

Feeding Children Ages 2 to 5



Table of contents

| | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| It's all about habits | 3 |
| Mom, I'm hungry! | 4 |
| A second helping? | 5 |
| Picky eaters! | 6 |
| Two more bites... | 8 |
| Balance means variety! | 9 |
| A healthy dose of vitamins | 10 |
| Including fibre in the menu | 12 |
| Calcium and much more | 14 |
| Making room for protein | 17 |
| What about fat? | 20 |
| Dad, I'm thirsty! | 21 |
| What about that smile? | 22 |
| Preventing choking | 24 |
| Preventing constipation | 26 |

It's all about habits



Early childhood is a critical learning period during which children aged two to five develop eating habits that will influence their diet and their relationship with food for a lifetime. *Feeding Children Ages 2 to 5*¹ is a useful resource that provides current information on feeding young children and practical tips to help children adopt healthy eating habits.

1. The recommendations set forth in this brochure are intended for children who do not have any specific health or food issues.

Mom, I'm hungry!

Preschoolers need to consume a variety of foods to get all the nutrients they require for healthy growth and development. To encourage children to develop healthy eating habits, keep the following in mind:

- Children's appetites vary from day to day and even from one meal or snack to the next. Children recognize when they are hungry and when they are full, so respect the amount of food they want to eat.
- Offer children three meals plus snacks every day. Children have small stomachs and high energy and nutrient needs, so it's important to offer small quantities of nutritious food throughout the day.
- Maintain a consistent meal and snack schedule so children know what to expect.
- Offer a snack halfway between meals, or about two hours before a meal, to avoid decreasing a child's appetite at mealtime.
- Avoid letting children nibble or graze between meals and snacks.



A second helping?

Growing children usually know when they are hungry and when they are full, so it is important to let them decide how much food they need. However, it is also important to pay attention to their eating behaviours to see whether other factors are prompting them to eat. If children turn to food for comfort or reward, it is important to help them find other ways of comforting or rewarding themselves and to teach them how to better recognize their hunger and fullness signals.

Here are a few tips:

- Eat slowly and encourage children to do the same.
- If children are still hungry, it is better to wait a few minutes or until almost everyone at the table has finished their first serving before offering a second.
- When there is a dessert, offer it to everyone at the table. The dessert, however, should not replace the main meal.
- Sit together at the table during mealtime. Avoid television, toys and other distractions.
- Make mealtimes enjoyable. Avoid using this time to resolve conflicts.
- Never put children on a diet, regardless of age; doing so may jeopardize their growth. If you are concerned about a child's eating habits, consult a doctor or a registered dietitian specializing in childhood nutrition.



Picky eaters!

Young children are very curious by nature and should be encouraged to explore new foods. The sooner they are introduced to a wide variety of nutritious foods, the better the chances they will accept and enjoy them.



Golden rules:

- Set a good example! Children learn by watching their parents and caregivers.
- Involve children in food preparation. They will be proud of what they've made and may be more willing to taste their own creations.
- Avoid disguising food – doing so does not encourage its acceptance. Children need to know what they're eating and you may lose their trust if they find out they've been tricked.
- Introduce a new food with familiar foods.
- Offer new foods regularly and encourage children to try a bite. Allow them to decide if they want to taste, without pressuring them. Be patient and keep trying! Although some children may like a food right away, others may need to be offered the same food 10 to 15 times – or more! – before they find it appealing.
- Help children serve themselves or ask them how hungry they are before serving them.
- Present foods in an original and fun way with a variety of shapes, colours, flavours and textures.
- Let children decide how much they want to eat and in what order. If they haven't eaten anything after about 20 minutes, remain calm and simply remove the plate.
- Don't worry if a child does not eat the same amount of food every day or at every meal. If this happens only occasionally, it is unlikely to affect growth or health.



Two more bites...

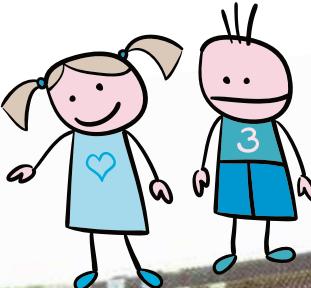
"If you're good, you can have some cookies!"

"Be good and eat all your beans!"

"Finish your meat if you want to go out and play!"

