



Your Guide to

# Raising a Healthy Eater



Tips for Feeding Toddlers and Preschoolers



Having young children is one of the hardest and most rewarding times of your life! Between working and taking care of your family's needs, it's sometimes easy to forget to make sure everything is on track. That's where this guide comes in handy. Written with information from doctors, nutritionists, and moms who have been there, this is a great guide to help your child become a healthy eater. The more your kids grow, the more you will want to know!



*"I think when I use the phrase 'walk in my shoes' it means that I've been there. I, too, was a WIC participant.... So it's from heart to heart, mom to mom, we're building a bond together."*

- Melissa Sanders,  
Mom of 5, former WIC mom,  
now a WIC breastfeeding peer counselor



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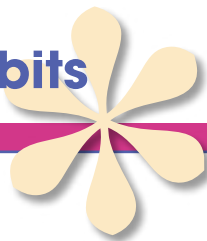
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**Did You Know?** WIC provides services for your child from birth to 5 years. Keep growing with WIC, we're here for you at [TexasWIC.org](http://TexasWIC.org).





## Make Mealtimes Happy

Most parents work too hard to get their children to eat. If you think your child isn't eating the right foods or enough of them, you are not alone. Nine out of 10 parents pressure their children to eat. Pressure makes a child eat worse, not better. Experts say the best thing you can do is relax — a battle over food is one you're sure to lose.

So what can you do? Do your job with feeding, and then trust your child to do her job with eating. Once your child is 1 year old, the feeding relationship should look like this:

### You decide:

- **When to offer food**  
Children need structure. This includes regular meals and snacks to grow, usually 3 meals and 2-3 snacks per day. Offer meals and snacks at the same time each day. Give only water between meal and snack times — that way, your child will be hungry when it is time to eat.
- **What foods to offer**  
Offer a variety of healthy foods. When you have treat foods, give only one serving. When you offer new foods, give them in small amounts and let your child ask for more.
- **Where to offer foods**  
Children eat best when they sit down for meals and snacks. Try to get everyone to sit and eat meals and snacks together at the family table.

### Your child decides:

- **Which foods to eat**  
Let your child choose one, two, or no foods to eat from the food choices you provide.
- **Whether or not to eat**  
It's normal for children to eat a lot one day and hardly anything the next day. Don't force your child to eat — your child will eat when she is hungry.



## Make Mealtime a Family Time

Family meals give you a chance to model good behaviors and help children learn to eat the foods you eat. It takes a little work to bring everyone together for meals. But it's worth it — the whole family eats better.

- **Start early.** Start eating meals together as a family when your child is young. Your child will grow used to this family time and build lasting memories.
- **Plan it.** Plan when you will eat together as a family. Write it on your calendar.
- **Prepare ahead.** If it's too hard to make meals during the week, cook the weekend before, and freeze and reheat food. You could also use a slow-cooker to have a meal ready when you get home.
- **Make an effort.** Try to have family meals most days of the week.
- **Make memories that will last a lifetime.** Keep family mealtimes pleasant without arguing or being negative. Make sure the TV is off; focus on the meal and each other.

### Did You Know?

Children with regular family meals are healthier, do better in school, and aren't as likely to be overweight or abuse drugs or alcohol.





## What is the Best Way to Feed My Child?

- **Start with yourself.** Set a good example by eating and enjoying a variety of foods.
- **Eat with your child.** Serve the foods you eat and resist making a different meal for your child. It helps to include at least one thing your child will eat, such as a whole-grain roll or a certain fruit or vegetable.
- **Feed with no pressure.** Offer foods without demanding, rewarding, or bribing. Try not to say things like, “clean your plate,” “eat your vegetables,” and “no dessert until you eat your vegetables.” On the other hand, it also means not praising your child if she does clean her plate or tries a new food.
- **Let your child do her eating (or not eating).** Let your child know that it’s okay to only eat as much as he or she wants at that time.



### Don't Worry...

- if your child does not eat a meal or snack. Just offer her healthy foods at the next planned meal or snack.
- if your child likes to eat the same food for a few days.
- if your child likes one food one day and refuses it the next day.

## Help Your Child Grow Into New Foods

Think of the last new food you tried. Were you excited to try it or not sure? Well, for your child, a new food comes to the table almost every day. That can be scary. So, how can you help?

