

ABCs OF Growing Healthy KIDS: CHILDREN TWO-SIX YEARS



GETTING YOUR CHILD TO EAT WELL

Are you and your child having problems at mealtimes? Does it seem as if your child won't eat anything anymore? You are not alone! All parents of preschoolers know the challenge of getting their children to eat well.

Children in these early years are impressionable. The preschool years are a great time to help them form positive attitudes toward food and to develop healthy eating habits—attitudes and habits that could last a lifetime.

Although toddlers and preschoolers grow at a slower rate than infants, they need enough energy and nutrients from food to fuel their active play. For young children, healthful eating helps to establish a foundation of good nutrition and lifestyle habits that may reduce the risks for obesity, heart disease, cancer, and other chronic diseases later in life.

Making sure preschoolers eat well requires shared responsibilities. As a parent, you are responsible for:

- selecting and buying food
- preparing and serving meals
- deciding when to serve meals and snacks
- making mealtimes pleasant
- helping children learn to behave at the table

Children are responsible for:

- eating a particular food
- how much they eat



SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO

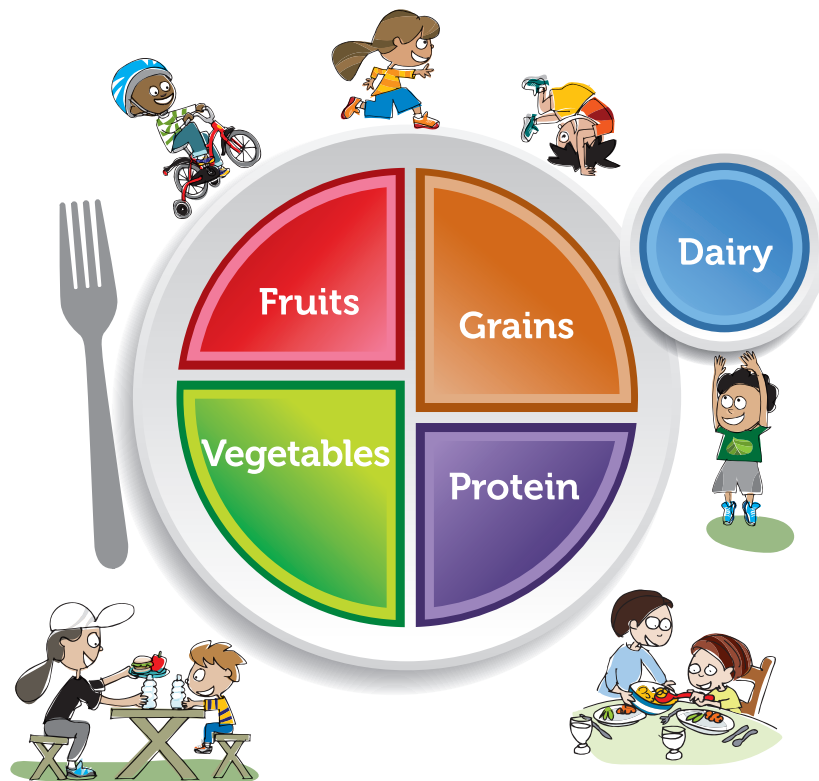
Here are a few tips to help your child become a healthy eater.

- Sometimes children quit eating to get attention. One solution to this problem is to give them attention before the meal. Involving children in pleasant conversation during the meal also helps them to eat.
- Children may quit eating when they do not get enough physical activity. They need physical activity every day.
- Preschool children are learning to be independent. You can help your child feel more independent by presenting a choice whenever possible. Offer a variety of foods with different textures and colors. This makes eating more interesting and introduces your child to a range of foods.
- Make it easy for the child to eat. A preschooler may need child-sized spoons and forks, a smaller plate and cup, and a booster chair. Offer child-sized servings. Let the child ask for more.
- Children will feel more independent if they can eat by themselves. Prepare foods they can eat with their fingers.
- Children like to eat foods they have helped prepare. Give the child a simple job to do. He or she can take apples out of the refrigerator or tear lettuce for a salad.
- Children learn eating habits by watching others eat. They are more likely to try new foods if they see others eating and enjoying those foods.
- To make eating safer, be sure your child sits quietly while eating. If children are lying down, running, jumping, playing, laughing, or crying while eating, they could choke.



