

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a pink t-shirt, is smiling and looking down at a young girl with long brown hair, wearing a white top. They are standing in a grocery store aisle, surrounded by large bins of red and green apples. The woman has her hand on the girl's back. The background is filled with various fruits and vegetables, creating a vibrant and healthy atmosphere.

# Hey, What's to Eat?

**Your child's  
nutritional  
needs change**

Unless you've been totally out of the loop, it's likely you've heard about the childhood obesity epidemic. Nearly 1 in 3 children in America is overweight or obese. It's talked about on television, radio, the Internet, and in books, newspapers, and magazines. Yet, with all this focus on kids being overweight and obese, many parents are still confused, especially when it comes to what kids eat. *How much does your child need? Is he getting enough calcium? Enough iron? Too much fat?*

Whether you have a toddler or a teen, what he eats is important to both his physical and mental development. Here's what children need — no matter what the age.

### Infants

During this stage of life, it's almost all about the milk — whether it's breast milk, formula, or a combination of the two. Breast milk or formula will provide practically every nutrient a baby needs for the first year of life, says Jennifer Shu, M.D., FAAP, a pediatrician at Children's Medical Group in Atlanta and co-author *Food Fights: Winning the Nutritional Challenges of Parenthood Armed with Insights, Humor, and a Bottle of Ketchup*, published by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

From about four months to six months most babies are ready to start solid foods like iron-fortified infant cereal and strained fruits, vegetables, and pureed meats, Dr. Shu says. Because breast milk may not provide enough iron and zinc when babies are around six to nine months, fortified cereals and meats can help breastfed babies in particular, she explains.

Once you do start adding foods, don't go low-fat crazy. Although the AAP recently released updated guidelines stating fat restriction in *some* babies is appropriate, in general, "you don't want to restrict fats under age two because a healthy amount of fat is important for babies' brain and nerve development," says Dr. Shu.

### Toddlers and Preschoolers

"Toddlers and preschoolers grow in spurts and their appetites come and go in spurts, so they may eat a whole lot one day and then hardly anything the next," says Loraine Stern, M.D., FAAP, a clinical professor of pediatrics at the UCLA School of Medicine. It's normal, and as long as you offer them a healthful selection, they will get what they need, she says.

One area parents should probably keep under watch is calcium. Calcium, the body's building block, is needed to develop strong, healthy bones and teeth. Children may not believe or care that milk "does a body good," but it is the best source of much-needed calcium.

Still, there's hope for the milk-allergic, lactose-intolerant, or those who are just impartial to milk. Lactose-free milk, soy milk, tofu, sardines, and calcium-fortified orange juices, cereals, waffles, and oatmeal are some calcium-filled options. In some cases the doctor may recommend calcium supplements.

Fiber is another important focus. Toddlers start to say "no" more and preschoolers can be especially opinionated about what they eat. The kids may want to stick to the bland, beige, starchy diet (think chicken nuggets, fries, macaroni), but this is really the time to encourage fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and beans, which all provide fiber, Dr. Shu says. Not only does fiber prevent heart disease and other conditions, but it also helps aid digestion and prevents constipation, something you and your child will be thankful for.

### Elementary School

Don't be surprised if your child quits meat. "It isn't uncommon for a 6- or 7-year-old to suddenly decide to be a vegetarian once they understand animals and where food comes," Dr. Stern says. This doesn't mean she won't get enough protein. "Animal tissue isn't the only place we get protein," Dr. Stern says. Rice, beans, eggs,

## Quick Tips: Give this ...

Here's what the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends kids get calorie-wise and from each food group for a healthy, balanced diet:

### Calories\*

- 2-3 years: 1,000
- 4-8: 1,200-1,400
- 9-13 (female): 1,600
- 9-13 (male): 1,800
- 14-18 (female): 1,800
- 14-18 (male): 2,200

\* For active children, calorie requirements may be greater

Age	Fruits (cups)	Vegetables (cups)	Grains (ounces)	Meats and Beans (ounces)	Milk (cups)	Oils (tsps)
2-3	1	2	3	2	2	3
4-8	1-1 ½	1 ½	4-5	3-4	2	4
9-13 (females)	1 ½	2	5	5	3	5
9-13 (males)	1 ½	2 ½	6	5	3	5
14-18 (females)	1 ½	2 ½	6	5	3	5
14-18 (males)	2	3	7	6	3	6

## Quick Tips: Drink Up!

Water makes up more than half of kids' body weight and is needed to keep all parts of the body functioning properly.

- There's no specific amount of water recommended for children, but it's a good idea to give them water throughout the day — not just when they're thirsty.
- Babies generally don't need water during the first year of life.
- If your child doesn't like the taste of water, add a bit of lemon or lime for flavor.
- Fruits and veggies are also good sources of water.
- Kids should drink more water when ill, when it's hot out, or when engaged in physical activity.



milk, peanut butter — all have protein. So whether your child goes “no-meat” for a week or for life, she’ll likely still get sufficient amounts of protein.

Areas that might be a little too sufficient are sugars, fats, and sodium. “This time is when kids first go to school and have a little bit more choice in what they eat, especially if they’re getting it in the cafeteria themselves,” Dr. Shu says. Cakes, candy, chips, and other snacks might become lunchtime staples. The body needs carbs (sugars), fats, and sodium, but should be eaten in moderation, as too much can lead to unneeded weight gain and other health problems. Packing your child’s lunch or going over the lunch menu and encouraging her to select healthier choices can help keep things on track, Dr. Shu says.

### Preteens and Teens

As puberty kicks in, young people need more calories to support the many changes they will experience.

Unfortunately, for some, those extra calories come from fast food or “junk” foods with little nutritional value. Some adolescents go the opposite way and restrict calories, fats, or carbs. Adolescence is the time kids start to become conscious of their weight and body image, which, for some, can lead to eating disorders or other unhealthy behaviors, Dr. Stern

says. She recommends parents keep an eye on things by being aware of changes in eating patterns and making family dinners a priority once or twice a week.

Like calories, calcium requirements are higher. Calcium is more important than ever during the tween and teen years because the majority of bone mass is built during this time. However, fewer than 10 percent of girls and just more than 25 percent of boys ages 9 to 13 are at or above their adequate intake of calcium. Encouraging kids to have milk, milk products, or calcium-rich alternatives, even if it means they have to add chocolate syrup to their milk to make it more palatable, should help them get more calcium.

In addition to more calories and calcium, your child’s gender may play a role in whether he or she needs more of a particular nutrient. For instance, teen girls need more iron than their male counterparts to replace what’s lost during menstruation, and males need slightly more protein than girls.

Although getting your child to eat healthy — regardless of his or her age — can be a constant battle, it’s one well worth fighting. A healthy child becomes a healthy adult, and only with your support and guidance will your child be both. ●