

What Does Your Child Need To Eat To Be Healthy?

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Confused about what to feed your child and how to do it? It really is not complicated; serve a fruit or vegetable (or both) at every meal, serve a good protein containing food at most meals and include small portions of whole grain bread, cereal or pasta. At snacks serve fruit, vegetables or low fat dairy as the first choice and use the label to determine the portions sizes for crackers, cookies, popcorn and so on.

As far as dessert goes serve only child-size portions; again use label for portion advice and keep in the 150 calorie range.

Here are even more specific recommendations for children age two to eighteen, the smaller portions being for the younger children and the larger for the adolescents and teens. All children will be healthiest if they get the minimum from each food group and if your child is an athlete or very active more of all will be needed.

Fruit- children need 1 cup to 2 ½ cups of fruit every day. Fresh, frozen or canned fruit is superior to fruit juice and fruit candy or highly advertised fruit snacks.

Advice: serve fruit at least twice a day, either at a meal, snack, or for dessert.

Vegetables- children need 1 cup to 3 cups of vegetables every day. The more color the better. Serve them raw, roasted, boiled or steamed. Buy them fresh, frozen or canned (look for low salt).

Advice: serve at least one and maybe two vegetables at every meal. Try vegetable sticks with low fat dip as a snack and remember children need to be offered a new vegetable as many as 15 times before they accept it and they need to see you eating vegetables too.

Milk/calcium

Children don't need milk they need calcium, milk just happens to be a very easy and healthy way to get calcium. Children need the equivalent of 2 to 3 cups per day. A 1 ½ ounce slice of cheese can replace 1 cup of milk, and 1 cup of yogurt carries the same calcium as 1 cup of milk.

Advice: eating more than what is needed from this food group does not make for better health.

Lean meat and beans

Beef, pork, lamb, poultry, fish, egg, cooked beans, tofu, peanut butter, nuts or seeds can all provide your child with essential protein needed for growth. The protein in one ounce of meat, poultry, or fish can replace 1 egg, ¼ cup cooked beans or tofu; 1 tbsp peanut butter, ½ ounce(about 2 tbsp) nuts or seeds . Children age 2-3 years require 2-4 ounces daily, children 4-8 years require 3-5 ½ ounces, children age 9- 13 require 5-6 ½ ounces and adolescents age 14 – 18 need 5 ½- 7 ounces each day.

Advice: serve a small protein source at most meals and your child will easily obtain what he needs.

Whole grains

Children (and mom and dad) should eat half of their grain foods as whole grains. Whole grain examples: whole-wheat and rye breads, whole grain cereals and crackers, oatmeal and brown rice. A serving is usually one ounce or 1 slice of bread, ½ cup rice, pasta or cooked cereal or an 80 calorie portion.

Advice: If whole grain foods are new to your family menu start by serving them at one meal each day and work your way up to two meals per day. Make a game of trying and finding new whole grain products you like

Fat and oils are essential for good health. Use plant-based oils such as olive oil and canola oil in cooking, and salad dressings and soft vegetable oil spreads or small amounts of butter at the table.