Nutrition for Ages 1-6

Once children are one year old they grow more slowly and need less food. They may eat well at one meal, then very little at the next. They may decide to eat only 3 foods one week then other foods the next! Don’t worry, they listen to their bodies and will usually eat enough to grow and stay healthy.

Safety First: The American Academy of Pediatrics has made guidelines to help prevent choking. These include:

- Never allow a child to run, walk, or lie down with food in the mouth. They should eat at a table or at least sit down.
- Do not feed children less than 4 years old round or firm food unless the entire item has been chopped up.
- Foods that children are most likely to choke on are: hot dogs, whole nuts, seeds, whole grapes, candy (hard, gooey, or sticky candy), popcorn, chunks of peanut butter, chunks of firm fruit such as apple, and chewing gum.

Tips for Feeding the Toddler and Preschooler

- Make meal time pleasant and enjoyable. Reduce distractions such as TV, computer, or pets. Eat together!
- Children like routine. Have 3 meals and 2 or 3 snacks at about the same time every day.
- Present healthy foods for meals and snacks. Children can choose what and how much to eat from the meal you offer.
- If your child doesn’t eat, or eats the same thing for a few days, it is OK. They will eat at the next meal or snack. Never force your child to eat.
- Offer the same foods to the whole family. Don’t make special foods for your child. Serve a food such as bread or fruit with meals in case your child likes nothing else on the menu.
- Set a good example! Try new foods and eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and avoid processed foods and sugar-sweetened drinks.
- To help your child’s appetite, don’t allow grazing. Offer water between meals and snacks.
- Praise good eating habits. Don’t label your child as “picky.”
- Serve just one new food at a time and do not mix foods. Children may need to be offered new foods many, many times before they try them.
- Small children will be messy. They still enjoy finger foods and learning to use utensils. Be ready with a cloth under the highchair and a cloth to clean up spills.
- Allow your toddler to help prepare food. They can stir, sprinkle, roll up, spread, and plop food items or help set the table. This may increase their interest in food.
How Many Servings per Day
Serving sizes and numbers vary with age, activity, and how fast your child is growing. The guide below is for a child with normal activity. It provides all the nutrients needed for good health and a good rate of growth. If your child is very active, they may need more calories from these food groups. Avoid overfeeding and force feeding.

- **Milk and dairy**
  - Children ages 1-8 should have 2- 2 1/2 cups of milk or other dairy foods such as yogurt, fortified cow milk alternatives (soy, almond, rice, etc.) or cottage cheese daily.
  - Children under 2 should have whole milk. Children over 2 years should have fat-free or low-fat dairy products.

- **Meat, poultry, fish, egg, beans, nuts, and seeds:**
  (1 ounce meat equals one egg, 1 tablespoon of peanut butter, ¼ cup cooked beans, or 1 oz nuts)
  - 1 year old child: 1 ½ ounces per day
  - 2-3 year old child: 2 ounces per day
  - 4-8 year old child: 4 ounces per day

- **Fruits:**
  Serving size is ¼ cup for a one year old, 1/3 cup for a 2-3 year old, and ½ cup or one small fruit for a 4 year old and up.
  - 1-3 year old child: 1 cup per day
  - 4-8 year old child: 1 ½ cups per day

Limit juice to no more than 4 ounces of 100% fruit juice per day. Avoid fruit drinks, soda pop, and “ade” drinks.

- **Vegetables:**
  Serving size is ¼ cup for a one year old, 1/3 cup for a 2-3 year old, and ½ cup or one small vegetable for 4 years and up.
  - 1 year old child: ¾-1 cup per day
  - 2-3 year old child: 1 cup per day
  - 4-8 year old child: 1 ½ cups per day

- **Grains:**
  One slice of bread, 1 oz of ready-to-eat cereal, or ½ cup of cooked pasta, cooked rice, or cooked cereal is equal to about one ounce.
  - 1 year old child: 2 ounces per day
  - 2-3 year old child: 3 ounces per day
  - 4-8 year old child: 5 ounces per day
Dessert
Desserts are not needed at all meals. When you offer desserts they should be served casually as part of the meal. This is so they do not seem more pleasing than the rest of the food served. Choose healthy desserts such as fruit, custard, pudding or oatmeal raisin cookies that can be part of a well-balanced diet. Less healthy desserts such as pie, cake, cookies and other rich foods should be served less often.

Encourage Fruits and Vegetables
• Add grated carrots, zucchini, pumpkin, banana, applesauce, raisins, squash, berries, etc. to muffins, quick breads, and pancakes.
• Dip fresh fruit slices and vegetables in yogurt or cottage cheese dip or spread with cream cheese, peanut butter, or yogurt. Top with raisins, grated carrots, crushed pineapple or banana.
• Make fruit, vegetable, cubed cheese, and meat kabobs.
• Sprinkle potatoes with cheese, low-fat sour cream, and chopped broccoli.
• Add grated carrots, zucchini, and/or finely chopped mushrooms to burgers and meatloaf.
• Make smoothies with fruits, spinach, carrots, or pumpkin. Just add a little milk and yogurt.

Snacks
Active, growing children burn many calories and will likely need to eat between meals in order to keep going and growing.

We suggest healthy snacks that include milk, small pieces of fruit, cut-up raw vegetables, dried fruit, cheese or meat cubes, yogurt, crackers spread with cottage cheese or peanut butter, hard cooked eggs, and non-sugared cereals. Although sweet snacks provide calories, they have little nutritional value and are bad for your child’s teeth. It is better if they are offered only once in a while.

Snacks should be scheduled so they are not too frequent or too close to mealtimes. Keep snacks small and schedule them about 2 hours before or after a meal.

Prevent Dental Issues (cavities)
Although many children are weaned from the bottle by their first birthday, those who still take a bottle should not be allowed to suck on it after they are asleep. Children’s teeth should be brushed daily after breakfast and at bedtime to prevent tooth decay. Brushing or rinsing with water after eating also helps to prevent dental cavities. Check with your dentist or doctor about the need for fluoride.

Exercise
Children should take part in physical activity each day. Promote their interest by playing games along with them. Provide a safe, supervised area for running, jumping, chasing balls, swimming or any activity your child is able to do. Inside games of dancing, tumbling or skipping are great for those “rainy days” when children can’t play outdoors and tire of quiet activities. Exercise along with a healthy diet helps promote proper growth and prevents obesity. Limit TV watching or computer and video time to less than 2 hours per day.

Other Needs
Iodine may need to be added to your child’s diet and depends on where you live. Check with your doctor.

Children often do not get enough vitamin D to help build strong bones. Talk to your doctor about the need for a supplement.
References/Resources:

www.choosemyplate.gov
www.americanheart.org
www.eatright.org
www.choosemyplate.gov

Teach Back:

What is the most important thing you learned from this handout?

What changes will you make in your diet/lifestyle, based on what you learned today?

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions please contact UW Health at one of the phone numbers listed below. You can also visit our website at www.uwhealth.org/nutrition.

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children’s Hospital (AFCH) can be reached at: (608) 890-5500.

Nutrition clinics for UW Medical Foundation (UWMF) can be reached at: (608) 287-2770.