Carbohydrates	Carbohydrates (sugars and starches) provide energy for the brain and body. Breads, grains, cereals, fruits, vegetables, and sugary foods have carbohydrates.
Vitamins and Minerals	Your child needs vitamins and minerals to stay healthy and can get them from food. Offer your child a variety of foods from all the food groups. If you feel your child needs a vitamin and mineral supplement, talk to their dietitian. Vitamins and minerals do not provide calories.
Water	Water is important but does not provide any calories. Your child can get enough water by drinking milk and formula, which provide both calories and fluid.

How can I get my child to eat?

Every child is different and there is no one perfect answer of how to get your child to eat better. But there are lots of things that have been helpful for others that may work for you. One important thing to try is to help your child eat better by letting them get hungry. Schedule meals and snacks 2–4 hours apart to encourage a good appetite. Your child should eat 5–6 times a day. Allow enough time for each meal or snack, usually 15–30 minutes. Don't let your child graze or sip between eating times. When the meal or snack is over, put the food and drink away until the next time to eat.



Here are other tips for encouraging healthy eating habits:

- Be positive about food and eating to create a pleasant, stress-free setting to make eating more enjoyable.
- Don't get upset; children can be very picky eaters.
- Eat meals and snacks together so your child feels a part of the family. Place the highchair at the table.
- Set a good example with your own healthy eating habits and don't be negative about your own eating habits.
- No TV, phones, or other electronics during mealtime.
- Involve your child in planning and preparing food. Children's cookbooks, parenting magazines, and websites are great resources for fun food ideas.
- When your child wants the same food day after day, this is called a food jag. This is quite common. It's okay to give your child the preferred food for a few days with small amounts of other foods.
- Include your child in feeding. Offer finger foods, and use a baby-sized spoon and cup with handles. Use plastic dishes so children can feed themselves safely. Expect messes.
- Choose foods that are easy to chew and swallow, especially if your child has physical or neurological problems.

How do I add calories to my child's food?

Below are some tips for adding calories to foods your child already eats.

Infants

- Add 1 teaspoon of vegetable oil (such as corn oil or olive oil) or liquid margarine to each jar of baby food.
- Mix any dry infant cereal with infant formula rather than water or juice.
- Use your blender to puree high-calorie table foods.
- Use whole milk, custard-style yogurt without fruit pieces. Compare labels for calories.
- Concentrate your infant's formula. Talk to your child's dietitian about concentrating formula correctly.

Toddlers

- Put oil, margarine, butter, or cream cheese on bread, crackers, pasta, rice, and vegetables.
- Add gravies, sauces, dips, and toppings to your child's favorite foods.
- Give your child whole milk to drink. Limit juice, water and soda. Some children "fill up" on water, juice, or soda and then refuse to eat.

Which high-calorie foods should I cook with?

Food	How to use
Whole milk or cream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make soups, hot cereals, and instant puddings with milk or cream instead of water. • Add powdered milk to whole milk, eggnog, milk shakes, soups, casseroles, meatloaf, and cookie dough, or cake, muffin, and bread batters. • Mix 1–2 tablespoons of cream or powdered milk in 1 cup of whole milk. • Stir whipped cream into applesauce. • Try using coconut milk and cream in recipes, too.
Breads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve soft breads or muffins like banana, zucchini, or pumpkin. • Make waffles, pancakes, or French toast for breakfast. Soften them with butter and syrup. • Give your child high-fat, buttery crackers for snacks.
Cheese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Melt cheese on sandwiches, meats, fish, vegetables, or eggs. • Grate cheese into sauces, casseroles, mashed or baked potatoes, rice, or noodles. • Add an extra slice of cheese to grilled cheese or meat sandwiches.
Cottage or ricotta cheese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use 4% fat cottage cheese made from whole milk. • Try fruit such as peaches with cottage cheese. • Add cottage or ricotta cheese to casseroles. • Mix cottage or ricotta cheese with powdered ranch dressing and use it as a dip.
Dried beans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread hummus on crackers or serve as a vegetable dip. • Serve refried beans or lentils as a side dish. Top them with sour cream, canola oil, or cheese to add more calories.
Eggs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add chopped, hard-cooked eggs to salads, dressings, vegetables, and casseroles. • Add extra eggs to cooked foods such as custards, French toast, muffin and pancake batter, and bread dough. • Cook scrambled or fried eggs in butter, margarine, or vegetable oil. • Mix scrambled eggs with cheese, cream cheese, or cottage cheese. <p><i>NOTE: Do not use raw eggs because they may contain bacteria.</i></p>
Nutrition drinks	<p>A variety of ready-to-use, high-calorie nutrition drinks are available. Give your child a drink during a meal or at snack time. There are many brands available such as PediaSure®, Boost®, or Carnation Breakfast Essentials®.</p>
Ice cream	<p>Compare labels to choose higher-calorie ice creams.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make ice cream into a milkshake by adding whole milk or cream. • Whip ice cream with frozen fruit. • Sandwich ice cream between cookies, cake, or graham crackers.
Peanut, almond, cashew, or sunflower butter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread generously on sandwiches, toast, muffins, French toast, pancakes, fruit slices, crackers, carrots and celery sticks. • Add to sauces, milk shakes, cookie and muffin batter, and bread dough. • Swirl through ice cream, yogurt, or pudding.
Meat and fish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add cooked meat to vegetables, salads, casseroles, soups, omelets, scrambled eggs, sandwiches, stuffing, and baked potatoes. • Try spam, deviled ham, chicken, or tuna canned in oil. • Chop or shred meat for easier chewing. • Spread deli meats with cream cheese and roll them up.

Which high-calorie foods should I cook with? (continued)

Food	How to use
Margarine or butter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add to hot cereals, soups, casseroles, mashed or baked potatoes, rice, noodles, pasta, cooked vegetables, pancakes, sauces, and gravies. • Spread extra butter or margarine on toast. • Butter both slices of bread in sandwiches. • Butter buns for hot dogs or hamburgers. • Use butter or margarine to cook eggs or sauté vegetables.
Mayonnaise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add mayonnaise to salad dressing. • Mix mayonnaise with ketchup to make fry sauce. • Spread mayonnaise on sandwiches and crackers. • Use mayonnaise to make vegetable dips.
Sugar, jams, jellies or honey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add to cereals, milk shakes, fruit, desserts, yogurt, toast, muffins, French toast, pancakes, or cookies. • Do not give honey to children younger than 1-year-old or children with weak immune systems.
Yogurt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose crème or custard-style yogurt. • Blend yogurt with fruit and whole milk to make a smoothie. • Stir crushed graham crackers, granola, or cold cereal into yogurt.
Nuts, seeds, dried fruit, and olives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add to foods whenever possible to add healthy fat and flavor • These foods may cause choking, so use carefully.
Avocados and guacamole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use in dips and sauces. • Add to sandwiches, burgers, omelets, and toast.
Modular supplements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modular supplements are special products to add calories and fat. They are only available from a pharmacy. Use modular supplements only if your child's healthcare provider. Examples include Polycose®, Microlipid®, or Duoca[®].

How do I choose heart-smart foods?

High-calorie foods and supplements should include heart-healthy choices. If you are concerned about adding extra fat, talk to your child's dietitian about these and other ideas:

- Ground flaxseed, chia seeds, and sunflower seeds
- Walnuts, almonds, pecans, and cashews
- Peanuts, peanut butter, and almond butter
- Olives, chopped olive spread, or tapenade
- Olive or canola oil
- Avocados and guacamole
- Fatty fish, such as tuna in oil or salmon
- Dried fruit and fruit leathers

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