- **Be a good role model** by trying new foods yourself. This teaches your child new foods are something to enjoy, not fear.
- **Ask your child to help pick out a new fruit and vegetable** at the store or help with preparing the food.
- **Children rarely eat a new food the first time they see it.** Don’t give up. It may take up to a dozen tries for your child to try a new food.
- **When you serve a new food, don’t make a big deal of it.** Pressuring your child to eat makes her eat less well, not better. Keep conversation focused on non-food topics.
- **Offer only one new food at a time.** Serve something that you know your child likes along with the new food.
- **Serve different colors.** Try adding a bit of tomato, carrot, or zucchini to perk up your child’s interest.
- **Serve different textures** like soft foods, chewy foods, and crisp foods that are still easy to chew.







## Kids in the Kitchen, Lessons for Life

Children who help an adult in the kitchen may be more likely to try and like more foods, plus they learn other skills, too. They learn basic math and science, new words, and how to help clean up messes. Remind your child to wash her hands first. Be patient in the kitchen, and be sure to praise your child for her efforts.

- Have a color contest and see how many green, red, yellow, and orange fruits and vegetables you can include in one meal.
- Cut foods into fun and easy shapes with cookie cutters.
- Name a food your child helps create. Make a big deal of serving “Karla’s Salad” or “Corey’s Sweet Potatoes” for dinner.
- Try a “Make Your Own” night. Let your family put together its own soft tacos, sandwiches, pizza, or salads. Place the ingredients within easy reach and let the fun begin.



### Little helpers with big hearts.

Doing simple tasks not only helps you out, it also builds your child’s confidence and lets her know that she’s a valuable part of the family. It means a lot when you thank her for all of her hard work.

## Stay Positive with Picky Eaters

Many parents have questions about how to help their picky eaters. Most of the time, picky eating gets better over time when you don’t make a big deal about it. Here are some tips that may help.

**Q: My daughter won’t eat her vegetables. How can I get her to eat them?**

Learning to like vegetables can be challenging for some children. When you keep offering vegetables without pressuring your child to eat them, you are doing a good job. It can take some children up to a dozen times to learn to like a food. That’s a lot of tries!

**Q: Every day, it’s the same thing — all she ever wants to eat is macaroni and cheese! How do I get her to try new foods?**

Young children are cautious about new foods. Sometimes they get into food habits and want to eat the same thing all the time. If your child doesn’t feel pressured, she may try the new food by touching, smelling, or eventually tasting it. You can also offer a familiar food along with the new food. The new foods will be better accepted if she is hungry and sees the rest of the family enjoying them.

**Q: Sometimes my child doesn’t want to eat at mealtime but wants to eat snacks and drink milk all day. Is it okay to give her all those snacks and milk whenever she asks for them?**

It’s okay to give children some healthy snacks because their stomachs can’t hold very much food. On the other hand, you shouldn’t let her eat snacks and drink milk or juice all day long. Regular mealtimes are important, and if your child asks for a snack close to mealtime, let her know that she will be fed soon. If you do decide to offer a snack because the meal is running late, offer a light snack so that your child will still be hungry when it’s time to eat.



It is perfectly normal for young children to be less interested in food at mealtimes, but many parents worry because it seems their child isn’t eating like before. If your child is growing well, her appetite is probably fine. Try to relax, keep offering a variety of healthy foods, and let your child choose how much to eat.



## What and How Much Should I Feed My Child?

The amount of food your child needs depends on her age, sex, and activity level. But all children need a variety of foods from different food groups. You can make a healthy plate using the tips below.

- Fill half your child's plate with fruits and veggies.
- Make one quarter of your child's plate grains, choosing whole grains most often.
- Add a serving of protein. Choose lean protein like chicken, fish, lean beef, or beans.
- Offer fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk (instead of whole or 2% milk) to children once they reach the age of two.

### Healthy Eating for preschoolers

**MyPlate.gov**

**Get your child on the path to healthy eating.**

*Focus on the meal and each other.*  
Your child learns by watching you. Children are likely to copy your table manners, your likes and dislikes, and your willingness to try new foods.

*Offer a variety of healthy foods.*  
Let your child choose how much to eat. Children are more likely to enjoy a food when eating it is their own choice.

*Be patient with your child.*  
Sometimes new foods take time. Give children a taste at first and be patient with them. Offer new foods many times.

*Let your children serve themselves.*  
Teach your children to take small amounts at first. Let them know they can get more if they are still hungry.

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

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USDA U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service  
 FNS-451 October 2012  
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Handout available from [MyPlate.gov](http://MyPlate.gov)

Young children need the same variety of foods as older children and adults, but since their body size is smaller, they need smaller amounts. The table below lists recommended daily amounts of food from each food group for 1-2 year olds and for 2-5 year olds.

