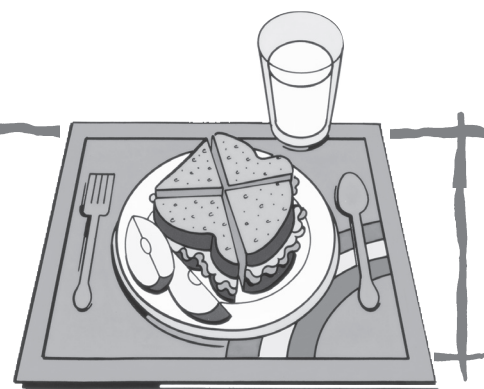


# What's to Eat? Healthy Foods for Hungry Children



Young children need a variety of foods to get the energy they need to grow up healthy. Read on for information from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) on creative ways to serve up breakfast and lunch, tips for picky eaters, and how to make healthy fast-food choices. Also read some tips about food safety, choking hazards, food allergies, and microwave safety. If you have specific questions about your child's nutrition, talk with your child's doctor or a registered dietitian.

## Off to a good start...breakfast

Breakfast gives children energy to carry through an active morning. Children who skip breakfast may not concentrate well at school or may lack energy to play. They also tend to eat unhealthy foods as snacks.

Cereal with low-fat milk is a favorite, but sweetened cereal can have a lot of added sugar. Check the Nutrition Facts label before buying. Although the percent daily values on food labels are based on calorie levels for adults, they can still be used to select more nutrient-rich cereals (and other foods). Choose cereals with less than 10 grams of sugar and at least 2 grams of fiber per serving. If your child prefers a sweet taste, jazz up unsweetened cereal with sliced peaches or bananas, strawberries, or blueberries.

For children who don't like traditional breakfast foods like cereal or toast, try one of the following recipes:

- **Breakfast shake:** Combine milk, fruit, and ice in a blender. (See "Milk—whole or reduced fat?")
- **Frozen banana:** Dip a banana in yogurt, then roll it in crushed cereal. Freeze.
- **Leftovers:** Serve whole-wheat spaghetti or chicken hot or cold.
- **Peanut butter snack:** Spread peanut butter on whole-wheat crackers, a tortilla, apple slices, or jicama slices. (See "Safety check.")

## Milk—whole or reduced fat?

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

Age	Type of milk
Younger than 12 months	Breast milk is best; iron-fortified formula should be used if breast milk is not available.
12 to 24 months	Wholemilk. Your child's doctor may recommend reduced-fat (2%) or low-fat (1%) 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 a registered dietitian before switching from whole to reduced-fat milk. Note: Breastfeeding can continue after 12 months of age as long as is desired by mom and baby.
Older than 24 months	Low-fat (1%) or nonfat (skim) milk

## Lunches worth munchin'

Children who help make their own lunches are more likely to eat them. Following are ideas to make lunches fun!

- Use cookie cutters to cut sandwiches into fun, interesting shapes.
- Decorate lunch bags with colorful stickers.
- Put a new twist on a sandwich favorite. Top peanut butter with raisins, bananas, or apple slices.
- For color and crunch, use a variety of veggies as sandwich toppers: cucumber slices, grated carrots, or zucchini.

## Picky eaters

Even the most nutritious meal won't do any good if a child won't eat it. Some children are picky eaters. Others eat only certain foods—or refuse food—as a way to assert themselves. Try these ideas to make your family meals pleasant.

- If your child refuses one food from a food group, try another from the same food group.
  - Try deep-yellow or orange vegetables instead of green vegetables.
  - Try chicken, turkey, fish, or pork instead of lean beef.
  - Try low-fat flavored milk, cheese, or yogurt instead of low-fat milk.
- Boost the nutritional value of prepared dishes with extra ingredients. Add nonfat dry milk to cream soups, milk shakes, and puddings. Mix grated zucchini and carrots into quick breads, muffins, meat loaf, lasagna, and soups.
- Serve a food your child enjoys along with a food that he or she has refused to eat in the past.
- Try serving a food again if it was refused before. It may take many tries before a child likes it.
- Invite children to help with food preparation. It can make eating food more fun.
- Add eye appeal. Cut foods into interesting shapes. Create a smiling face on top of a casserole with cheese, vegetables, or fruit strips.
- Set a good example by eating well yourself. Ideally, eat at least one meal together as a family every day or try for 3 to 4 times per week.

