

# NUTRITION MATTERS

## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO CHILDREN'S GROWTH

Children come in different shapes and sizes and grow at different rates. Your child may be taller or shorter, bigger or smaller than other children. Height and weight changes generally follow a regular pattern that is right for your child.

Your child's growth depends on genetics (how their parents grew). If you think your child is growing too fast or slow, talk to your child's doctor. They can track your child's growth on a chart.

### Feed your child is a positive way

Your role is to decide **what** foods and beverages to offer and **when** and **where** your child will eat. Let your child choose what to eat from the foods you offer and trust them to eat as much or as little as they want.

Children are born knowing how much to eat for healthy growth. Both big and small eaters know how much to eat.

Pressuring, restricting or controlling does not improve eating. Pressure includes reminding your child to eat or punishing them for not eating. It can also include offering rewards for eating. Pressuring your child to eat more or less food may make eating worse.

### Things you can do to help

Give your child support and encouragement by helping them feel good about themselves. Make sure your child knows that you love them no matter

what size they are. Your task as a parent is to feed your child well and provide opportunities for activity and accept your child's natural size and shape.

### CHILDREN DO NOT NEED DIETS

Diets can interfere with their normal growth and development. Children know when they are hungry and when they are full. Restricting your child to eat less food often backfires and may make them feel bad about themselves. Children who are afraid that they will go hungry may overeat.

### EAT TOGETHER

Research shows that families who eat together usually eat healthier foods. Prepare and offer the same meals to everyone. Turn off the screens, remove toys and enjoy the conversations.

- Eat snacks and meals together at the table
- Try 'family style' meals. In 'family-style' meals, food is put into larger bowls or serving dishes on the table. Everyone serves themselves
- Cook at home as often as you can
- Invite your child into the kitchen. Children learn about food by touching, seeing and helping in the kitchen
- Keep a meal and snack routine and offer only water between
- If your child asks for a snack soon after dinner, say, "Dinner time is over. You will have to wait until snack time. If you are thirsty though, I can get you some water"

### PUBLIC HEALTH

1-877-464-9675  
TTY 1-866-512-6228  
[york.ca/nutrition](http://york.ca/nutrition)

## PROVIDE SCHEDULED SNACKS

Young children need three small meals and two to three snacks each day, which means eating every two and a half to three hours. Keep a meal and snack routine and offer only water between. To avoid grazing on food, have planned, sit down snacks. Here are some snack ideas:

- Yellow pepper strips and whole grain crackers
- Small oatmeal muffin and sliced strawberries
- Cucumber slices and cheese cubes

## HOW TO OFFER FOODS THAT ARE LESS HEALTHY

Restricting less healthy foods can make children eat more of them when they are available.

Approach food and eating in a positive way. Help your child feel relaxed about all foods by:

- Putting a serving of dessert at each person's plate. Let them eat it before, during or after the meal
- Sometimes offering unlimited sweets at snack time
- Once in a while, offering less healthy foods as part of a meal
- Enjoying all foods! Healthy eating can include small amounts of less healthy foods

Avoid calling foods “good” or “bad.” Let your child know that some foods are more nutritious than others, but all foods can be enjoyed. You can call foods “everyday foods” and “sometimes foods.”

## BE A POSITIVE ROLE MODEL

If you or other people in your family follow specific diets or talk a lot about weight, then your child may do the same. Set a good example by:

- Being active
- Having a healthy relationship with food and a positive body image
- Eating regular meals and snacks with your family
- Providing plenty of chances to try new foods

## WATCH WHAT YOUR CHILD IS DRINKING

If your child drinks too much milk, they may be less interested in eating food, putting them at risk for low iron. Limit milk to no more than 750 mL (24 ounces) per day for young children.

Children do not need juice. Replace juice with water.

## LIMIT HIGHLY PROCESSED FOODS

Highly processed foods often have lots of sodium, sugar or saturated fat. These include sugary drinks (pop), chocolate, candy, chips, processed meats and frozen entrees. If your family eats at restaurants often, set a limit of one fried food per meal, for example, French fries or chicken tenders, not both.

## Help your child to be more active

- Be active as a family
- Let kids jump, run and play in outdoor spaces to improve decision making, problem solving and self-confidence
- Choose active toys like balls, rackets and bikes and encourage a variety activities
- Ensure adequate sleep, swap indoor time for outdoor time and replace sedentary activities with more movement for greater health benefits
- Children aged one to four years should get at least 180 minutes of activity each day
- Children aged five years and older should get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity activity each day

## Reduce screen time

- Screen time is not recommended for children under two years of age
- Children two to four years are recommended to limit screen time to less than one hour per day
- Children five to 11 years are recommended to limit screen time to two hours per day
- Do not allow screens (TV, tablets, phones) in children's bedrooms

Accept and celebrate that healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes. Help your child eat well, be active and feel good about themselves.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For additional resources visit

- [www.york.ca/nutrition](http://www.york.ca/nutrition)
- [www.unlockfood.ca](http://www.unlockfood.ca)
- [www.york.ca/physicalactivity](http://www.york.ca/physicalactivity)

To speak to a registered dietitian at no cost, call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000

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