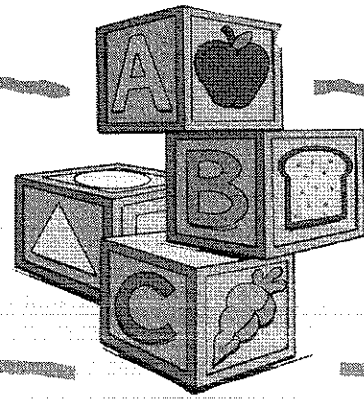


# Right From The Start: ABC's of Good Nutrition for Young Children



## Good nutrition: the results are worth it

Proper nutrition begins at the supermarket with the foods you buy and continues at home as you prepare and serve meals. Giving your child a healthy start with good eating habits promotes his or her lifelong health.

Read on about how you can set the stage for healthy eating habits and food choices for your young child. For specific advice about food and nutrition for your child, talk with your child's doctor or a registered dietitian.

## Actions speak louder than words

As children grow and develop, they watch for clues about food choices. They often copy food habits, likes, and dislikes from other children and adults. When you make wise food choices, your actions speak louder than words. Remember, the single-best predictor of a child with a healthy weight and lifestyle is parents who set a good example by making healthy food choices and engaging in regular physical activity.

## The ABC's of good nutrition

Young children need a variety of foods in order to get the nutrients they need to build strong bodies and stay healthy. Food also supplies the energy that children need to grow normally, play, learn, and explore the world around them.

Offering a variety of healthy, tasty, and nutrient-rich foods is the best way to supply the nutrition that a growing child needs. A wide variety of foods is found in the 5 food groups. Each food group has special nutrients, and each nutrient has certain jobs in the body.

### Safety check

#### Choking hazards

Do not feed children younger than 4 round, firm food unless it is chopped completely. The following foods are choking hazards: nuts and seeds; chunks of meat or cheese; hot dogs; whole grapes; fruit chunks (such as apples); popcorn; raw vegetables; hard, gooey, or sticky candy; and chewing gum. Peanut butter can be a choking hazard for children younger than 2.

#### Peanut allergies

Peanut and tree nut allergies are increasing. If your child has food allergies, or is diagnosed with peanut or tree nut allergies, avoid nuts and any food that contains or is made with nut products. If nuts are to be eaten away from home, check to make sure there are no children present with nut allergies.

## Foods to choose

Foods from all the groups work together to supply energy and nutrients necessary for health and growth. No one food group is more important than another. For good health, you and your child should choose foods from all 5 food groups.

- **From the grain group:** Whole-grain products such as breads, crackers, cereal, pasta, brown rice, bagels, tortillas, corn bread, pita bread, bran muffins, English muffins, matzo crackers, pancakes, breadsticks, and pretzels.
- **From the vegetable group:** Asparagus, beets, bok choy, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, collard greens, corn, cucumbers, green and red peppers, jicama, kale, okra, peas, potatoes, pumpkin, snow peas, squash, spinach, string beans, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, vegetable juices, and zucchini. Some raw vegetables can be choking hazards for young children. (See "Safety check.")
- **From the fruit group:** Apples, applesauce, apricots, bananas, berries, cantaloupe, figs, 100% fruit juices (unsweetened), grapefruit, kiwi, mangoes, nectarines, oranges, papayas, peaches, pears, plums, pineapple, raisins, prunes, starfruit, strawberries, tangerines, and watermelon. Many of these can be offered as dried fruits as well. Some fresh and dried fruits can be choking hazards for young children. (See "Safety check.")
- **From the meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs, and nuts group:** Lean cuts of beef, veal, pork, ham, and lamb; skinless chicken and turkey; fish; shellfish; cooked beans (kidney beans, black-eyed peas, pinto beans, lentils, black beans); refried beans (made without lard); peanut butter; eggs; reduced-fat deli meats; tofu; nuts; and peanuts. (See "Safety check.")
- **From the milk, yogurt, and cheese group:** Low-fat milk, yogurt, cheese, string cheese, cottage cheese, pudding, custard, frozen yogurt, and ice milk.

The following are guidelines about what type of milk to give your child.

Age	Type of milk
Younger than 12 months	Breast milk and/or iron-fortified formula
12 to 24 months	Whole milk. Your child's doctor may recommend reduced-fat (2%) milk if your child is obese or overweight or if there is a family history of high cholesterol or heart disease. Check with your child's doctor or dietitian before switching from whole to reduced-fat milk.
Older than 24 months	Reduced-fat (2%), low-fat (1%), or nonfat (skim) milk

## How do I know if my child is eating enough?

Children eat when they are hungry and usually stop when they are full. Some parents worry because young children appear to eat very small amounts of food, especially when compared with adult portions. A child who is growing well is getting enough to eat.

To check your child's eating pattern, pay attention to his or her food choices.

- Make sure no one food group is completely left out. If this happens for a few days, don't worry. But prolonged neglect of a food group could keep your child from getting enough nutrients.
- Encourage your child to be adventurous and eat a variety of foods within the food groups too. Even within a food group, different foods provide different nutrients. If the family is adventurous, then the child will likely join in.

## Child-sized servings: be realistic

For children, adult-sized servings can be overwhelming. Offering child-sized servings encourages food acceptance.

Here's an easy guide to child-sized servings.

- Serve one-fourth to one-third of the adult portion size, or one measuring tablespoon of each food for each year of the child's age.
- Give less than you think the child will eat. Let the child ask for more if he or she is still hungry.

### MyPyramid.gov food and menu planner

For the latest information from the US Department of Agriculture about making healthy food choices and keeping physically active, visit their Web site at [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov). MyPyramid offers individualized tools, including a food and menu planner. Dietary information is available for the general public starting at age 2 and older.

Developed in collaboration with the American Dietetic Association (ADA). For more information about the ADA, visit their web site at [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org).

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

## Snacks count too

Snacks make up an important part of childhood nutrition. Children must eat frequently. With their small stomachs, they cannot eat enough at meals alone for their high-energy needs. Three meals and 2 or 3 healthy snacks a day help children to meet their daily nutrition needs.

To make the most of snacks, parents and caregivers should offer healthy snack choices and be consistent with the time snacks are served.

**Type.** Offer a variety of snacks. Choose mostly healthy snack foods that are a good source of nutrients (protein, vitamins, minerals) as well as calories. Examples include raw vegetables, fresh or dried fruits, and low-fat dairy products. (See "Safety check.") One hundred percent fruit juices (unsweetened) are an alternative to soda and fruit drinks but should be limited to 4 to 6 ounces per day.

**Timing.** Plan snacks. Schedule snacks around normal daily events, and space them at least 2 hours before meals. Children should not feel full all the time. A feeling of hunger between meals and snacks encourages children to eat well when healthy foods are offered. If your schedule is hectic, pack a snack. This helps prevent a cranky, hungry child with no options besides fast food.

## Active play is important to health

Along with proper nutrition, your child needs physical activity to help maintain a healthy weight and lifestyle. Physical activity in the form of active play not only promotes your child's appetite but also helps develop a sense of well-being and confidence. From the early childhood years, encourage your child to live an active life. The daily recommendation for exercise for children (adults also) is at least 1 hour per day. This takes commitment from parents.

## From your doctor

American Academy  
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

American Academy of Pediatrics  
Web site—[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

Copyright © 2006  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
All rights reserved.