Feeding Your Child

Ages 2 to 5 years

These are general guidelines for feeding healthy children, ages two to five. Talk with the nutritionist or health care provider for more information on feeding your child.

Eating Habits

Most eating habits are learned in childhood. These habits affect food choices and health throughout life.

To help develop good eating habits, parents should:

- Plan regular mealtimes and snacktimes. Limit eating or drinking between planned mealtimes and snacktimes.
- Serve meals when your child is not tired.
- Eat family meals together. It provides security for children. It is also a time for children to see what and how you eat.
- Keep the television off during mealtime.
- Make mealtime happy.
- Serve foods with bright colors, mild flavors, and a variety of textures.
- Set a good example.
- Pay attention to your child when his or her mealtime behavior is desirable. Behavior that is rewarded is repeated.
- Have healthy foods ready and prepared for quick snacks.
- Plan enough time for play, rest, and sleep.
- Comfort and reward with love and attention, not with food.

Physical Activity

Children should be physically active for 1 hour or more every day. In general, preschoolers should not be sitting still for 1 hour or more at a time, except when sleeping.

Here are some examples of the activities children can do:

- Walking
- Riding a tricycle
- Swimming
- Playing outside at a park or playground
- Playing ball
- Dancing to music
- Running and skipping
- Jumping and hopping

Set aside time each day for the family to do some type of physical activity together.

Screen Time: Television & Computer Use

- Children 2 years of age and older should watch no more than 1 hour per day of educational, non-violent television programs.
- Computer use should be limited to no more than 15-minute time periods.
- Do not allow your child to have a television set or computer in his or her bedroom.

Eat Healthy Foods When You’re Away from Home

Choose these items MORE often:

- lowfat milk, water
- turkey sandwich with vegetables
- small, plain hamburger with vegetables
- grilled or broiled chicken sandwich
- baked potato
- cheese pizza or pizza with vegetable toppings
- fruits and vegetables
- lowfat frozen yogurt
- lowfat or fat free salad dressings

Choose these items LESS often:

- soda, sweet tea, fruit drinks
- sausages, pepperoni, hot dogs, or bacon
- fried chicken or chicken nuggets
- fried fish, french fries, or fried onion rings
- biscuits, hush puppies
- olives, bacon bits
- salads made with mayonnaise
- seeds, nuts
- higher fat salad dressings
- high fat, high sugar desserts such as cake or pie

What changes will you make in your family’s eating and activity habits?

Florida Department of Health, WIC Program
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Daily Food Guide for Children Ages 2 to 5 years

Offer your child foods from each of these food groups daily. Amounts may vary with your child’s activity and growth.

Protein Foods
Total of 2 to 4 ounces every day
1 oz equals:
- 1 oz cooked meat, poultry, or fish
- 1 cooked egg
- 1 tablespoon peanut butter*
- ¼ cup cooked beans

Vegetables
Total of 1 to 1½ cups every day
½ cup equals:
- ½ cup cooked vegetables
- ½ cup chopped raw vegetables*
- 1 cup raw leafy vegetables*
- ½ cup 100% vegetable juice

*Be careful. These foods may cause choking, especially in children under 4 years of age.

Dairy
Total of 2 to 2½ cups every day
1 cup equals:
- 1 cup milk or yogurt
- 1½ oz natural cheese
- 2 oz processed cheese

Grains
Total of 3 to 5 oz every day
1 oz equals:
- 1 slice of bread
- ½ cup cooked cereal, rice, or pasta
- 1 cup (1 oz) dry cereal
- 5 to 6 whole grain crackers
- 1 4-inch waffle or pancake
- 1 6-inch tortilla
- ½ hamburger bun, roll, or 3-inch bagel

Fruits
Total of 1 to 1½ cups every day
½ cup equals:
- ½ cup chopped, cooked, or canned fruit
- ¼ cup dried fruit*
- ½ cup 100% fruit juice

Limit 100% fruit juice to:
- 4 oz (½ cup) per day for children 1 to 3 years of age
- 4 to 6 oz per day for children 4 to 6 years of age

Oils
Total of 3 to 4 teaspoons every day
One teaspoon (5 grams) oil equals:
- 1 teaspoon liquid vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon light mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons light salad dressing
- 1 teaspoon margarine with zero trans fat

Limit solid fats like butter, regular margarine, shortening, and lard, as well as foods that contain these ingredients.

Prevent Choking
Do not give children under 4 years of age the following foods:
- Popcorn, nuts, seeds, dried fruits, large chunks of meat or cheese,
- Hard pieces of vegetables or fruits, hard candies, marshmallows, chips,
- Whole grapes, and fish or meat with bones. Peanut butter should only be given to children 2 years of age and older when spread thinly on crackers or toast.

Avoid oversized portions.
Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.
Make at least half your grains whole grains.
Switch to fat-free or lowfat (1%) milk.
Compare sodium in foods like soup, bread, and frozen meals and choose the foods with less sodium.

Eating less salt is an important way to help your child stay healthier as they grow. The daily limit for sodium for 1 to 3 year olds is 1,000 milligrams, and for 4 to 8 year olds it is less than 1,200 milligrams.

Drink water instead of sugary drinks.

Go to ChooseMyPlate.gov for more information about healthy eating, meal planning, food safety, and physical activity.

Eat Fish, Choose Wisely
Young children can eat 1 to 2 servings a week of a variety of fish that are lower in mercury. The serving size is 1 ounce for ages 2 to 3 years and 2 ounces for ages 4 to 7 years.

Some fish low in mercury are: canned light tuna, catfish (farm-raised), pollock, salmon, shad, tilapia, whitefish, and whiting.

Due to their mercury content, do not eat the following: Shark, King Mackerel, Swordfish, Tilefish, Orange Roughy, Bigeye Tuna, Blackfin Tuna, Little Tunny, Cobia, and Marlin.

If you eat fish caught by family or friends, check for local or state fish advisories.

In Florida, some of the fish advisories say do not eat or eat no more than once per month the following fish: Black Crappie, Chain Pickerel, Crevalle Jack, Great Barracuda, and Largemouth Bass.