- Avoid foods that could cause choking, as small children choke easily. Avoid round pieces of hot dogs; grapes; raw carrot chunks; popcorn; or nuts. Nut (peanut, almond, and cashew), sunflower seed, and soy butters and large pieces of meat also can be hard to swallow (see "ToddlerTips," page 4).
- Keep mealtimes quiet and calm. Set a good example. Avoid arguing about food with your child. If you find yourself in a "me against you" situation, try distracting your child by talking about something besides food. Talk about something you have seen or done together. Children have short memories. They may soon forget and eat without further argument.
- Do not force a child to eat a food he or she does not like. Do not make children eat when they are not hungry.
- Serve meals and snacks at regular times. Children need daily routines. Plan meals and snacks for times your child is likely to be hungry and not too tired or excited. Allow about two hours between snacks and meals.

Healthy Eating ^{for} preschoolers



Choose**MyPlate**.gov



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In an effort to make it easier for parents to determine how to feed their children nutritious, balanced meals, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) promotes an easy-to-follow food guide ChooseMyPlate. The colorful divided plate includes sections for vegetables, fruits, grains, and foods high in protein with room for dairy products.

Just by looking at the picture, you know right away vegetables and fruits should take up half the plate (with the veggie portion a bit bigger), and grains and protein foods should take up the other half (with the grains portion a bit bigger). And with a side helping of dairy, you're reminded children also need a serving of milk or another dairy food (like cheese or yogurt) at each meal.

Because ChooseMyPlate is a divided plate, no one food group overpowers the others. This message encourages eating a variety of foods with lots of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, along with meats or other forms of protein and dairy products.

While oils provide important nutrients and are recommended in small amounts, they aren't included on the ChooseMyPlate picture. This is because dietary guidelines recommend limiting oils, solid fats, and foods with added sugars. These foods provide what are considered empty calories—meaning they add plenty of calories but little or no nutritional value.

See page 5 for additional information on How to Build a Healthy Plate.

TODDLERS TIPS

Always watch children during meals and snacks. Young children, especially ages 2–3, are at risk for choking on food. Foods that may cause choking include:

- Frankfurters
- Nuts and seeds
- Popcorn
- Raw carrots
- Chunks of meat
- Raisins
- Marshmallows
- Peanut butter (spoonful)
- Chips
- Whole grapes
- Pretzels
- Round or hard candy
- Raw celery
- Cherries with pits
- Large pieces of fruit



Some childhood favorites can be offered if you change the form:

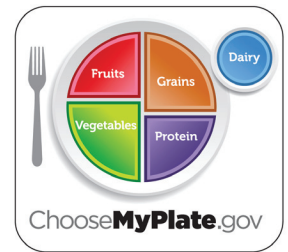
- Cut frankfurters lengthwise into thin strips
- Cook carrots or celery until slightly soft, then cut in sticks
- Cut grapes or cherries into small pieces
- Spread nut (peanut, almond, and cashew), sunflower seed, and soy butters thin

10 tips

Nutrition
Education Series

build a healthy meal

10 tips for healthy meals



A healthy meal starts with more vegetables and fruits and smaller portions of protein and grains. Think about how you can adjust the portions on your plate to get more of what you need without too many calories. And don't forget dairy—make it the beverage with your meal or add fat-free or low-fat dairy products to your plate.

1 make half your plate veggies and fruits

Vegetables and fruits are full of nutrients and may help to promote good health. Choose red, orange, and dark-green vegetables such as tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and broccoli.



2 add lean protein

Choose protein foods, such as lean beef and pork, or chicken, turkey, beans, or tofu. Twice a week, make seafood the protein on your plate.

