

## **HEALTHY WEIGHT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN (Obesity & Overweight in Young Children)**

Eating well and being physically active are key to your child's well-being. Eating too much and exercising too little can lead to overweight and related health problems that can follow children into their adult years. You can take an active role in helping your child - and your whole family- learn healthy eating and physical activity habits.

### **HOW WILL HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY HELP MY CHILD?**

All children benefit from healthy eating and physical activity. A balanced diet and being physically active help children:

- Grow
- Learn
- Build strong bones and muscles
- Have energy
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Avoid obesity-related diseases like type 2 diabetes
- Get plenty of nutrients
- Feel good about themselves

### **HOW ARE MY CHILD'S EATING AND ACTIVITY HABITS FORMED?**

Parents play a big role in shaping children's eating habits. When parents eat a variety of foods that are low in fat and sugar and high in fiber, children learn to like these foods as well. It may take 10 or more tries before a child accepts a new food so do not give up if your child does not like a new food right away.

Parents have an effect on children's physical activity habits as well. You can set a good example by going for a walk or bike ride after dinner instead of watching TV. Playing ball or jumping rope with your children shows them that being active is fun.

With many parents working outside the home, child care providers also help shape children's eating and activity habits. Make sure your child care provider offers well-balanced meals and snacks, as well as plenty of active play time.

If your child is in school, find out more about the school's breakfast and lunch programs and ask to have input into menu choices, or help your child pack a lunch that includes a variety of foods. Get involved in the parent-teacher association (PTA) to support physical education (PE) and after-school sports.

Your child's friends and the media can also affect his or her eating and activity choices. Children may go to fast food places or play video games with their friends instead of playing tag, basketball, or other active games. TV commercials try to persuade kids to choose high-

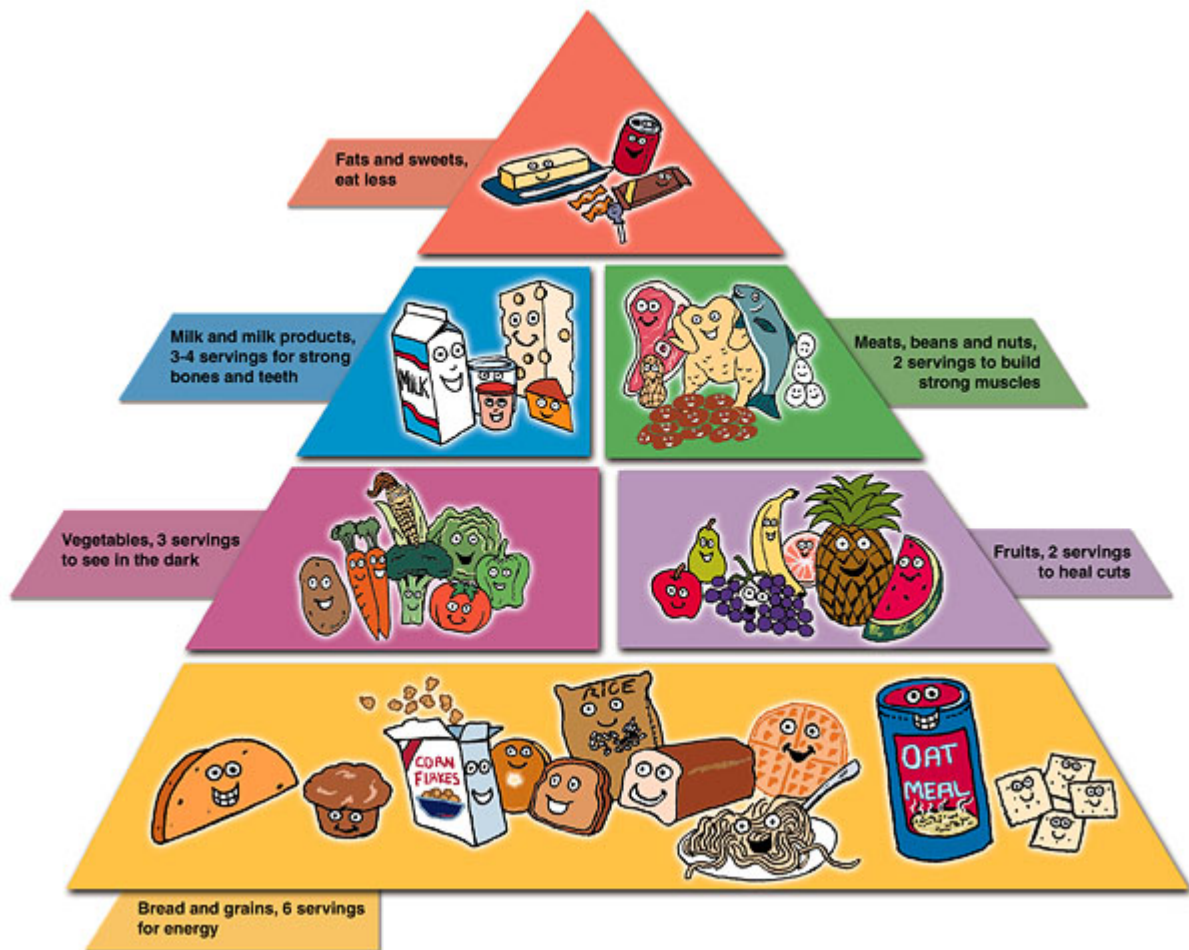
fat snacks and high-sugar drinks and cereals. When parents help their children be aware of peer and media pressures, youngsters are more likely to make healthy choices outside the home.