When food is used as a negotiating tool, it encourages children to view "reward-foods" as more attractive, and "conditional-foods" as less desirable. It may also strengthen food aversions in some children. To reinforce healthy eating behaviors, children should be encouraged, without pressure, to try a bite of each food served.

Punishing or rewarding children with food can also blur their hunger and fullness signals. In the long term, this can negatively impact their relationship with food. When rewarding the child for positive behaviour (e.g., sharing a favourite toy with a friend), reward them with something the child values, other than food (e.g., read them a story, give them a hug, play their favourite game with them).





Balance means variety!

Children's diets should consist mainly of foods from the four food groups in *Canada's Food Guide*. A balanced diet helps kids get all the nutrients they need, making supplements unnecessary.

Consider the following ideas to encourage children to enjoy a variety of foods:

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Breakfast | Offer foods from at least three food groups (e.g., whole-grain cereal, milk, banana). |
| Lunch and supper | Offer foods from all four food groups (e.g., meatloaf, green beans, brown rice, milk). |
| Snacks | Depending on their appetites, offer children two or three snacks a day that include foods from at least two food groups (e.g., raspberries and yogurt, whole-wheat mini pitas and cheese). |

A healthy dose of vitamins

PEPPERS, MELON, BROCCOLI, KIWI... Vegetables and fruit are packed with nutrients that offer great health benefits. In general, the more colourful they are, the richer they are in vitamins.



Remember...

Offer vegetables and fruit every day. One dark green vegetable (e.g., spinach, asparagus) and one orange vegetable (e.g., carrots, pumpkin) should be on the menu each day.

Choose fresh or frozen vegetables and fruit. When opting for the canned variety, choose vegetables with no added salt or rinse them before eating to reduce the sodium content. As for puréed or canned fruit, it's best to choose those with no added sugar or sweeteners.

Choose vegetables and fruit over juice. Their higher fibre content helps satisfy appetites and maintains healthy bowel function.



No peas, please!

Some children refuse to eat certain vegetables and fruit because of their more acidic or bitter taste. To help children enjoy these foods, try the following:

- Serve them without utensils, if possible, so that children can eat and explore them as finger foods.
- Cut them in various ways: julienne, cubed, grated, etc.
- Serve them in a variety of dishes: soup, salad, etc.
- Present them in various textures: cooked, raw, semi-cooked, puréed, etc.
- Offer them with dishes that children already enjoy.
- Serve vegetables with a dip or topped with cheese sauce.



Including fibre in the menu

BREAD, PASTA, RICE, COUSCOUS, PITA, TORTILLA, QUINOA...

Young children usually enjoy a variety of grain products.

Choosing products made with whole grains provides more fibre. Grain products also provide energy for the body and brain and contain a number of important nutrients, such as folic acid, zinc and iron.

Remember...

Cereal can be part of a nutritious breakfast or snack. Opt for types that are unsweetened or low in sugar and made with whole grains.

At least half the grain products consumed each day should be made of whole grains (e.g., whole-wheat pasta, hulled barley, brown rice).



Keep in mind!

Processed foods, such as pastries, granola bars and store-bought cookies, are often high in fat and sugar and low in fibre. It's better to choose minimally processed grain products made from whole grains.

calcium and much more



MILK, YOGURT, CHEESE... Healthy bone development is important for a child's growth. Milk products such as white or chocolate milk, yogurt and cheese are reliable sources of bone-healthy, easy-to-use calcium. Milk products also provide up to 15 other nutrients, including vitamin D and protein.

Remember...

In Canada, cow's milk must be fortified with vitamin D, a vitamin that plays an important role in calcium absorption. As recommended by *Canada's Food Guide*, Canadians two years of age and over should drink 500 mL (2 cups) of milk each day to help meet their vitamin D needs.

Whole milk (3.25% M.F.) and partly skimmed milk (2% M.F.) contain fatty acids that promote brain growth and development in children.

To prevent food-borne illnesses, preschool-aged children should eat cheeses made only from pasteurized milk.

If children do not drink milk, they should be given fortified soy beverages. Other dairy-free beverages (e.g., rice or almond beverage), even enriched versions, are not appropriate substitutes for milk, particularly because of their low protein and fat contents.

Did you know?