Food Group	1 - 2 Year Olds	2 - 5 Year Olds	What Counts As A Serving?
<p>Fruits</p>	1 cup each day	1 - 1 ½ cups each day	½ cup of fruit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ½ cup mashed, sliced, or chopped fruit</li> <li>• ½ cup of 100% fruit juice</li> <li>• ½ medium banana</li> <li>• 4 - 5 large strawberries</li> </ul>
<p>Vegetables</p>	1 cup each day	1 - 2 cups each day	½ cup of veggies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ½ cup mashed, sliced, or chopped vegetables</li> <li>• 1 cup raw leafy greens</li> <li>• ½ cup vegetable juice</li> <li>• 1 small ear of corn</li> </ul>
<p>Grains</p>	2 - 3 ounces each day	3 - 5 ounces each day	1 ounce of grains <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 bread slice or small tortilla</li> <li>• 1 cup ready-to-eat cereal</li> <li>• ½ cup cooked rice or pasta</li> <li>• 5 crackers</li> </ul>
<p>Protein Foods</p>	2 ounces each day	3 - 5 ounces each day	1 ounce of protein foods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 ounce cooked meat, poultry, or seafood (e.g. ½ chicken leg, ½ hamburger patty)</li> <li>• 1 egg</li> <li>• ¼ cup cooked beans</li> <li>• 1 tablespoon peanut butter</li> </ul>
<p>Dairy</p>	2 cups each day	2 cups each day	½ cup of dairy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ½ cup milk</li> <li>• ½ cup yogurt</li> <li>• ¾ ounce cheese</li> <li>• 1 string cheese</li> </ul>

### Some foods are easy for your child to choke on.

Skip hard, small, whole foods, such as popcorn, nuts, seeds, and hard candy. Cut up foods such as hot dogs, grapes, and raw carrots into pieces smaller than the size of a nickel.





### Examples of Healthy Meals and Snacks

These patterns show one way a 1200 calorie Daily Food Plan can be divided into meals and snacks for a preschooler. Sample food choices are shown for each meal or snack.

Breakfast	Breakfast Ideas		
1 ounce Grains ½ cup Fruit ½ cup Dairy*	<b>Cereal and Banana</b> - 1 cup <i>crispy rice cereal</i> - ½ cup <i>sliced banana</i> ½ cup milk*	<b>Yogurt and Strawberries</b> - ½ cup <i>plain yogurt*</i> - 4 <i>sliced strawberries</i> 1 slice whole wheat toast	<b>Applesauce Topped Pancake</b> - 1 <i>small pancake</i> - ¼ cup <i>applesauce</i> ¼ cup blueberries ½ cup milk*

Morning Snack	Morning Snack Ideas		
1 ounce Grains ½ cup Fruit	1 slice cinnamon bread ½ large orange	1 cup toasted oat cereal ½ cup diced pineapple	Frozen Graham Cracker Sandwich - 2 <i>graham crackers (4 squares)</i> - ½ cup <i>mashed banana</i>

Lunch	Lunch Ideas		
1 ounce Grains ½ cup Vegetables ½ cup Dairy* 1 ounce Protein Foods	<b>Open-faced Chicken Sandwich and Salad</b> - 1 <i>slice whole wheat bread</i> - 1 <i>slice American cheese*</i> - 1 <i>ounce sliced chicken</i> ½ cup baby spinach (raw) ¼ cup grated carrots	<b>Soft Taco (meat or veggie)</b> - 1 <i>small tortilla</i> - ½ cup <i>salad greens</i> - ¼ cup <i>chopped tomatoes</i> - 3 <i>Tablespoons shredded cheese*</i> - 1 <i>ounce cooked ground beef</i> or ¼ cup <i>refried beans</i>	<b>Bagel Snake</b> - 1 <i>mini whole grain bagel</i> - ¼ cup <i>sliced cherry tomatoes</i> - ¼ cup <i>diced celery</i> - 1 <i>ounce tuna</i> ½ cup milk*

Afternoon Snack	Afternoon Snack Ideas		
½ cup Vegetables ½ cup Dairy*	½ cup sugar snap peas ½ cup yogurt*	½ cup veggie "matchsticks" (carrot, celery, zucchini) ½ cup milk*	½ cup tomato juice 1 string cheese*

Dinner	Dinner Ideas		
1 ounce Grains ½ cup Vegetables 1 cup Dairy* 2 ounces Protein Foods	<b>Chicken &amp; Potatoes</b> - 2 <i>ounces chicken breast</i> - ¼ cup <i>mashed potato</i> ¼ cup green peas 1 small whole wheat roll 1 cup milk*	<b>Spaghetti &amp; Meatballs</b> - ½ cup <i>cooked pasta</i> - ¼ cup <i>tomato sauce</i> - 2 <i>meatballs (2 ounces)</i> ½ small ear corn on the cob 1 cup milk*	<b>Rice &amp; Beans with Sausage</b> - ½ cup <i>cooked brown rice</i> - ¼ cup <i>black beans</i> - ¼ cup <i>bell pepper</i> - 1 <i>ounce turkey sausage</i> ¼ cup broccoli 1 cup milk*

\*Offer your child fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese.