## WHAT SHOULD MY CHILD EAT?

Just like adults, children need to eat a wide variety of foods for good health. Use the food guide pyramid as a starting point for planning family meals and snacks. The Food Guide Pyramid applies to healthy people age 2 years and older. The smaller number of servings in the range is for children age 6 years and under. For 2- to 3-year old children, the serving size should be smaller, about two-thirds of a regular serving (except for milk).

When you help children build healthy eating habits early, they will approach eating with a positive attitude—that food is something to enjoy, help them grow, and give them energy.

### FOOD GUIDE PYRAMID FOR YOUNG CHILDREN



*Children 2 to 6 years old need two servings from the milk group per day; children over 6 need three servings. Do not limit fat for children under 2. For older children, aim for a total fat intake of no more than 30 percent of daily calories.*

## **ONE SERVING EQUALS**

### **Bread, Cereal, Rice, and Pasta Group**

- 1 slice of bread
- 1 ounce of ready-to-eat cereal
- ½ cup of cooked cereal, rice, or pasta

### **Vegetable Group**

- 1 cup of raw or ½ cup of frozen (cooked) leafy vegetables
- ½ cup of other vegetables-cooked or chopped raw
- ¾ cup of vegetable juice

### **Fruit Group**

- 1 medium apple, banana, or orange
- ½ cup of chopped, cooked, or canned fruit
- ¾ cup of fruit juice

### **Milk, Yogurt, and Cheese Group**

- 1 cup of milk or yogurt
- 1 ½ ounces of natural cheese
- 2 ounces of processed cheese

### **Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans and Nuts Group**

- 2-3 ounces of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish
- ½ cup of cooked dry beans or 1 egg counts as 1 ounce of lean meat. Two tablespoons of peanut butter or 1/3 cup of nuts count as 1 ounce of meat.

## **SOURCES OF CALCIUM**

Calcium helps build strong bones and teeth. Milk and milk products are great sources of calcium. If your child cannot digest milk or if you choose not to serve milk products, there are other ways to make sure he or she gets enough calcium.

- Offer one serving of calcium-fortified fruit juice per day. Fortified juices contain as much calcium per serving as milk.
- Serve calcium-rich vegetables like broccoli, mustard greens, kale, collard greens, and Brussels sprouts.
- Include high-calcium beans like great northern beans, black turtle beans, navy beans, and baked beans in casseroles and salads.

- Try calcium-enriched soy-and rice-based drinks. Serve chilled, use in place of cow's milk in your favorite recipes, or add to hot or cold cereals.
- Serve lactose-reduced or lactose-free dairy products like low-fat or fat-free milk yogurt and ice cream. (Lactose is the sugar in milk and foods made with milk. People who cannot digest lactose often have stomach pain and bloating when they drink milk.)
- Try low-fat yogurt or cheese in small amounts—they may be easier to digest than milk.

## **HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD EAT BETTER?**

- Give your child a snack or two in addition to his/her three daily meals.
- Offer your child a wide variety of foods, such as grains, vegetables and fruits, low-fat dairy products, and lean meat or beans.
- Serve snacks like dried fruit, low-fat yogurt, and air-popped popcorn.
- Let your child decide whether and how much to eat. Keep serving new foods even if your child does not eat them at first.
- Cook with less fat-bake, roast, or poach foods instead of frying.
- Limit the amount of added sugar in your child's diet. Choose cereals with low or no added sugar. Serve water or low-fat milk more often than sugar-sweetened sodas and fruit-flavored drinks.
- Choose and prepare foods with less salt. Keep the salt shaker off the table. Have fruits and vegetables on hand for snacks instead of salty snack foods.
- Involve your child in planning and preparing meals. Children may be more willing to eat the dishes they help fix.
- Have family meals together and serve everyone the same thing.
- Do not be too strict. In small amounts, sweets or food from fast-food restaurants can still have a place in a healthy diet.
- Make sure your child eats breakfast. Breakfast provides children with the energy they need to listen and learn in school.

