

Feeding Your Preschooler

As a parent, you are the greatest role-model in teaching your preschooler healthy eating habits. Help your child get a good start with nutrition by following these suggestions:

- Establish regular meal and snack times; encourage starting the day with a healthy breakfast.
- Provide your preschooler with nutritious meals and snacks
- Eat with your preschooler so they can see that eating healthy foods taste good!
- Use appropriate utensils and portion sizes for your preschooler's age and development.
- Allow your child to decide how much they want to eat. Children are good at knowing to eat when they are hungry, and stop when they are full.
- Always offer 1-2 foods that your child will eat, in addition to offering foods the rest of the family is eating. Your preschooler may want to try new foods, while other times will want to stick to the foods they already know.
- Avoid using desserts or sweets as rewards for good behavior. This will increase your child's preference for sweet foods that are not as nutritious.
- Avoid offering foods with added sugar or sodium
- Be a good role model for manners. Wash your hands before meals.

Common Feeding Problems

- **Constipation** – Children ages 4-5 need 25 grams of fiber per day. If your child is constipated try to include more sources of fiber in their diet such as fruit, vegetables, and whole grain breads and cereals. Also, encourage your preschooler to drink plenty of water (see fluid recommendations)
- **Child won't try new foods** – Encourage your child to try at least one bite of a new food. Don't be discouraged if it takes several exposures before your child will eat and enjoy the food. Patience is key!
- **Child doesn't have an appetite** - Your preschooler may have growth spurts where you will notice they have an increase in appetite. But at other times, their growth rate will even out and their appetite may change. If your preschooler only wants to eat a small amount, be sure to offer nutritious foods during these times and avoid snacks such as candy, chips, cake, or cookies. If you notice your child has a decreased appetite for several days, always follow up with your pediatrician.
- **Child has food jags** – It is common for a child to go through periods where they want the same food over and over. These periods usually don't last long and help your child feel independent. Allow your child to eat what they prefer, and eventually the phase will pass. If your child's food demands become a power struggle, encourage your child eat the same healthy foods offered to the rest of the family, in a calm but consistent effort from both parents.

Dietitian: _____

Phone: _____

Facility: _____

- **Child won't eat vegetables** – Allow your child to help choose vegetables in the grocery store or help with growing vegetables at home. This can create an interest in eating vegetables. Try offering vegetables in a variety of different states such as cooked, steamed and raw. Creative preparation may also help make vegetables more acceptable.
- **Child is overweight** – Encourage your child to eat only when hungry. Resist making them clean their plate when they are no longer hungry. Don't offer food as a cure for boredom or as a way to cheer them up if they are unhappy. Limit sweets, chips and other high calorie, low nutrition foods. Serve cakes, cookies, pies and other rich foods for rare occasions. Bake, broil or steam foods rather than frying. Do not discuss weight with young children. This can make them feel confused and rejected. If you are concerned, talk to your doctor.




Fluid Needs

- The recommended fluid intake for preschoolers is 1.3 - 1.7 Liters per day which equals 43 - 57 fluid ounces or 5 ½ cups - 7 ¼ cups.
- Water and milk are the recommended beverages for preschoolers. Fruit juice, even if 100% juice, may contain added sugar that can add more calories than your child needs. Sweetened drinks can also increase likelihood of developing tooth decay and cavities.
- Reduced fat or fat free milk is the recommended type of milk for children 2 years of age and older.
- Limit offering beverages between feedings; this can cause a low appetite at regular meal and snack times. If your child is thirsty offer water to quench thirst between meals.




Food Recommendations

The table on the next pages is a food guide to show how much food is necessary to promote growth and development. Foods are divided into five groups and listed with the number of servings needed daily from each group. These are general guidelines for a basic diet. Additional foods and servings sizes adjustments may be necessary to meet your child's specific calorie and appetite needs.