*Note:* The amount of food and number of servings children need daily from each food group depends on their age and how active they are. Some parents worry because young children seem to eat small amounts of food, especially when compared with adult portions.

Don't worry about how little a child eats. A child who is growing well is getting enough to eat. If you are concerned, talk with your child's doctor.

## Hungry and in a hurry? Food for fast times

When it comes to food, families want convenience. It's no surprise that fast-food restaurants are so popular. However, many fast foods have a lot of fat, calories, and salt. Children and adults can eat these foods every once in a while if other food choices are sensible. Following are tips on how to make healthier fast-food choices:

## At fast-food restaurants

- **Share.** Split an order of fries with other family members.
- **Choose a food from each food group.** Most fast-food places offer a variety of lower-fat choices, including the salad bar (low-fat dressing), plain baked potatoes (top with veggies or salsa), chili, low-fat milk, low-fat frozen yogurt, English muffins, or grilled (non-fried) chicken sandwiches.
- **Substitute.** Order 100% fruit juice (unsweetened) or low-fat milk instead of soft drinks. If dessert is included with a meal, ask if fruit is available instead of a dessert.
- **Balance high-fat choices with low-fat choices.** Order a small hamburger and the salad bar. Kids often like many foods available on a salad bar like fresh fruit, carrot sticks, and broccoli florets.

## At the supermarket

- **Plan ahead.** It takes less than a minute to fix a sandwich with reduced-fat meat and cheese if you have the ingredients. Check the Nutrition Facts label on packaged meats because many deli meats, like salami and bologna, are high in fat.
- **Shop for healthier meals.** For grab-and-go meals, try ready-made deli sandwiches (made with reduced-fat deli meats) or roasted chicken served with fresh fruits and vegetables from the salad bar.
- **Shop for healthier snacks.** Whole-wheat pretzels, baked tortilla chips, and baked potato chips are low-fat alternatives, but watch the salt content.

## Safety check

### Food safety

Remember 2 important rules to prevent food-borne illness.

1. Everyone should wash their hands well before and after meals.
2. Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. When there's no refrigerator to store a bag lunch, the following are ways to keep food safe:
  - Tuck an ice- or freezer-pack into the lunch bag. Or use an insulated container to keep hot foods hot.
  - Add a box of frozen 100% fruit juice (unsweetened). *Note:* The AAP recommends that juice be limited to 4 to 6 ounces per day for children 1 to 6 years of age, and 8 to 12 ounces per day for children 7 to 18 years of age.
  - Freeze the sandwich bread and filling—or other freezable foods—the night before.

### Active play is important too!

Physical activity, along with proper nutrition, promotes lifelong health. Active play is the best exercise for kids! Parents can join their children and have fun while being active too. Some fun activities for parents and kids to do together include playing on swings, riding tricycles or bicycles, jumping rope, flying a kite, making a snowman, swimming, or dancing. The daily recommendation for exercise for children (adults too) is at least 1 hour per day. This takes commitment from parents, but the rewards are together time and better health.

## Choking hazards

Do not feed children younger than 4 years 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 years.

## Peanut allergies

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.

## Microwave safely!

A microwave oven can help you cook in a healthful way. Vegetables cooked in a microwave oven stay nutrient-rich. Meat, fish, and poultry dishes can be cooked or reheated with little or no added fat.

Microwaving also can help you cook faster and easier. But it can pose potential hazards—especially when children cook with the microwave oven.

*Burns* are the most common microwave injury. Children can be burned by

- Removing dishes from the microwave oven—make sure they use a pot holder.
- Spilling hot foods—keep the oven out of a young child's reach.
- Opening microwave popcorn packages and other containers—show older children how to open the container so steam escapes away from their hands and face.
- Eating food that is cooked unevenly or has hot spots—show older children how to stir food well before tasting it, or let food rest so that heat distributes evenly.

Remember to only use containers labeled for use in the microwave.

*Safety tip:* If children are too young to read or follow written directions, they are too young to use a microwave oven without supervision.

## For more information

### American Academy of Pediatrics

[www.HealthyChildren.org](http://www.HealthyChildren.org)

### Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

[www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org) and [www.kidseatright.org](http://www.kidseatright.org)

### US Department of Agriculture and other federal government agencies

[www.nutrition.gov](http://www.nutrition.gov) (includes information about the new food group symbol, MyPlate, which replaces MyPyramid)

Developed in collaboration with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (formerly American Dietetic Association). For more information about the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, visit their Web site at [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org).

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