Healthy Eating for Preschoolers

Get your child on the path to healthy eating.

Offer a variety of healthy foods.
Choose foods from each MyPlate food group. Pay attention to dairy foods, whole grains, and vegetables to build healthy habits that will last a lifetime.

Be mindful of sweet drinks and other foods.
Offer water instead of sugary drinks like regular soda and fruit drinks. Other foods like hot dogs, burgers, pizza, cookies, cakes, and candy are only occasional treats.

Focus on the meal and each other.
Your child learns by watching you. Let your child choose how much to eat of foods you provide. Children copy your likes, dislikes, and your interest in trying new foods.

Be patient with your child.
Children enjoy food when eating it is their own choice. Some new foods take time. Give a taste at first and wait a bit. Let children serve themselves by taking small amounts. Offer new foods many times.

Cook together.
Eat together.
Talk together.
Make meal time family time.

Choose MyPlate.gov

Food and Nutrition Service
USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

FNS-451
Revised December 2016
## Daily Food Checklist

Use this Checklist as a general guide.

- This food checklist is based on average needs. Do not be concerned if your child does not eat the exact amounts suggested. Your child may need more or less than average. For example, food needs increase during growth spurts.
- Children’s appetites vary from day to day. Some days they may eat less than these amounts; other days they may want more. Let your child choose how much to eat. Throughout a day, offer amounts shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food group</th>
<th>2 year olds</th>
<th>3 year olds</th>
<th>4 and 5 year olds</th>
<th>What counts as:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fruits</td>
<td>1 cup</td>
<td>1 – 1½ cups</td>
<td>1 – 1½ cups</td>
<td>½ cup of fruit? 1 ½ cup mashed, sliced, or chopped fruit ½ cup 100% fruit juice ½ small banana 4-5 large strawberries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>1 cup</td>
<td>1 – 1½ cups</td>
<td>1½ – 2 cups</td>
<td>½ cup of veggies? 1 ½ cup mashed, sliced, or chopped vegetables 1 cup raw leafy greens ½ cup vegetable juice 1 small ear of corn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grains</td>
<td>3 ounces</td>
<td>3 – 5 ounces</td>
<td>4 – 5 ounces</td>
<td>1 ounce of grains? 1 slice bread 1 cup ready-to-eat cereal flakes ½ cup cooked oatmeal, rice, or pasta 1 tortilla (6” across)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein Foods</td>
<td>2 ounces</td>
<td>2 – 4 ounces</td>
<td>3 – 5 ounces</td>
<td>1 ounce of protein foods? 1 ounce cooked meat, poultry, or seafood 1 egg 1 Tablespoon peanut butter ¼ cup cooked beans or peas (kidney, pinto, lentils)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>2 cups</td>
<td>2 – 2½ cups</td>
<td>2½ cups</td>
<td>½ cup of dairy? ½ cup milk 4 ounces yogurt ¼ ounce cheese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some foods are easy to choke on while eating. Children need to sit when eating. Foods like hot dogs, grapes, and raw carrots need to be cut into small pieces the size of a nickel. Be alert if serving 3- to 5-year-olds foods like popcorn, nuts, seeds, or other hard foods.

There are many ways to divide the Daily Food Checklist into meals and snacks. View the ‘Meal and Snack Patterns and Ideas’ to see how these amounts might look on your preschooler’s plate at www.ChooseMyPlate.gov/preschoolers-meal-and-snack-patterns.
Encourage children to eat vegetables and fruits by making it fun. Provide healthy ingredients and let kids help with preparation, based on their age and skills. Kids may try foods they avoided in the past if they helped make them.

1 smoothie creations
   Blend fat-free or low-fat yogurt or milk with fruit pieces and crushed ice. Use fresh, frozen, canned, and even overripe fruits. Try bananas, berries, peaches, and/or pineapple. If you freeze the fruit first, you can even skip the ice!

2 delicious dippers
   Kids love to dip their foods. Whip up a quick dip for veggies with yogurt and seasonings such as herbs or garlic. Serve with raw vegetables like broccoli, carrots, or cauliflower. Fruit chunks go great with a yogurt and cinnamon or vanilla dip.