For more great child-size meal and snack ideas, check out the "Meal and Snack Patterns and Ideas" at [MyPlate.gov/life-stages/preschoolers](http://MyPlate.gov/life-stages/preschoolers)

### What are Some Good Ideas for Easy Snacks?

Children have small stomachs and need a healthy snack in between meals. Try to make snacks mini-meals by including 2 or more food groups. You could offer:

- Quick bread or muffins — Made with whole-wheat flour and carrots, zucchini, pumpkin, bananas or berries.
- Corn tortillas — Spread with beans, sprinkled with grated cheese and broccoli, topped with plain yogurt and salsa.
- Whole-wheat pita bread — Place sliced meat, cheese, lettuce, and tomato in the open pocket.
- English muffin pizzas — Top with spaghetti sauce, grated cheese and meats. Broil or bake and cut into fourths.
- Yogurt parfait — Layer yogurt, fruit, and cereal.
- Frozen fruit cubes — Freeze applesauce or fruit juice into cubes.
- Soft, sliced veggies — Serve with a dip of hummus, peanut butter, or low-fat salad dressing.
- Bananas — Dip in yogurt or spread with peanut butter and roll in cereal.

### Make Sure Fruits and Veggies are in Reach

- Keep a bowl of washed fresh fruits on the kitchen table.
- Put washed and cut fruits and vegetables on a shelf in your refrigerator where your child can see them.
- Children love to dip fresh veggies in low-fat ranch dressing. Cut up veggies. Store them near the dip on a low shelf in the fridge.





### How Do I Make Water More Exciting to Drink?

It's important to make sure your child drinks enough water to stay hydrated, especially during hot months. Some children prefer milk or juice, but try to offer water first so your child gets used to the taste.

- Consider getting your child a special water bottle to take with him to preschool or on outings.
- When your child plays outside, be sure to offer water often.
- Flavor water with fresh fruit, like oranges, strawberries, lemons, or limes.
- Make magic ice cubes to add to your child's water. Freeze fruit juice mixed with water in an ice cube tray.

### Drinks Can Fill Up Little Tummys, so Choose Drinks Wisely

Water and milk are the best choices for quenching thirst, and small amounts of 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice are fine, too. But fruit drinks, punch, sodas, sports drinks (like Gatorade®), and energy drinks have extra calories and added sugars that your child does not need. Flavored milks can also have added sugar and calories.

- **Water** provides the fluid your child's body needs without extra sugar, caffeine, calories, or cost.
- **Milk** is a good source of calcium, protein, vitamins A and D and other nutrients. While some children don't drink enough milk, others tend to fill up on milk and avoid other important foods. When children reach the age of 2, give them 1% (low-fat) or skim (fat-free) milk — both milks have the same nutrition but less fat than whole or 2% (reduced fat) milk.
- **100 percent fruit or vegetable juice** provides vitamin C. Some juices may have other nutrients added to them, but too much juice can lead to weight gain, diarrhea, and tooth decay. Offer real fruits more often, these have more fiber than fruit juice.

**Did You Know?** Children need:

- At least 4 glasses of water a day
- Just 16 ounces (2 cups) of milk a day (give 1% or fat-free milk to children 2 or older)
- No more than 6 ounces of 100 percent fruit juice a day

### Average Calories, Grams of Sugar, and Teaspoons of Sugar in 4 Ounces (1/2 Cup) of Beverages

Check the food label for the most accurate nutrition facts



**Fruit infused water**  
0 calories  
0 grams sugar  
0 teaspoons sugar



**Sports drink**  
30 calories  
7 grams of sugar  
1.7 teaspoon sugar



**Cola**  
50 calories  
14 grams sugar  
3.3 teaspoons sugar



**Fruit punch/fruit drink**  
60 calories  
15 grams sugar  
3.6 teaspoons sugar



**100% fruit juice**  
65 calories  
15.5 grams sugar  
3.7 teaspoons sugar



**Chocolate 2% milk**  
100 calories  
16 grams sugar  
3.8 teaspoons sugar





## Ways to Combine Fitness and Fun

Some of the best childhood memories are made while playing at the park, riding a bike, or silly dancing. As parents, we all want our children to feel happy, strong, and confident. Exercise helps with all of these, and it keeps us at a healthy weight with less stress. Just like healthy eating habits, being active throughout life can lower the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and more. Children need at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day.

