

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, heavier or lighter than other children the same age. Height and weight changes generally follow a regular pattern that is right for your child.

A child's growth depends on genetics (how their parents grew). Healthy eating habits help a child grow at a healthy rate. 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.

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.

If your child is eating because they are bored, stressed or as a way to deal with problems, talk with them to find out what is bothering them.

DON'T PUT YOUR CHILD ON A DIET

Diets can interfere with their normal growth and development. Children know when they are hungry and when they are full. Pushing a child to eat less food often backfires. Children who are afraid that they will go hungry may overeat when they have a chance. They may start to eat in secret.

Supporting healthy eating habits

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 food you offer and trust them to eat as much or as little as they want.

EAT TOGETHER

Research shows that families who eat together usually eat healthier foods. Prepare and offer the same healthy meals to everyone in the family. Turn off the tablets, TV and have enjoyable conversations.

- Eat at the table.
- Cook from home as often as you can.
- Do not pressure or bribe your child to eat.
- Keep a meal and snack schedule and do not offer food in between.
- If your child asks for a snack soon after dinner, say, "We just ate, but snack time will be soon."

Provide scheduled snacks

Young children need three small meals and two to three snacks each day, separated by two and a half to three hours. Snacks should include foods from at least two food groups. Let your child eat as much or as little as they want from the foods you offer.

PUBLIC HEALTH

1-877-464-9675
TTY 1-866-512-6228
york.ca/nutrition

Here are some snack ideas

- Carrot sticks and whole grain crackers
- Small oatmeal muffin and grapes
- Sliced pear and dry, whole grain cereal
- Cucumber slices and cheese cubes

How to offer foods that are less healthy

Children should not be given unlimited access to food or drinks high in fat or sugar like chips, candy and pop. However, restricting foods can make children eat more of them when they are available.

- Occasionally offer them in a snack or meal
- Offer nutritious food with less healthy food
- Avoid bribing or rewarding with food
- Enjoy! Healthy eating can include small amounts of less healthy foods

Approach food choices and eating in a positive way. 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 good role model

If you or other people in your family diet to lose weight or talk a lot about weight, then your child may do the same. To be a good role model, be active, eat regular meals and snacks with your family and speak positively about food.

Watch what your child is drinking

Too much milk can also provide extra calories. Children two to eight years of age need two cups (500 mL) of plain 2%, 1% or skim milk or fortified soy beverage every day.

Children do not need juice. If you serve juice, it should be 100% juice and only offered as part of a meal or snack. Avoid or limit juice to ½ cup (125 mL) a day for children aged one to three years and limited to ½ to ¾ cup (125 to 175 mL) per day for children aged four to six.

Sugary drinks like pop or fruit-flavoured drinks are “sometimes foods” and should only be served occasionally. Have water available to quench your child’s thirst.

Small amounts of added fat is ok

Use only a small amount of non-hydrogenated margarine or oil like olive or canola when cooking. Try baking, steaming, broiling or stir-frying when cooking. Eat less processed foods and avoid going to restaurants too often. If your family eats at restaurants, set a limit of one fried food per meal, for example, French fries or chicken tenders, not both.

Helping your child to be more active

Young children aged one to four years should get at least 180 minutes of activity throughout the day. Children age five years and older should get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity every day.

- Screen time is not recommended for children under two years of age.
- For children 2 to 4 years, screen time should be limited to less than one hour per day. Children five to 11 years are recommended to limit screen time to no more than two hours per day.
- Don’t allow televisions, tablets, and computers in children’s bedrooms.
- Provide safety and opportunities for your child to move in different settings both indoors and outdoors.
- Choose active toys like balls, rackets and bikes and encourage a variety of movements and activities.

Remember

Accept and celebrate that bodies come in all shapes and sizes. Assure your child that there is nothing wrong with being a different size or shape than other children their age. Whatever their size, your child can be healthy, active and feel good about themselves.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For additional resources on healthy eating, go to www.york.ca/nutrition or www.unlockfood.ca

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

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