

Tip Sheet: Healthy Eating for Toddlers Ages 3 through 5 Years

Encouraging Healthy Eating Habits

- Start with age-appropriate servings, as listed in the chart on the next page.
- Teach him to eat slowly. Ask if he is still hungry before allowing him to serve himself more food. Taking the time to decide if he is hungry or full will help him pay attention to important cues from his body.
- Avoid requiring your child to clean her plate. Help her learn to eat based on how hungry she is, not on how much food is still on her plate.
- Understand your role and your child's. Your job is to offer a variety of healthy foods at regular meal times; his job is to decide what and how much to eat.
- Be a positive role model. Sit with your child and let her observe you eat a healthy, balanced diet. Serve yourself appropriate portions and try “new” foods. Eat when you are hungry and stop when you are full, even if there is food left on your plate. Talk about what you are doing.
- Pay attention to your preschooler's cues. He may not say that he is full, but may show it by starting to play, becoming distracted, shaking his head “no,” pushing food around on his plate or simply refusing to eat.
- Complaints of being hungry, especially when a child has just eaten, may be due to other triggers such as boredom, TV advertising or seeing another person eating.
- Given healthy servings, most children can sense when they are full and will stop eating if you let them. The amount of food a preschooler eats may change from day to day, but a healthy child will generally consume just the right amount of food to nourish her body.

Trying New Foods

It is natural for preschoolers to be cautious about trying new foods; but remember that by and large, they should eat what the rest of the family is eating. If you are eating and enjoying a variety of healthy foods, they won't want to be left out.

- When offering a new food, feed a familiar food with the new one, alternating bites between each.
- Some children are less likely than others to try new things. It may take her 5 – 20 times of trying a new food before she will like it. Don't give up!
- Encourage your child to try new foods—at least one bite. Begin by putting a small amount on his plate (e.g., two peas). However, do not force him to finish more than he feels comfortable eating.
- Model trying new foods. Try a new fruit or vegetable and talk about how it looks, smells and tastes.
- Avoid rewarding good behavior or a clean plate with foods of any kind. Especially avoid forcing your child to finish the “healthy foods” to get dessert or sweets—this can make the healthy food seem like punishment and force her to eat when she is full.
- Offer desserts rarely so he does not expect one at every meal.

How Much to Feed Your Child

Understand your role and your child's role at mealtimes. Your job is to offer healthy foods at regular times; your child's job is to decide whether and how much to eat.

Ask your healthcare provider if you have any questions about feeding your child.

Choking Hazards

Do not feed children younger than four years of age round, firm food unless it is chopped completely.

The following foods are choking hazards:

- Nuts and seeds
- Large chunks of cheese or meat (e.g., hot dogs)
- Whole grapes, chunks of hard fruit (e.g., apples) and raw vegetables
- Peanut butter
- Ice cubes
- Raisins
- Popcorn
- Hard, gooey, or sticky candy, chewing gum

*Never leave a young child unattended while she/he is eating.

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	BREAKFAST	LUNCH/ SUPPER	SNACK
	Serve first 3 components	Serve all 4 components	Select 2 of the 4 components
1. Milk, fluid (Fat-free or 1% low-fat)	3/4 cup	3/4 cup	1/2 cup
2. Fruit or Vegetable	1/2 cup	Serve 2 or more separate fruit/vegetable dishes: 1/2 cup total (1/4 cup for each)	1/2 cup
3. Grain or Bread			
Bread	1/2 slice	1/2 slice	1/2 slice
Grain or Pasta	—	1/4 cup	1/4 cup
Cereal – Dry	1/3 cup	1/3 cup	1/3 cup
Cereal – Hot	1/4 cup	1/4 cup	1/4 cup
4. Meat or Meat Alternate (protein source)			
Lean meat, poultry/fish	1/2 oz	1 1/2 oz	1/2 oz
Cheese	1/2 oz	1 1/2 oz	1/2 oz
Cottage cheese	2 Tbsp	3/8 cup (1/4 cup + 2 Tbsp)	2 Tbsp
Large egg	1/2 egg	3/4 egg	1/2 egg
Cooked dry beans/peas	—	3/8 cup (1/4 cup + 2 Tbsp)	2 Tbsp
Peanut butter/other nut/seed butters	1 Tbsp	3 Tbsp	1 Tbsp
Nuts or seeds	1/2 oz	3/4 oz	1/2 oz
Yogurt, plain or flavored	1/4 cup	3/4 cup	1/4 cup



Milk

6 oz (3/4 cup) serving
shown in a 9 oz cup:

- Fat-free or 1% (low-fat) milk



Juice

4 oz (1/2 cup) serving in a
9 oz cup –100% juice

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Age-Appropriate Servings for Lunch/Supper for Preschoolers Ages 3 through 5 Years

Grain/Bread

1/4 cup serving shown

Meat/Meat Alternate

1-1/2 oz serving shown



Fruit/Vegetable

1/2 cup total
(1/4 cup each)

Lunch/Supper
shown on 8" plate.
Add milk to complete
the meal requirements.