Fun should always be part of the plan. Children are more likely to stay active if they enjoy it. Get the whole family involved in activities together.

- Plan family hikes, nature walks, and camping trips.
- Teach kids to swim and bicycle at a young age, and make these routine activities.
- Turn chores, such as raking leaves and gardening, into fun activities.
- Make up fun races and obstacle courses in the park.
- Think of ways to be active indoors; dancing to music, tossing balloons or soft balls, doing yoga and stretching, dancing with kids' music videos, etc.
- Check to see what sort of recreational programs are available, such as swim lessons, community programs, and city park programs.



## Keep an Eye on Screen Time

Screen time means watching TV, videos, DVDs, playing video games, or using the computer. For many children, screen time replaces hours of running, jumping, and playing active games.

Experts say that too much TV can increase violent behavior and may promote weight gain. Advertisements can also affect what your child wants to eat. We challenge you to turn off the TV and computer and join your child in fun activities like:

- Dancing
- Biking
- Walking/running
- Playing ball
- Swimming
- Playing hide and seek
- Jumping rope

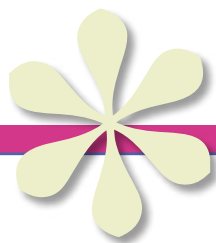
### Did you know?

Children who watch more than 2 hours a day of TV (or computer use) do less homework, read less, and perform poorer on tests.



## A Reminder About Well-Child Checkups

Don't forget to take your child to her yearly well-check appointments. At these appointments, your health-care provider will answer any questions you might have and will make sure your child's vaccinations are up to date.



## The Healthy “Weigh” of Life

Living a healthy lifestyle is a choice, and WIC is here to make it easier for you. Take a look at the list of healthy behaviors below, and place a check mark next to those your family currently does. Are there any new ideas from this list you think you can try with your family?

### Healthy Behaviors Checklist

#### My family currently:

- Sits down and eats meals together
- Eats breakfast most mornings
- Eats when hungry and stops before getting too full
- Tries to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables
- Drinks water instead of sugary drinks
- Eats fresh or less processed foods often
- Eats home-prepared meals (meals made at home tend to be healthier than meals made outside of the home)
- When eating out, picks healthier items off the menu at times or eats out less frequently
- Enjoys doing physical activities regularly
- Watches less than 2 hours a day of TV or computers (adults and children 2 years and older) and has no TV or media time for children under 2 years old
- Shows love by giving attention, hugs, playtime, reading books, etc., and less often with food
- Finds comfort, pleasure, and fun in ways other than from eating food
- Gets enough sleep (7-8 hours a day for adults, 11-14 hours a day for children)

**Did You Know?** Toddlers need 12 – 14 hours and preschoolers need 11 – 13 hours of sleep per day. Putting your child to bed on time each night is very important.

## Nutrition and General Information

### USDA Choose My Plate

Preschoolers:

[MyPlate.gov/life-stages/preschoolers](https://www.myplate.gov/life-stages/preschoolers)

### Kelly Mom – Breastfeeding Past Infancy

Fact sheet:

[kellymom.com/ages/older-infant/ebf-benefits/](https://www.kellymom.com/ages/older-infant/ebf-benefits/)

### American Academy of Pediatrics, Healthy Children

Ages and Stages:

[healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/Pages/default.aspx](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/Pages/default.aspx)

Safety:

[healthychildren.org/english/safety-prevention/Pages/default.aspx](https://www.healthychildren.org/english/safety-prevention/Pages/default.aspx)

## Child Skill Development by Age

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Positive Parenting Tips:

[cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/)

### Early Childhood Intervention Program

Resources:

[hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/early-childhood-intervention-services](https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/early-childhood-intervention-services)

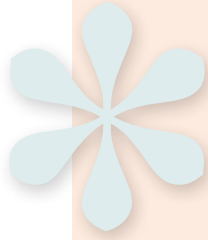
## Physical Activity for Your Child

### Kids Health

Physical Activity Recommendations:

[kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition\\_center/staying\\_fit/exercise.html#](https://www.kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition_center/staying_fit/exercise.html#)





Find out how WIC can help  
you make amazing kids.

Visit **TexasWIC.org** to learn more  
and find your nearest WIC clinic.



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