

Nutrition for Ages 1-6

As your child grows up, their appetite may decrease. Toddlers begin eating more table food and may stop breast milk or infant formula. Some days they eat well and other days they eat little. This is why it is important to practice healthy eating habits. Read this handout to learn tips and tricks on good nutrition.

Choking Safety Tips

Below are some tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics to help prevent choking.:

- Your child should always sit while eating.
- **Do not** let your child run, play, or lie down with food in their mouth.
- **Do not** offer round or firm foods to children under age four unless they are fully chopped.
- Peel fruits and vegetables and cut food into small bites.
- **Avoid** foods that are common choking risks:
 - Hot dogs/sausages
 - Meat sticks
 - Whole nuts or seeds
 - Whole grapes
 - Hard, sticky, or chewy candy
 - Popcorn
 - Marshmallows
 - Chewing gum
 - Chunks of peanut butter
 - Hard fruits or vegetables

Preventing Cavities

Do not let your child sleep with a bottle. Have them brush their teeth after breakfast and before bed. Rinsing with water after meals also helps. Ask your child's doctor or dentist about fluoride.

Tips for Toddlers and Preschoolers

- **Be calm and positive:** Talk about the day and the foods they are eating.
- **Avoid distractions:** Turn off screens and put toys away.
- **Create a meal plan:** Children do best with routine. Aim for three meals and two or three snacks at the same times each day. Offer healthy foods and let your child choose what and how much to eat. Never force your child to eat.
- **Serve the same meal for the whole family: Do not** make special meals. Include at least one food you know your child eats. If they skip a meal, they often eat more later.
- **Eat healthy foods:** Set a good example by eating fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Limit sugary and processed foods/drinks. Stick to planned meals and snacks. Offer water between meals and snacks.
- **Praise positive eating habits:** Avoid calling your child "picky." Offer new foods one at a time. Children may need many tries before accepting new foods.
- **Let children help with food tasks:** This can include stirring, sprinkling, or setting the table. This can increase interest in eating.

Activity

Children should be active every day. Play games together and offer safe spaces to move. Indoor play works well on cold or rainy days.

Children under age two should not use screens. Ages two to five should limit screen time to one hour per day. Avoid screens before bedtime.

Nutrition Daily Amounts			
Type of Food	Ages 1	Ages 2-3	Ages 5-8
Dairy Products	2 to 2 ½ cups per day		
Milk	18-24 ounces per day		
Protein	2 ounces per day	2 to 5 ounces per day	4 to 6 ounces per day
Fruits	½ to 1 cup per day	1 to 1 ½ cups per day	1 to 2 cups per day
Fruit Juice	4 ounces per day		
Vegetables	⅔–1 cup per day	1–2 cups per day	1½–3 cups per day
Grains	2–3 ounces per day		3–4 ounces per day
Fats	2 servings	3–4½ servings	3½–5½ servings

Daily Serving Guide

Serving sizes vary by age and activity. This guide is for healthy, active children. Very active children may need more food. Avoid force feeding.

Milk and Dairy

Children age 1–8 need about 2 to 2½ cups of dairy each day. This may include milk, yogurt, cottage cheese, or fortified plant milks such as soy, oat, or pea. Talk with your doctor about full fat versus low fat dairy. Limit how much milk your child drinks per day to prevent iron deficiency.

Protein Foods

One ounce of protein equals:

- 1 ounce meat
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon peanut butter
- ¼ cup cooked beans
- ¼ cup nuts (Nuts can be a choking risk in young children)

Grains

One ounce equals one slice of bread, one cup cereal, or ½ cup cooked rice, pasta, or cereal. Aim for half of grains to be whole grains.

Fruits

Offer fruit at meals and snacks. Serving size increases with age. Limit juice to 4 ounces of 100% fruit juice per day. Dilute with water if offered. **Avoid** fruit drinks and soda.

Vegetables

Offer vegetables during meals and snacks. Serving size increases with age.

Fats

Healthy fats support growth. One serving may include oil, butter, nut butter, avocado, or olives. Some items can be choking risks for young children.

Desserts

Don't have desserts for every meal. When you have dessert, choose options like fruit, pudding, or oatmeal cookies. Serve rich desserts such as cake or pie less often.

Snacks

Children often need snacks between meals. Choose snacks with milk, fruit, vegetables, yogurt, cheese, eggs, or whole grain foods. Offer sugary or processed snacks less often. Schedule snacks for about two hours before or after meals. Keep portions small.

Picky Eating

Food struggles are common and part of learning independence. Parents and children have different roles.

Parents decide:

- What food is offered
- When meals and snacks happen
- Where meals are eaten

Children decide:

- If they eat
- How much they eat

Trust your child's hunger and fullness cues.

Adding Fruits and Vegetables

Try these easy ways to add produce:

- Mix grated vegetables or fruit into baked goods.
- Use yogurt or cottage cheese dips.
- Make kabobs with soft foods.
- Add vegetables to burgers or meatloaf.
- Blend smoothies with fruit and vegetables.
- Offer fruit or vegetable pouches.

Other Nutrition Needs

Some children may need iodine, iron, or vitamin D. This depends on diet, milk intake, and sun exposure. Always talk with your doctor before starting supplements. Keep iron supplements out of reach.

Resources

Choose MyPlate

<https://www.myplate.gov/>

American Heart Association

<https://www.heart.org/>

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

<https://www.eatright.org/>

Who to Call

If you have questions, please contact your provider through MyChart or call your provider listed in your After Visit Summary or After Hospital Care Plan. For a list of UW Health Clinics, visit www.uwhealth.org/.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 4/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#194