## **SIMPLE SNACK IDEAS\***

- Dried fruit and nut mix
- Fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables or fruit served plain or with low-fat yogurt
- Rice cakes, whole grain crackers, or whole grain bread served with low-fat cheese, fruit spread, peanut butter, almond butter, or soy nut butter
- Pretzels or air-popped popcorn sprinkled with salt-free seasoning mix
- Homemade fruit smoothie made with low-fat milk or yogurt and frozen or fresh fruit
- Dry cereals served plain or with low-fat or non-fat milk

*\*Children of preschool age and younger can easily choke on foods that are hard to chew, small and round, or sticky, such as hard vegetables, whole grapes, hard chunks of cheese, raisins, nuts and seeds, and popcorn. Carefully select snacks for children in this age group.*

## **WHAT ABOUT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?**

Like adults, children should be physically active most, if not all, days of the week. Experts suggest at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity daily for most children. Walking fast, bicycling, jumping rope, dancing fast, and playing basketball are all good ways for your child to be active.

As children spend more time watching TV and playing computer and video games, they spend less time being active. Parents play a big role in helping kids get up and get moving.

### **HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD BE MORE ACTIVE?**

- Be a role model for your children. If they see you being physically active and having fun, they are more likely to be active and stay active throughout their lives.
- Involve the whole family in activities like hiking, biking, dancing, basketball, or roller skating.
- Focus on fun. You can do a lot of walking during trips to the zoo, park, or miniature-golf course.
- Include children in household activities like dog-walking, car-washing, or lawn-mowing.
- Limit your children's TV and computer time. Offer them active options, like joining a local recreation center or after-school program, or taking lessons in a sport they enjoy.
- Encourage your child to be physically active every day.

### **WHAT IF MY CHILD IS OVERWEIGHT?**

Children who are overweight are more likely to become overweight adults. They may develop type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and other illnesses that can follow them into adulthood. Overweight in children can also lead to stress, sadness, and low self-esteem.

Because children grow at different rates at different times, it's not always easy to tell if a child is overweight. For example, it is normal for boys to have a growth spurt in weight and catch up in height later. Your health care provider can measure your child's height and weight and tell you if your child is in a healthy range for his or her gender and age. If your provider finds that your child is overweight, you can help.

### **HOW CAN I HELP MY OVERWEIGHT CHILD?**

- Do not put your child on a weight-loss diet unless your health care provider tells you to. Limiting what children eat may interfere with their growth.
- Involve the whole family in building healthy eating and physical activity habits. It benefits everyone and does not single out the child who is overweight.
- Accept and love your child at any weight. It will boost his or her self-esteem.
- Help your child find ways other than food to handle setbacks or successes.
- Talk with your health care provider if you are concerned about your child's eating habits or weight.

Remember, you play the biggest role in your child's life. You can help your children learn healthy eating and physical activity habits that they can follow for the rest of their lives.

## TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Make sure your child eats breakfast. Breakfast provides children with the energy they need to listen and learn in school.
- Offer your child a wide variety of foods, such as grains, vegetables and fruits, low-fat dairy products, and lean meat or beans.
- Talk with your health care provider if you are concerned about your child's eating habits or weight.
- Cook with less fat—bake, roast, or poach foods instead of frying.
- Limit the amount of added sugar in your child's diet. Serve water or low-fat milk more often than sugar-sweetened sodas and fruit-flavored drinks.
- Involve your child in planning and preparing meals. Children may be more willing to eat the dishes they help fix.
- Be a role model for your children. If they see you being physically active and having fun, they are more likely to be active and stay active throughout their lives.
- Encourage your child to be active everyday.
- Involve the whole family in activities like hiking, biking, dancing, basketball, or roller skating.

This information was provided by NIDDK Weight Control Information Network. [Http://www.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.niddk.nih.gov)

Visit our web site at: <http://www.uaex.edu/miller/>

University of Arkansas, United States Department of Agriculture and County Governments Cooperating.

The Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability, marital or veteran status, or any other legally protected status, and is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

