

Nutrition for the School-Aged Child

Linda Boeckner, Extension Nutrition Specialist
Karen Schledewitz, Extension Assistant

When you send your child off to school, your job related to healthful meals for your child isn't over. During the school years, many nutrition lessons still need to be taught. Your children will likely face new choices about what to eat during and after school. Schoolmates will have a greater influence on these choices.

Nutrients for the Growing Years

Carbohydrates and fats provide energy for growing and physical activity. Through the school years children will have periods of rapid growth and big appetites. When growth slows, appetites will decrease and children may want less food at meals and snacks.

Protein builds, maintains and repairs body tissue. It is especially important for growth. In the United States, most children do not suffer from lack of dietary protein. It is important, however, to encourage children to eat recommended amounts of protein-rich food each day. Milk and other dairy products, poultry, fish, pork and beef are examples of good protein sources.

A variety of vitamins and minerals support growth and development during childhood. Calcium from milk and dairy products and some dark green, leafy vegetables is usually sufficient in young children's diets. As children approach their teen years, dietary calcium intakes don't always keep up with recommendations. Calcium is particularly important in building strong bones and teeth. Osteoporosis, a brittle bone disease that affects older adults, begins in childhood if diets do not provide calcium-rich foods.

Iron deficiency anemia can be a problem for some children. Iron is an oxygen-carrying component of blood. Children need iron because of rapidly expanding blood volume during growth. For girls, the beginning of menstruation in late childhood adds an extra demand for iron due to the regular loss of iron in menstrual blood. Meats, fish, poultry and enriched breads and cereals are the best sources of dietary iron.

Vitamins A and C come from many different fruits and vegetables. They are important for healthy skin, growth and fighting infections. The B vitamins (thiamin, niacin, riboflavin and other B vitamins) come from a variety of foods including grain products, meat and meat substitutes and dairy products. They promote healthy growth in a variety of ways.

Parents should provide a variety of foods and establish regular meal and snack times and encourage physical activity for their children. In most cases, nutrient and energy needs will be adequately met. If parents are concerned about their children's poor nutrient intakes or their weights, they should consult with a physician or trained nutrition professional, such as a registered dietitian.

"A Pattern for Daily Food Choices" provides guidance for planning general daily food intakes for children. For more information about food selections for your child's specific age, sex and activity level, go to www.MyPyramid.gov. Look for the section titled, "For Kids."

Snacks

Growing and physically active children need snacks, but poor snack choices lead to too many calories and not enough nutrients. Parents and other caretakers can help children make nutritious snack choices by keeping foods on hand from the food groups shown in "A Pattern for Daily Food Choices."

Safe food handling and preparation is an important part of snacking. Young school children ages 5 to 8 should have snacks that are ready-to-eat or partly prepared. Older children enjoy preparing their own snacks. Review safety rules for using kitchen equipment and set limits for the amount of food preparation that can be done. Demonstrate how to use a microwave oven. Sharp, electrically powered equipment should be off limits unless a child has adult supervision. Encourage children to be responsible for their own kitchen activities by expecting them to clean up after themselves.

A Pattern for Daily Food Choices (for school-aged children).

| Food Groups | <i>Suggested Daily Amount (exercising 30 to 60 min/day)</i> | | | | Measurement Equivalents | Tip |
|--|---|-------------|--------------------|-------------------|--|---|
| | 5 yr. olds | 10 yr. olds | 14 yr. old girl | 14 yr. old boy | | |
| Grains includes foods made from whole grains | 5 oz. | 6 oz. | 6 oz. | 8 oz. | 1 oz. = 1 slice bread, 1 cup ready-to-eat cereal or 1/2 cup cooked cereal, pasta or rice | Make at least 1/2 of your grains whole grains |
| Vegetables includes all fresh, frozen and canned vegetables | 1.5 cups | 2.5 cups | 2.5 cups | 3 cups | 1 cup = 1 cup raw or cooked vegetables or 100% juice, 2 cups of raw, leafy greens | Choose a variety of colorful veggies |
| Fruits includes all fresh, frozen, canned and dried fruit | 1.5 cups | 1.5 cups | 2 cups | 2 cups | 1 cup = 1 cup fruit or 100% juice, 1/2 cup dried fruit | Eat more fruits than fruit juices |
| Milk includes milk, cheese and yogurt | 2 cups | 3 cups | 3 cups | 3 cups | 1 cup = 1 cup milk or yogurt, 1 1/2 oz. natural cheese, 2 oz. processed cheese | Eat low-fat or fat-free milk products |
| Meat and Beans includes beans, eggs and nuts | 4 oz. | 5 oz. | 5.5 oz. | 6.5 oz. | 1 oz. = 1 oz. lean meat, poultry or fish, 1 egg, 1 tablespoon peanut butter, 1/4cup cooked dry beans, 1/2 oz. nuts | Eat lean meat and vary your choices |

