

Nutrition

What You Need to Know

Proper nutrition is key to leading a healthy life, and healthy eating habits are best formed during childhood. Parents can teach their children good eating habits by being positive role models in their own choices and by explaining to their children the importance of a balanced diet and how to choose healthy options from each food group. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's MyPyramid for Kids (see the insert or go to www.mypyramid.gov) can be a useful resource for talking to your kids.

Recommended Daily Portions

A child's age, gender, and activity level are all factors that determine how much he or she needs to eat every day to stay healthy. Boys and girls grow at different rates and thus may need more or less calories than each other, even when they are the same age. Daily food recommendations for children who exercise 30 minutes a day are provided here. For food intake recommendations for children with other activity levels, visit www.mypyramid.gov.

2- to 3-year-olds

Food Group	Amount Per Day	Examples
Grains	3 ounces	1 ounce could be 1 slice of whole wheat bread, ½ cup of oatmeal, or ½ cup of brown rice
Vegetables	1 cup	Carrots, peas, sweet potatoes, zucchini <i>Give them a little at each meal and a variety!</i>
Fruits	1 cup	Strawberries or melon, or a small apple
Milk Products	2 cups	Low-fat milk or yogurt; 1½ ounces of cheese counts as 1 cup
Proteins	2 ounces	Lean cooked meat or chicken; 1 egg counts as 1 ounce

4- to 8-year-olds

Food Group	Amount Per Day	Examples
Grains	4–5 ounces	1 ounce could be 1 slice of whole wheat bread, ½ cup of oatmeal, or ½ cup of brown rice
Vegetables	1½ cups	Carrots, peas, sweet potatoes, cucumber, tomatoes <i>Give them a little at each meal and a variety!</i>

Fruits	1½ cups	A small apple counts as 1 cup; a small banana counts as ½ cup
Milk Products	2 cups	Low-fat milk or yogurt; 1½ ounces of cheese counts as 1 cup
Proteins	3–4 ounces	Lean cooked meat or chicken; 1 egg counts as 1 ounce

9- to 13-year-olds

Food Group	Amount Per Day	Examples
Grains	6 ounces for boys; 5 ounces for girls	1 cup of ready-to-eat cereal counts as 1 ounce; 1 cup of cooked whole wheat pasta counts as 1 ounce
Vegetables	2½ cups for boys; 2 cups for girls	Green beans, asparagus, beets, kidney beans
Fruits	1½ cups	A large orange counts as 1 cup; a small banana counts as ½ cup
Milk Products	3 cups	Low-fat milk or yogurt; 1½ ounces of cheese counts as 1 cup
Proteins	5 ounces	Lean cooked meat or chicken; 1 egg counts as 1 ounce

14- to 18-year-olds

Food Group	Amount Per Day	Examples
Grains	7 ounces for boys; 6 ounces for girls	1 cup of ready-to-eat cereal counts as 1 ounce; 1 cup of cooked whole wheat pasta counts as 1 ounce
Vegetables	3 cups for boys; 2½ cups for girls	Green beans, asparagus, beets, kidney beans
Fruits	2 cups for boys; 1½ cups for girls	A large orange counts as 1 cup; a small banana counts as ½ cup
Milk Products	3 cups	Low-fat milk or yogurt; 1½ ounces of cheese counts as 1 cup
Proteins	6 ounces for boys; 5 ounces for girls	Lean cooked meat or chicken; 1 egg counts as 1 ounce

Adapted from the Healthy Lifestyles at Home and School notebook, developed by PTA and Parents' Action for Children.

What You Can Do

Serving healthy snacks to our children is important to providing good nutrition for growth and development, supporting lifelong healthy eating habits, and preventing costly and potentially disabling diseases, like heart disease, cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity.

Snacks are a bigger part of kids' diets than in the past, and can make positive or negative contributions to kids' diets—depending on the choices we offer. Below are ideas of healthy drinks and snacks to serve to children.

Healthy Foods

* **Fruits and vegetables:** *Almost all of the snacks served to children should be fruits or vegetables.* Do taste tests, or let kids choose (or vote for) new fruits and vegetables to try. Fruit can be served whole, sliced, cut in half, cubed, or in wedges. Canned, frozen, and dried fruits are easy and usually need little preparation. Healthy options include fresh fruits and vegetables; frozen fruit; applesauce; fruit cups or canned fruit (in juice or light syrup); dried fruit and fruit leathers (without added sugars); fruit salad; fruit juice popsicles; and homemade smoothies. Vegetables can be served with dips like hummus, bean dip, or salad dressing; in salads; or as veggie pockets in whole wheat pita.

* **Healthy grains (whole grains that are low in fats and sugars):** Serve mostly whole grains, which provide more fiber, vitamins, and minerals than refined grains do. (*Whole* wheat [or other whole grain] should be the first ingredient listed.) Healthy whole grain options can include English muffins, pita, or tortillas; breakfast cereal; crackers; rice cakes; popcorn; tortilla chips; granola; cereal bars; breadsticks; or flatbreads. Refined grains, such as pretzels and goldfish, should not be everyday offerings. Be sure to read nutrition labels to pick options that are low in sugars, saturated fat, and trans fat.

* **Low-fat dairy foods:** To protect children's bones and hearts, make sure all dairy foods are low-fat or fat-free, such as yogurt and low-fat pudding. Since cheese is the number two source of heart-damaging saturated fat in children's diets, choose lower-fat cheeses, serve small portions, and serve cheese with other foods, like fruit, vegetables, or whole grain crackers.

* **Nuts and trail mix:** Since nuts are high in calories, it is best to serve small portions (a small handful) and serve them along with another snack, such as fruit.

Healthy Beverages

- * **Water:** *Water should be the main drink served to kids at snack times.* Water satisfies thirst without adding calories or sugars (and it is low-cost!).
- * **Seltzer or sparkling water:** Look for calorie-free varieties, flavored or unflavored.
- * **Low-fat and fat-free milk:** Milk is a terrific source of calcium and vitamin D, but it is also the number one source of heart-damaging saturated fat in children's diets. Choose fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) instead of whole or 2% (reduced-fat) milk. Soy and rice "milks" (fortified with calcium and vitamin D) also are healthy options.
- * **Fruit juice:** Choose only 100% fruit juice, but limit juice to no more than 6 ounces (a little less than a cup) for 1- to 6-year-olds and no more than 12 ounces (1½ cups) for 7- to 18-year-olds. Avoid juice drinks, which, nutritionally, are no better than soda pop. The label should list 100% juice. Avoid drinks with sugar or high fructose corn syrup in the ingredient list.

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Where You Can Go

- * Center for Science in the Public Interest, www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/
- * MyPyramid, www.mypyramid.gov
- * PTA Parent Resources, Health and Wellness, www.pta.org/parent_resources.html