3 caterpillar kabobs
   Assemble chunks of melon, apple, orange, and pear on skewers for a fruity kabob. For a raw veggie version, use vegetables like zucchini, cucumber, squash, sweet peppers, or tomatoes.

4 personalized pizzas
   Set up a pizza-making station in the kitchen. Use whole-wheat English muffins, bagels, or pita bread as the crust. Have tomato sauce, low-fat cheese, and cut-up vegetables or fruits for toppings. Let kids choose their own favorites. Then pop the pizzas into the oven to warm.

5 fruity peanut butterfly
   Start with carrot sticks or celery for the body. Attach wings made of thinly sliced apples with peanut butter and decorate with halved grapes or dried fruit.

6 frosty fruits
   Frozen treats are bound to be popular in the warm months. Just put fresh fruits such as melon chunks in the freezer (rinse first). Make "popsicles" by inserting sticks into peeled bananas and freezing.

7 bugs on a log
   Use celery, cucumber, or carrot sticks as the log and add peanut butter. Top with dried fruit such as raisins, cranberries, or cherries, depending on what bugs you want!

8 homemade trail mix
   Skip the pre-made trail mix and make your own. Use your favorite nuts and dried fruits, such as unsalted peanuts, cashews, walnuts, or sunflower seeds mixed with dried apples, pineapple, cherries, apricots, or raisins. Add whole-grain cereals to the mix, too.

9 potato person
   Decorate half a baked potato. Use sliced cherry tomatoes, peas, and low-fat cheese on the potato to make a funny face.

10 put kids in charge
   Ask your child to name new veggie or fruit creations. Let them arrange raw veggies or fruits into a fun shape or design.

Go to www.ChooseMyPlate.gov for more information.
be a healthy role model for children

10 tips for setting good examples

You are the most important influence on your child. You can do many things to help your children develop healthy eating habits for life. Offering a variety of foods helps children get the nutrients they need from every food group. They will also be more likely to try new foods and to like more foods. When children develop a taste for many types of foods, it’s easier to plan family meals. Cook together, eat together, talk together, and make mealtime a family time!

1. show by example
   Eat vegetables, fruits, and whole grains with meals or as snacks. Let your child see that you like to munch on raw vegetables.

2. go food shopping together
   Grocery shopping can teach your child about food and nutrition. Discuss where vegetables, fruits, grains, dairy, and protein foods come from. Let your children make healthy choices.

3. get creative in the kitchen
   Cut food into fun and easy shapes with cookie cutters. Name a food your child helps make. Serve “Janie’s Salad” or “Jackie’s Sweet Potatoes” for dinner. Encourage your child to invent new snacks.

4. offer the same foods for everyone
   Stop being a “short-order cook” by making different dishes to please children. It’s easier to plan family meals when everyone eats the same foods.

5. reward with attention, not food
   Show your love with hugs and kisses. Comfort with hugs and talks. Choose not to offer sweets as rewards. It lets your child think sweets or dessert foods are better than other foods. When meals are not eaten, kids do not need “extras”—such as candy or cookies—as replacement foods.

6. focus on each other at the table
   Talk about fun and happy things at mealtine. Turn off the television. Take phone calls later. Try to make eating meals a stress-free time.

7. listen to your child
   If your child says he or she is hungry, offer a small, healthy snack—even if it is not a scheduled time to eat. Offer choices. Ask “Which would you like for dinner: broccoli or cauliflower?” instead of “Do you want broccoli for dinner?”

8. limit screen time
   Allow no more than 2 hours a day of screen time like TV and computer games. Get up and move during commercials to get some physical activity.

9. encourage physical activity
   Make physical activity fun for the whole family. Encourage your child to get creative in the kitchen. Cut and serve food into fun and easy shapes with cookie cutters.

10. be a good food role model
    Try new foods yourself. Describe its taste, texture, and smell. Offer one new food at a time. Serve something your child likes along with the new food. Offer new foods at the beginning of a meal, when your child is very hungry. Avoid lecturing or forcing your child to eat.

Go to www.ChooseMyPlate.gov for more information.