

Eating Right = Healthy Children!



Good nutrition is essential for supporting preschoolers' healthy growth while avoiding obesity. Parents can offer the foods that children need and help them develop good eating habits. Here are some ideas for helping children eat right.

What do 2- to 5-year-old children need in their daily diet?

The amount of food that your child needs depends on their age, size, and activity level. Many children will eat more some days than others. You can learn more about the daily recommended amounts for your child at MyPlate.gov and HealthyChildren.org. Children should not be pressured to eat more than they want. As you plan the day's meals and snacks for your child, keep the following in mind:

- Grains, such as bread or cereal, at least half whole-grain
- Vegetables, of varied colors
- Fruit
- Milk or dairy, including nondairy milks, low-fat for most children
- Protein, including meat, beans, eggs, and peanut butter

What about sweet drinks and desserts?

It's best to limit these but not to completely ban any food. Sweet foods should not be used as rewards. Water is the healthiest drink most of the time. Sweet drinks and foods may...

- Interfere with your child's appetite for more nourishing food.
- Lead to tooth decay.
- Make it easier for your child to consume too many calories.

How can parents teach their children good eating habits?

The best way to encourage healthy eating is by setting a good example. You can offer fresh foods to avoid preservatives and the added salt, sugar, and fat often found in processed foods. You can also plan for the family to eat together at home as often as possible. Here are some more ideas:

- Offer a variety of foods and let your child help with food choice and preparation.
- Encourage your child to try new foods.
- Serve small portions, with seconds available.
- Help your child recognize and stop when they have had enough.

Are occasional fast food meals OK?

When you eat fast food, talk to children in advance about making healthy choices. You can also ...

- Replace soda with milk or water and fries with fruit.
- Choose grilled foods rather than fried foods.

The opinions, resources, and referrals provided in this Tip Sheet are intended for information purposes only and should not be considered or used as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. We advise parents to ask their child's health care provider for advice on their child's healthiest weight and fitness level.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



13 Children's Research Center
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
51 Gerty Dr. • Champaign, IL 61820-7469
Telephone: 217-333-1386
Toll-free: 877-275-3227
E-mail: iel@illinois.edu
<https://illinoisearlylearning.org>



Illinois
State Board of
Education