



Maternal & Family
Health Services

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Nutrition for Preschool Age (3-5)

Healthy eating is important at every age. Offer preschoolers a variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, protein foods, and dairy or fortified soy alternatives. When deciding on foods and beverages, choose options that are full of nutrients and limited in added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium. Start with these tips:

Model healthy behaviors. Preschoolers tend to copy what parents or caregivers do at the table. If you eat your veggies, they'll eat their veggies. And, it's good for both of you.

Think about their drinks. Sugar-sweetened beverages like sodas and fruit drinks are sources of added sugars that are often high in calories. Beverages with no added sugars like water, unsweetened fat-free or low-fat milk (including low-lactose or lactose-free options), or fortified soy beverages should be the primary choice for children.

Prevent choking. Encourage children to sit at a table for meals and snacks and not wander around carrying food. Avoid serving foods that are hard to swallow or cut them into small pieces, about ½ inch.

Practice food safety. Encourage hand washing after using the bathroom, before and after eating, after playing with pets or whenever they are dirty. Ensure that foods containing seafood, meat, poultry or eggs are cooked to the recommended safe minimal internal temperature.

Try new foods. Involve your kids in online and in-store grocery shopping and let them pick a new fruit or vegetable. This can help improve their interest in trying new things.

Get kids involved. Preschoolers can help at mealtimes by washing produce, tearing lettuce, stirring mixes, scooping ingredients, or setting the table.

Offer choices. Like adults, preschoolers like to have a say in what they eat. "A pear or an apple?" "Whole wheat toast or some crackers?" You offer the healthy options, but they get to choose.

Importance of snacks

A growing preschooler needs 1 to 2 healthy snacks every day. Make snack time healthy with fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy to help your child get all the nutrients he needs.





Toddlers and preschoolers grow in spurts and their appetites come and go in spurts, so they may eat a whole lot one day and then hardly anything the next. It's normal, and as long as you offer them a healthy selection, they will get what they need.

The amount of food preschoolers need depends on a variety of factors, including age, sex, and physical activity level. Use the MyPlate Plan as a general guide to how much they should eat from each food group every day.

