

Keeping a Healthy Balance in Children

This pamphlet contains general guidelines about healthy eating, physical activity, and positive parenting for children ages 2 to 5 years. Talk with the nutritionist or health care provider for more information.

Positive Parenting

Children need to be loved, supported, accepted, and encouraged by their parents, family members, and friends. Children are more likely to feel good about themselves when they feel loved by their parents. Here are some positive parenting tips:

- Spend time reading, singing, and playing with your children every day.
- Listen to your children.
- Encourage your children every day. Be positive and tell your children what they are doing well.



- Tell your children you love them as a person, although there may be a behavior you dislike.
- Comfort and reward your children by doing a special activity. Rewards could be: a trip to the beach, park, or library; reading books; and playing games together. Do not use food as a reward.
- Remember, each child is an individual who is special and unique.
- Involve children in food shopping and meal preparation.
- Make sure your child gets enough sleep each night.

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Florida Department of Health
WIC Program
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Make Healthy Food Choices



- Choose foods every day from each of the food groups.
- The amount of food consumed daily may vary with your child's activity and growth. The goal is for your child to stay at a healthy weight or to "grow into" a healthy weight.
- Children 2 to 3 years old should generally eat the lower number of ounces or cups per day from each food group. Older children may need the higher amounts.
- The foods and drinks your preschooler has throughout the day are important for his or her health. Limit the amount of added sugars, sodium, and saturated fat in your preschooler's meals, drinks, and snacks.

To help children develop healthy eating habits:

- Encourage children to enjoy and learn about a variety of foods. All foods can fit into a healthy eating plan.
- At meals, try to fill about half of the plate with fruits and vegetables.
- Plan meals and snacks for about the same time each day.
- Drink water when thirsty. Limit sodas and sweet drinks.
- For meals and snacks, buy foods low in sugar, sodium (salt), and fat.
- Serve smaller portions. Let your child ask for seconds.
- Let children stop eating when they are full, instead of when the plate is empty.
- Eat meals together as a family as often as possible and make these mealtimes pleasant.
- Turn off the television during mealtime.

Physical Activity

Children should get 1 hour or more of physical activity per day. Preschoolers should not sit still for 1 hour or more at a time, except when sleeping. Plan times and places for your family to engage in activities such as those listed below:

- Walking
- Playing at the park or playground
- Swimming
- Riding a tricycle or bicycle
- Dancing to music
- Rollerskating or rollerblading
- Playing games such as soccer, kickball, basketball, and tennis
- Playing games that include running, skipping, hopping, jumping, or marching—these can be outdoor games or games that can be played indoors
- Joining in household tasks such as cleaning and yardwork



Screen Time:

Television, Smart Phones, Video Games & Computer Use

- For children 2 to 5 years of age, limit screen time to 1 hour per day of educational, non-violent programs. Parents should watch with children to help them understand what they are seeing.
- Do not allow your child to have a television, computer, or video games in his or her bedroom.

WIC has nutrition and cooking information on the Internet!

Go to wichealth.org. Sign up and complete your profile using the **Family ID** on your WIC Verification of Certification card. Click **Start Lesson** and then choose a lesson. There are a wide variety of lesson topics. Also see **Health eKitchen** for new recipes.

Protein

2 to 4 ounces per day



1 ounce protein equals:

- 1 ounce cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish
- 1 cooked egg
- ¼ cup cooked beans
- 1 tablespoon peanut butter*

Vary your protein routine

- Choose a variety of protein foods such as seafood, beans, lean meats, poultry, and eggs.
- Limit highly processed meat, turkey, chicken, fish, or meat (like hotdogs, sausage, chicken nuggets, and fish sticks). Even some “reduced fat” meats and cold cuts, like sausage, bologna, and salami, may be high in saturated fat and sodium.
- Add beans to children’s favorite foods. Add beans and peas to tacos, casseroles, stews, pastas, and side dishes.

Dairy

2 to 2½ cups per day



1 cup of dairy equals:

- 1 cup milk or yogurt
- 1½ ounces natural cheese
- 2 ounces processed cheese

Move to fat free or lowfat milk or yogurt

- Serve unflavored, fat free, and lowfat milks most often. They have less added sugar and fewer calories than flavored, whole, or reduced fat milk.
- Lowfat milk, yogurt, and cheese provide much needed calcium. Try making a dip for fruits or vegetables from yogurt.
- Blend milk or yogurt into smoothies. Combine fat free or lowfat yogurt with bananas and cocoa powder for a smoothie, or try milk, ice cubes, and frozen berries.

Fruits

1 to 1½ cups per day



½ cup of fruit equals:

- ½ cup chopped, cooked, or canned fruit
- ¼ cup dried fruit*
- ½ cup 100% fruit juice

Limit 100% fruit juice to ½ cup per day for children 2 to 3 years of age and ½ to ¾ cup per day for children 4 to 5 years of age.

Focus on whole fruits

- Serve a rainbow of choices. Fruit can be a quick and easy way to make meals and snacks healthier and more colorful.
- Choose from fresh, frozen, canned, and dried fruits. Buy canned fruit in water or 100% fruit juice instead of syrup.
- Limit fruit juice. While 100% fruit juice can be part of a healthy diet, it does not contain the dietary fiber found in other forms of fruit.
- Avoid fruit snacks or strips, which usually contain very little fruit.

Vegetables

1 to 1½ cups per day



½ cup of vegetables equals:

- ½ cup cooked vegetables
- ½ cup chopped raw vegetables*
- 1 cup leafy salad greens*
- ½ cup vegetable juice

Vary your veggies

- Serve a variety of colorful choices. Brighten children’s plates with red, orange, and dark green vegetables.
- Choose from fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables. Prepare and serve vegetables without added salt or solid fat.
- Try a dip. 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.

Grains

3 to 5 ounces per day



1 ounce of grains equals:

- 1 slice of bread
- ½ cup cooked cereal, rice, or pasta
- ¾ to 1 cup ready-to-eat 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

Make half your grains whole grains

- Make at least half of your children’s grains whole grains by offering 100% whole grain cereals, breads, and pasta.
- Vary the choices for whole grains. Rolled oats, oatmeal, brown rice, wild rice, bulgur (cracked wheat), quinoa, and millet are whole grain foods.
- Choose toppings wisely for toast, hot cereals, pasta, and rice. Instead of adding butter, stick margarine, and regular cheese, use vegetable oils, lowfat cheeses, or marinara sauce as toppings.

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