FOOD GROUP	Foods and Serving Size for Ages 2-3	Foods and Serving Size for Ages 4-5	Comments
<p>Milk & Milk Products 4 servings per day</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ½ cup milk • ¾ ounce cheese • ½ cup yogurt • 3 Tablespoons cottage cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¾ cup milk • 1 ounce cheese • ¾ cup yogurt • 4 Tablespoons cottage cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase milk and dairy products that are fortified with Vitamin D. • Milk is low in iron, if your child is drinking more than 3 cups a day, this may displace high iron foods, such as meat and eggs. • Use 1% of skim milk for children over 2 years of age. Buy low-fat or fat-free dairy products such as cottage cheese, yogurt, or cream cheese.
<p>Breads 6 or more servings per day</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¼ - ½ slice bread • ¼ - ½ cup ready-to-eat cereal • ¼ cup cooked cereal • ¼ cup rice and noodles • ½ small roll, bagel, muffin, biscuit, pancake • 2 crackers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ½ - 1 slice bread • ½ - ¾ cup ready-to-eat cereal • ½ cup cooked cereal • ½ cup rice and noodles • ½ - 1 small roll, bagel, muffin, biscuit, pancake • 3 - 4 crackers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use iron-fortified grain products such as bread and cereal. • Use whole grain products whenever possible. Whole grain bread products contain more fiber, vitamins, and minerals.
<p>Fruits 2 or more servings per day</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ½-1 small piece of fruit • ¼- ½ cup cooked, canned, or fresh chopped fruit • ½ cup juice • ½ cup berries • ½ cup applesauce • ¼ cup dried fruit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ½-1 small piece of fruit • ¼- ½ cup cooked, canned, or fresh chopped fruit • ½ cup juice • ½ cup berries • ½ cup applesauce • ¼ cup dried fruit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vitamin A and C are the most lacking vitamins in children's diets. • Fruits high in Vitamin C include: oranges, strawberries, honeydew, melons, grapefruits, and tangerines. • Fruits high in Vitamin A include: peaches, watermelon, cantaloupe, nectarines, papayas, and apricots. • Remove pits, seeds or any part of fruits that can cause choking.

This handout is meant for use during an appointment with a registered dietitian only and is not intended for use by other clinicians.

FOOD GROUP	Foods and Serving Size for Ages 2-3	Foods and Serving Size for Ages 4-5	Comments
<p>Vegetables 3 or more servings per day</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¼- ½ cup cooked, canned, or fresh chopped vegetables • ½ cup juice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¼- ½ cup cooked, canned, or fresh chopped vegetables • ½ cup juice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vitamin A and C are the most lacking vitamins in children's diet. • Vegetables high in Vitamin C include: broccoli, asparagus, tomatoes, Brussel sprouts, and cauliflower. • Vegetables high in Vitamin A include: broccoli, carrots, spinach, sweet potato, and winter squash.
<p>Meat and Meat Substitutes 2-3 servings per day</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Tablespoons (1 ounce) cooked chicken, turkey, beef, pork, lamb, or fish • ¼ cup cooked dried or canned beans • ¼ cup nuts • 1 Tablespoon peanut butter • ½ - 1 Egg • 2 – 4 Tablespoon cottage cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Tablespoons (1 ounce) cooked chicken, turkey, beef, pork, or fish • 1/3 cup cooked dried or canned beans • ¼ cup nuts • 1 small egg • 1 Tablespoon peanut butter • 4 Tablespoons cottage cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meats cooked until moist and tender are usually better accepted. • If protein foods aren't eaten at mealtime, try serving a high protein snack such as a peanut butter sandwich, cottage cheese with fruit or a hard-cooked egg, celery stuffed with cheese or peanut butter
<p>Fats and Oils Sparingly, no more than 3 servings per day</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 teaspoon butter • 1 teaspoon margarine • 1 teaspoon oil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 teaspoon butter • 1 teaspoon margarine • 1 teaspoon oil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose healthy fat sources high in omega-3 fatty acids and DHA to encourage brain and vision development: olive oil, avocados, nuts, and fish are excellent sources of healthy fats

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