Consumption of milk products does not increase mucus production during bouts of a cold or the flu.

Chocolate milk contains the same nutrients as white milk. It contains no more sugar than an equal amount of 100% pure apple juice.

Very few children are lactose intolerant (unable to digest lactose, the sugar naturally found in milk). When in doubt, consult a doctor. Eliminating milk products from a child's diet can deprive them of important nutrients. If a child is lactose intolerant, firm cheese (e.g., Cheddar, Mozzarella), yogurt and small quantities of milk can usually be tolerated. Lactose-free milk can help them achieve the recommended number of servings from the Milk and Alternatives food group.



calcium and much more

To ensure that children consume 500 mL (2 cups) of milk daily, try the following:

- Set a good example by drinking milk at meals.
- Encourage children to pour themselves a glass of milk, with supervision.
- Serve milk in fun glasses or with a colourful straw.
- Break out of the routine by offering chocolate milk or by adding vanilla, ground cinnamon or cocoa powder to milk.
- Prepare milk-based recipes, such as smoothies, puddings, tapioca, vegetable soups, white sauce, mashed potatoes, etc.

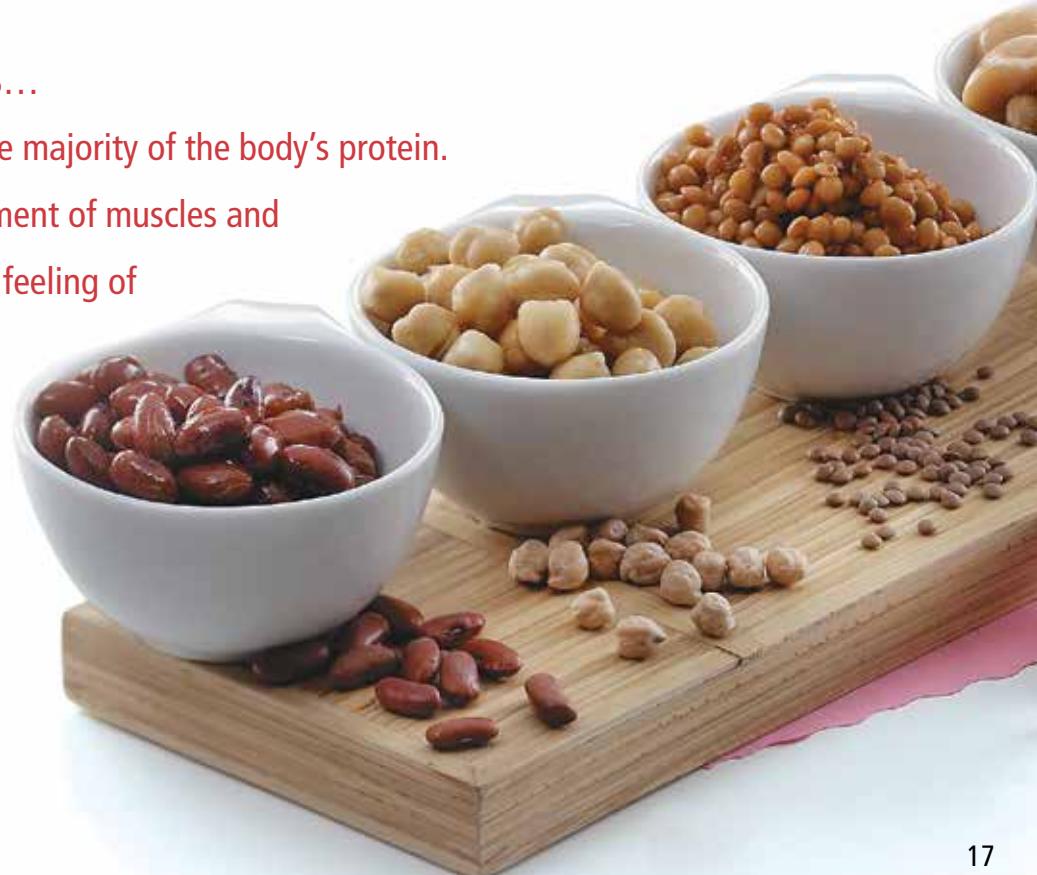


Making room for protein

MEAT, POULTRY, FISH, EGGS, LEGUMES...