3 include whole grains

Aim to make at least half your grains whole grains. Look for the words "100% whole grain" or "100% whole wheat" on the food label. Whole grains provide more nutrients, like fiber, than refined grains.

4 don't forget the dairy

Pair your meal with a cup of fat-free or low-fat milk. They provide the same amount of calcium and other essential nutrients as whole milk, but less fat and calories. Don't drink milk? Try soy milk (soy beverage) as your beverage or include fat-free or low-fat yogurt in your meal.



5 avoid extra fat

Using heavy gravies or sauces will add fat and calories to otherwise healthy choices. For example, steamed broccoli is great, but avoid topping it with cheese sauce. Try other options, like a sprinkling of low-fat parmesan cheese or a squeeze of lemon.

6 take your time

Savor your food. Eat slowly, enjoy the taste and textures, and pay attention to how you feel. Be mindful. Eating very quickly may cause you to eat too much.

7 use a smaller plate

Use a smaller plate at meals to help with portion control. That way you can finish your entire plate and feel satisfied without overeating.

8 take control of your food

Eat at home more often so you know exactly what you are eating. If you eat out, check and compare the nutrition information. Choose healthier options such as baked instead of fried.

9 try new foods

Keep it interesting by picking out new foods you've never tried before, like mango, lentils, or kale. You may find a new favorite! Trade fun and tasty recipes with friends or find them online.



10 satisfy your sweet tooth in a healthy way

Indulge in a naturally sweet dessert dish—fruit! Serve a fresh fruit cocktail or a fruit parfait made with yogurt. For a hot dessert, bake apples and top with cinnamon.

Food Group Servings for Children 2-6 Years Old

FOOD GROUP	NUTRIENTS	CHILD SERVINGS	FOODS	SERVING SIZE
GRAINS	Carbohydrate Iron Fiber	6	Bread Rice or pasta Cooked cereal Ready-to-eat cereal	1 slice 1/2 cup 1/2 cup 1 ounce
FRUITS	Vitamin C Vitamin A Fiber	2	Apple Banana Orange Juice Canned fruit Dried fruit	1 1 1 3/4 cup 1/2 cup 1/4 cup
VEGETABLES	Vitamin A Vitamin C Fiber	3	Cooked Raw Raw, leafy	1/2 cup 1/2 cup 1 cup
MILK	Calcium Protein	2	Milk Yogurt Cheese	1 cup 1 cup 2 ounces
MEAT	Protein Iron Zinc	2	Lean meat Poultry Fish Egg Cooked dry beans Peanut butter	2-3 ounces 2-3 ounces 2-3 ounces 1 1/2 cup 2 Tbsp.



PLAN FOR YOUR YOUNG CHILD . . . THE MYPLATE WAY

Use the chart on the opposite page to get an idea of the foods your child eats over a week. Write in the foods eaten each day and fill in the corresponding triangular shape. For example, if toast is eaten at breakfast, write in toast and color in one grain group triangle. The number of triangles shown for each food group is the number of servings to be eaten each day. At the end of the week, if you see only a few blank triangles, keep up the good work. If you notice several blanks, offer foods from the missing food groups in days to come.

	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
MILK	△△	△△	△△	△△	△△	△△	△△
MEAT	△△	△△	△△	△△	△△	△△	△△
VEGETABLE	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
FRUIT	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
GRAIN	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△	△△△
BREAKFAST							
SNACK							
LUNCH							
SNACK							
DINNER							
SNACK							

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All children grow, learn, and develop at different rates. The information in this brochure is considered typical for children of this age. If you do all you can to help children grow and develop now, they will have the best chance to do well in school and in life.

References:

Choose My Plate, United States Dept. of Agriculture
[www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/downloads/TenTips/
DGTipsheet7BuildAHealthyMeal.pdf](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/downloads/TenTips/DGTipsheet7BuildAHealthyMeal.pdf)