Children — Overweight and Physically Unfit?

U.S. children today are more overweight and less fit compared to children of the 1960s. A variety of factors affect this trend but a primary reason is lack of physical activity. Today's average school-aged child spends several hours each week watching television and working on the computer. The result is less time to be physically active. Added to the problem is the decline of physical education as children advance through the grade levels. The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that children engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week.

Parents can become positive examples for their children by joining them in physical activity. Outdoor activities such as playing tag, swinging, walking, bicycling, flying a kite, swimming, building a snow fort and others will boost energy requirements for a child and help to build healthy weights. Family outings which include hiking, picnicking, trips to the park playground, bicycle trips and bowling are more ideas.

Diets of school-aged children can also affect their weights. Use caution when dealing with an overweight child. Children should not be pushed to lose weight. Instead, focus on dietary variety within the guidelines found in "A Pattern for Daily

Food Choices." Do not isolate children from family meals by preparing separate food. The family menus should be appropriate for all family members, including an overweight child.

Keeping fat intake at moderate levels without being too extreme is important. Parents who are too restrictive with fat intake will limit a child's ability to eat sufficient calories to maintain growth. No foods should be forbidden in a child's diet. The key to achieving low to moderate fat levels is offering appropriate choices, balancing high fat choices with low fat choices and providing a variety of foods. Look over the table, "Food Choices by Level of Fat" to learn about available choices.

Summary

Nutrition for school-aged children should promote growth and meet energy and nutrient needs without promoting fatness. During the school years, children will experience increased opportunities to make choices about their food intakes. Parents can help their children make positive food choices by planning family mealtimes, keeping a variety of foods in supply and setting positive examples. Habits formed in childhood are likely to carry into adult years.

Food Choices by Level of Fat

Higher Fat Choices

Lower Fat Choices

Grain Food Group (For whole grains, look for whole grain as the first item on ingredient list)

| | |
|------------|---|
| Donuts | Whole Grain Cereal (oatmeal, whole grain corn, whole wheat) |
| Danish | Variety of whole grain or enriched bread (whole wheat, whole oats, whole rye) |
| Croissants | Pasta (whole wheat) |
| | Rice (brown rice, wild rice) |

Vegetables (eat more dark green and orange vegetables)

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Sauteed or deep-fried | Lightly steamed vegetables with herb seasonings or lemon |
| French fries | Plain potatoes with low-fat yogurt or cottage cheese or light amounts of margarine and sour cream |
| Au gratin potatoes | Raw vegetables |
| Creamy salads | Salads that use low fat dressing/vinegar/oil |

Meat and Beans (vary your protein sources - choose more fish, beans, peas, nuts and seeds)

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Fried eggs and meats | Select lean meat cuts; trim fat |
| Heavy sauces or gravy | Select lean ham, chicken, turkey to replace luncheon meats |
| High-fat meat cuts | Hard cooked eggs |
| Luncheon meats | Roasted or baked chicken |
| Hot dogs | |

Milk and Milk Products (If you can't drink milk, choose lactose-free products)

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Whole milk | Select low fat or nonfat milk, milk products and yogurt |
| Regular cheeses | Select sherbet or frozen yogurt to replace ice cream |
| Ice cream | Use low fat cheeses, such as mozzarella, ricotta and farmer's cheese |

Snack Items (use snacks only to supplement daily meals - not to replace them)

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Chips | Unbuttered popcorn |
| Buttered popcorn | Fruit and fruit shakes with low fat milk |
| Candy bars | Low fat crackers and bread sticks |
| Cookies | Graham or whole wheat crackers |

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