Meat and meat alternatives provide the majority of the body's protein.

These foods contribute to the development of muscles and body tissues in addition to providing a feeling of fullness. Many of these foods are also sources of iron, a nutrient needed to carry oxygen in the blood. Children are more at risk of developing iron deficiency anemia than adults, so ensuring adequate iron intake is key.



Making room for protein

Remember...

The body absorbs iron from animal sources (meat, poultry and fish) much more easily than iron from plant sources (found mainly in dark green vegetables, legumes, tofu and fortified grain products).

Eating a food rich in vitamin C (e.g., kiwis, melon, citrus fruit, strawberries, peppers, tomatoes) with meals increases the absorption of iron from grains and vegetables.

To prevent food-borne illnesses, avoid serving children raw fish (e.g., sushi) or raw or undercooked eggs, poultry or meat (e.g., tartare).

Fatty fish (e.g., salmon, mackerel) is a source of essential fatty acids called omega-3s, which are necessary for brain development. Children should consume fatty fish at least twice a week. For more information on recommendations related to fish consumption, consult Health Canada's website at hc-sc.gc.ca.





I don't want any meat!

Since meat can sometimes be difficult to chew, it may be challenging for a child to consume enough of it. Here are a few tips to encourage meat consumption:

- Offer small portions of very tender meat cooked in a broth.
- Serve meat in a sauce or as a meatloaf.
- Cut meat into small cubes or offer ground meat.
- Offer other foods from this group, such as eggs, tofu, legumes, fish or smooth peanut butter. Children often like these foods because they are easier to chew.

What about fat?

Fat is an essential part of a healthy diet, especially for preschoolers. It is a concentrated source of energy and provides a feeling of fullness that tides children over until their next meal or snack. Fat is also essential for the development of the brain and nervous system and is a vehicle to deliver certain vitamins to the body.

Remember...



Don't hesitate to serve nutritious foods that contain fat, such as avocado, peanut butter and cheese.

Choose full-fat milk products (as opposed to reduced-fat versions).

Vary sources of fats (e.g., dips, oils, sauces, salad dressings, butter, non-hydrogenated margarine).

Limit the consumption of foods that are high in fat and low in nutritional value, such as chips, french fries and cakes, as these may spoil a child's appetite and leave less room for more nutritious foods. Although these foods can be part of a child's diet, they should be eaten only occasionally and the emphasis should be placed on more nutritious foods.

Dad, I'm thirsty!

Children are at greater risk of dehydration than adults because they may not always be aware that they are thirsty and their body temperature rises faster than an adult's. When playing outside in the sun during the summer, children are also more susceptible to heat stroke. Keeping children hydrated is very important, particularly when it is hot and humid outside.

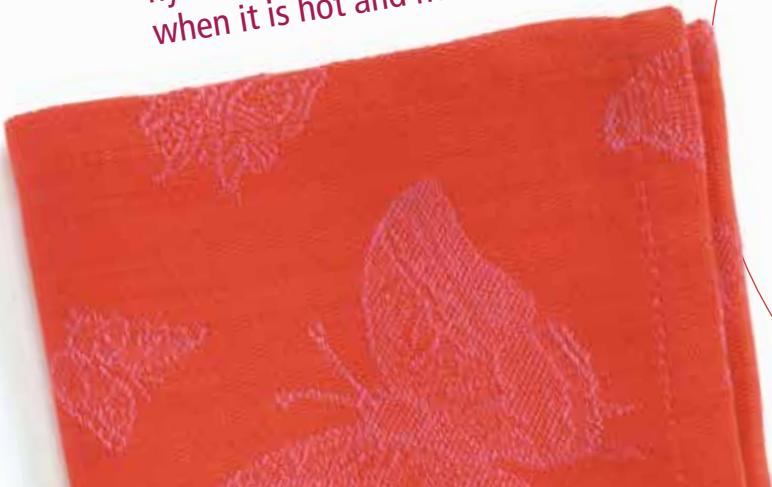


Water: Offer water between meals and snacks because it hydrates without affecting appetite.

Milk: Offer milk with meals and snacks because it provides energy and many nutrients while quenching thirst and satisfying hunger.

Fruit juice: Limit the amount of 100% pure fruit juice to 125 mL ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup) per day.

