Let's Talk About...

Power packing: increasing calorie intake

Good nutrition is important for normal growth, activity, and health. Getting enough nutrients for a child who doesn't feel well or doesn't want to eat can be hard. Sometimes a child has a poor appetite or has an illness that increases nutrient needs. This handout provides 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 fat to foods your child already eats.

Power packing is helpful for children who:

- need to gain weight
- have a poor appetite
- cannot eat a normal amount of food
- have higher than normal nutritional needs.

Here are some important parts of good nutrition:

- **Calories** are a measure of energy. Your child needs energy to grow, play, learn, and for many other things. Calories come from food. Carbohydrate, protein, and fat all have calories. The more active your child is the more energy or calories her body needs. Illness or injury may increase her need for calories.
- The body uses **protein** for growth and repair. Meat, eggs, dairy, soy, and legumes (such as dried beans, nuts and seeds) are good sources of protein.
- **Fat** helps build cells and provide energy. Fat has twice the number of calories as protein and carbohydrate. Good sources of fat are butter, margarine, oils, cream, mayonnaise, salad dressings, whole fat dairy, meats, and nuts and seeds.
- **Carbohydrates** (sugars and starches) provide energy for the brain and body. Breads, grains, cereals, fruits, vegetables, and sugary foods have carbohydrates.
- Your child needs **vitamins and minerals** to stay healthy. They do not provide calories. Your child can get the vitamins and minerals they need 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 your dietitian.
- **Water** is important but does not provide any calories. Your child can get enough water by drinking fluids such as milk and formula, which provide both calories and fluid.

How can I get my child to eat?

The way to get your child to eat is to make them hungry! Schedule meals and snacks 2½ to 4 hours apart to encourage hunger. Allow enough time for each meal or snack, usually 15 to 30 minutes. Your child should eat five to six times a day. 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.

Be positive about food and eating. A pleasant, stress-free setting makes eating more enjoyable. Don't get upset; children can be very picky eaters. Eat meals together so your child feels a part of the family. Place the highchair at the table. Have someone sit and eat or just drink a glass of milk with your child at snack time.

Limit distractions that may take your child's mind away from eating. This means no TV during mealtime.

Be creative! Make food fun and eye-catching. Food jags (wanting the same food day after day) are common. Give the preferred food for a few days with small amounts of other foods.

Involve your child in planning and preparing food. Children's cookbooks are great sources of fun food ideas with "kid appeal." Include your child in feeding. Offer finger foods. Use a baby-sized spoon and cup with handles. Use plastic dishes so your child can feed himself with no worries about breaking dishes.

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?

Children grow very fast. They need a lot of calories for growth. Below are some tips for adding calories to foods your child already eats.

For infants:

- Add 1 teaspoon of any vegetable 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 custard-style yogurt. Compare labels for calories.
- Concentrate your infant's formula. Talk to your dietitian about concentrating formula correctly.

For toddlers

- Put oil or margarine on bread, crackers, pasta, rice, and vegetables.
- "Dress" your child's foods with gravies, sauces, dips, and toppings.
- Feed your child whole milk. Limit juice, water and soda. Some children "fill up" on water, juice, or soda then refuse to eat.

Here are some high-calorie foods and ideas on how to use them:

Whole milk or cream

- Make soups, hot cereals, and instant puddings with milk or cream in place of water.
- Serve cream sauce with vegetables.
- Add powdered milk to whole milk, eggnog, milk shakes, soups, casseroles, meatloaf, cookie dough, or cake, muffin and bread batters.
- Make "muscle milk" a high-calorie milk. Mix 1-2 tablespoons of cream in 1 cup of whole milk.
- Add cream to sauces and gravies.
- Stir whipped cream into applesauce.

Breads

- Serve soft breads or muffins like banana, zucchini, or pumpkin.
- Make waffles, pancakes, or French toast for breakfast. Soften with butter and syrup.
- Use high-fat crackers for snacks. Try Towne House®, Ritz®, Club® or other buttery crackers.

Cheese

- Melt on sandwiches, meats, fish, vegetables, or eggs.
- Grate into sauces, casseroles, mashed or baked potatoes, rice, or noodles.
- Add an extra slice to grilled cheese or meat sandwiches.

Cottage or Ricotta Cheese

Use whole milk 4% fat cottage cheese.

- Use as a filling in a peach or tomato half.
- Add to casseroles.
- Mix with powdered ranch dressing and use as a dip.
- Use as a topping for baked potatoes.

Dried beans

- Spread hummus on crackers or serve as a vegetable dip.
- Serve refried beans or lentils as a side dish. Top with sour cream, canola oil, or cheese for more calories.
- Try tofu in stir-fry or on salads.

Egg

Do not use raw eggs because they may contain bacteria.

- 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 in butter, margarine, or vegetable oil.
- Mix scrambled eggs with cheese, cream cheese, or cottage cheese.

Formulas

A variety of ready-to-use, high-calorie formulas are available. Use for a drink at meal or snack time. Examples include Pediasure®, Kindercal®, Boost®, Ensure®, Boost Kid Essentials®, Nutren Junior®, and Carnation Instant Breakfast®.

Ice cream

Compare labels to choose higher calorie products.

- Make into a milk shake.
- Whip with frozen fruit.
- Serve with fruits, cakes, brownies, and pies.
- Sandwich between cookies, cake, or graham crackers.

Peanut butter

- Spread generously on sandwiches, toast, muffins, french toast, pancakes, fruit slices, crackers, or carrot 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

- 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. Try a soft, white fish like halibut or sole.
- Spread deli meats with cream cheese and roll-up.

Margarine or butter

- Add to hot cereals, soups, casseroles, mashed or baked potatoes, rice, noodles, pasta, cooked vegetables, pancakes, sauces, and gravies.
- Spread extra on toast.
- Butter both slices of bread in sandwiches.
- Butter buns for hot dog or hamburgers.
- Use to cook eggs or sauté vegetables.

Mayonnaise

- Add to salad dressing.
- Mix mayonnaise with ketchup to make fry sauce.
- Spread on sandwiches and crackers.
- Use to make vegetable dips.
- Use to make meat, fish, or vegetable salads.
- Stir into casseroles.

Sugar, jams, jellies, or honey

Do not give honey to infants under one year of age or children with weak immune function.

- Add to cereals, milk shakes, fruit, desserts, yogurt, toast, muffins, French toast, pancakes, or cookies.

Yogurt

- Choose crème or custard style.
- Blend with fruit and whole milk to make a smoothie.
- Stir in crushed graham crackers, granola, or cold cereal.

Other favorites

- Olives*
- Avocados and guacamole
- Coconut milk and cream
- Peanuts, nuts, and seeds*
- Raisins and other dried fruits*

*These foods may cause choking, use with care.

Modular supplements

These are special products to add calories and fat. They are only available from a pharmacy. Use only under the advice of your child's doctor or dietitian:

- Polycose®
- Microlipid®
- Duocal®

What about heart-smart power packing?

There should not be any long-lasting ill effects if you add extra fat for a short time. If you are concerned about adding extra fat, talk to your child's dietitian about these and other ideas:

- For heart-healthy fats, try nuts, peanuts, peanut butter, almond butter, olives, olive oil, canola

oil, avocados, and fatty fish such as tuna in oil or salmon.

- Use dried fruit, fruit leathers, canned fruits in heavy syrup, jams, preserves, and honey.

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