Other drinks: Limit the number of soft drinks, fruit drinks, fruit cocktails or sports drinks that children consume – these beverages are low in nutrients and offer no benefits to children's diets.



What about that smile?



Here are some tips that promote dental health:

- Limit consumption of soft drinks and fruit juices, even those that are 100% pure juice. Avoid letting children sip them over extended periods to limit the amount of time these beverages are in contact with teeth.
- Whenever possible, offer non-sticky foods at snack time such as fruit, vegetables, milk and cheese.
- Choose grain products made with whole grains. Their higher dietary fibre content reduces the risk of cavities.
- Limit the consumption of foods that have a greater potential to cause cavities, such as granola bars, dried fruit, candy, fruit leathers, etc.

Teeth-friendly foods



- Fresh vegetables and fruit: These foods contain fibre. They require a lot of chewing, which stimulates the production of saliva and therefore neutralizes acid in the mouth.
- Meat and meat alternatives (e.g., poultry, fish, legumes): Because they contain mainly protein and fat, they cannot serve as food for cavity-causing bacteria.
- Milk products: Their many nutrients protect the tooth enamel and help remineralize teeth. Firm cheeses are particularly good allies against cavities – not only do they provide nutrients important to dental health, they also require chewing, which stimulates the production of saliva.



Preventing Choking

Choking on food is one of the leading causes of accidental death in children under the age of four.

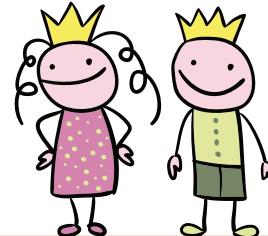
Preschool-aged children are at higher risk of choking when they eat because of the small size of their esophagus. Be mindful of this when offering them food.



To reduce the risk of choking:

- Always eat sitting down, in a calm environment.
- Ensure that children are supervised by an adult while eating.
- Do not allow children to eat in the car.
- Do not let children talk, walk, run or play with food in their mouths.
- Encourage children to take small mouthfuls and to chew food properly.
- Avoid foods such as popcorn, chips, hard candy, chewing gum and ice cubes.
- Avoid foods served on toothpicks or skewers.

**Serve foods
that have been
prepared properly**



Firm vegetables
(e.g., carrots, turnip, celery)

Cook slightly (blanch), cut into thin strips or grate

Fresh fruit

Remove seeds, pit, and/or core and peel any tough skin

Round fruit

(e.g., grapes, large blueberries, cherries, strawberries)

Cut in half or quarters, depending on size

Dried fruit

(e.g., dates, figs, apricots, raisins)

Chop (or rehydrate and chop)

Sausages, hot dog

Cut lengthwise, then into small pieces

Whole nuts, seeds and peanuts

Grind and add to recipes

Peanut or nut butter

Use smooth variety only; spread a thin layer on a slice of warm toast

Fish

Remove all bones and serve in small pieces

Meat and poultry

Remove all bones and serve in small pieces



Preventing constipation



- Adequate intake of fluids and fibre (e.g., whole-grain products, vegetables, fruit and legumes) helps the bowels to function properly and therefore helps prevent constipation.
- Contrary to popular belief, no single food causes constipation. There is therefore no reason to eliminate bananas, rice or cheese from children's diets when they are constipated.
- Establish a routine for bowel movements. Encourage children to go to the washroom soon after meals, even if they don't feel the need.
- Encourage children to be active. In addition to being beneficial to overall health, physical activity helps prevent constipation.

For any questions about children's diets, consult a doctor or registered dietitian who specializes in childhood nutrition.

The team of Registered Dietitians at Dairy Farmers of Canada would like to thank the following people for reviewing the content of this brochure:

Lamia Belfares, Dietitian, Équipe 0–5 ans, Direction régionale de santé publique de la Capitale-Nationale

Stéphanie Côté, Dietitian, Extenso, Centre de référence en nutrition de l'Université de Montréal and for naîtregrandir.com

Stéphanie Ledoux, Dietitian, CHU Sainte-Justine

Additional resources:

Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca

Institut national de santé publique du Québec: www.inspq.qc.ca

Dietitians of Canada: www.dietitians.ca

Health Canada: www.hc-sc.gc.ca

Canadian Paediatric Society: www.cps.ca

