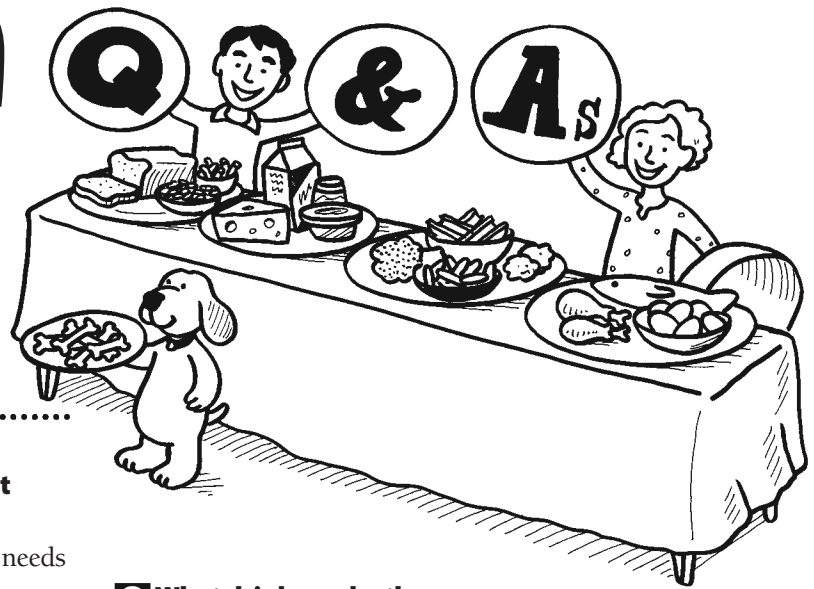


# Nutrition



Building good eating habits is a surefire way to boost your child's health. These answers to common questions can help your family make wise decisions when it comes to food choices.

## **Q** What foods should I try to get into my child's diet each day?

**A** To have a healthy and balanced diet, your youngster needs foods from these groups every day:

- whole grains like whole-wheat bread, brown rice, or multi-grain pasta
- vegetables—raw or cooked, in a variety of colors
- fruit, preferably fresh or frozen with no sugar added
- dairy products (fat-free milk and low-fat cheese or yogurt)
- lean protein from meat, poultry, fish, eggs, or beans

*Note:* The amount of each food your child needs will vary according to age, gender, and level of physical activity. Ask your pediatrician or school nurse, or look online at [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov).



## **Q** My youngster won't eat vegetables. What should I do?

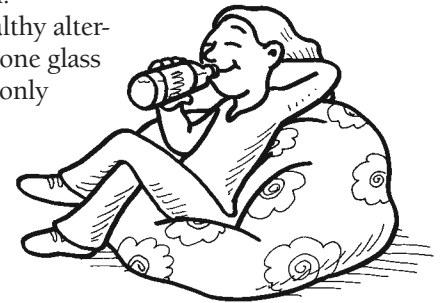
**A** This is a common problem. Try these ideas:

- Make sampling new vegetables a family adventure. It can be fun to try artichokes or bok choy when it's new to everyone. Let your child pick out a different vegetable during each trip to the grocery store and then help you find a recipe for it.
- Offer vegetables raw. Some children prefer crunchy vegetables over cooked ones. *Tip:* Kids love to dip. Put out vegetables (sugar snap peas, green beans, baby carrots) with low-fat ranch dressing, salsa, or hummus.
- "Hide" vegetables in foods your youngster likes. Try adding frozen chopped spinach (thawed) to his favorite meatloaf or diced cooked cauliflower to macaroni and cheese. For other ideas, look through cookbooks like *The Sneaky Chef: Simple Strategies for Hiding Healthy Foods in Kids' Favorite Meals* by Missy Chase Lapine.

## **Q** What drinks make the healthiest choices?

**A** Water is the best option—it can keep your child's digestive system healthy and quench her thirst without adding extra sodium, sugar, or calories. It's also important for your child to drink fat-free milk so she gets the calcium she needs for strong bones and teeth.

Fruit juice can be a healthy alternative, if limited to about one glass a day. Make sure you buy only juices labeled 100% real fruit juice.



## **Q** What can we do to make our weekly menus healthier?

**A** Little changes can mean a lot. You can get started with simple steps like these:

*Step 1:* Try to eat more foods prepared from scratch. Processed foods (quick-to-prepare boxed dinners, for example) are often high in salt, fat, and calories. To save time, plan a day when you can cook double batches of healthy recipes—then eat one, and freeze the other for later.

*Step 2:* Incorporate more fruits and vegetables into meals and snacks. You might stir a handful of berries into your child's oatmeal at breakfast, tuck spinach leaves into his sandwich for lunch, give him celery sticks with peanut butter for an afternoon snack, serve asparagus and baked acorn squash with dinner, and offer him a fresh orange or apple before bedtime.

*Step 3:* Add flavor without adding sugar or salt by trying different herbs and spices. Basil, oregano, and marjoram are good in pasta and tomato dishes, for instance. Dill, chives, and tarragon liven up salads. And red pepper flakes, chili powder, and cumin make spicy additions to Mexican-style dishes like burritos and enchiladas.

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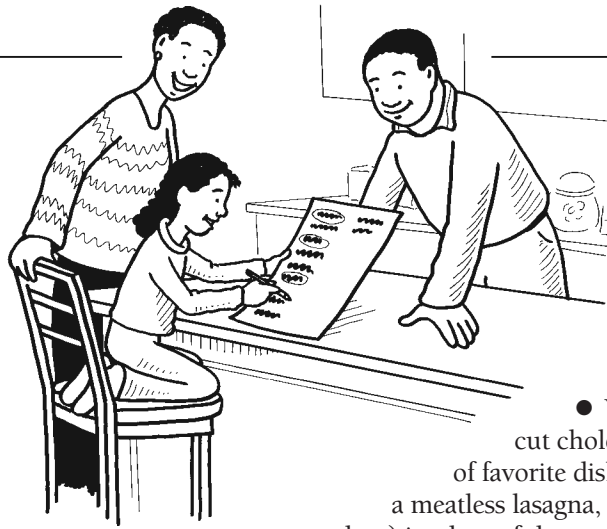
**Q How can I encourage my child to choose healthy snacks?**

**A** Teach her to think of snacks as a way to get part of her daily nutrition. Consider making a snack “menu” together.

First, ask her to list snacks she likes. Then, go through the items with her, and have her circle the ones that include whole grains, fruits, vegetables, protein, and low-fat dairy. *Examples:* fruit smoothies, popcorn, frozen waffles.

Next, your youngster can use markers to rewrite and illustrate the list on a small poster board. She could separate the items into two columns—one for snacks to grab on the go (a box of raisins, a hard-boiled egg) and the other for items taking a little time (baked sweet potato “fries,” a cheese-and-bean quesadilla).

Hang your child’s menu on the fridge. You can use it as a handy checklist when writing a grocery list, and she’ll have an instant reminder of nutritious foods that make tasty snacks.



**Q How can I help my youngster manage his food allergies away from home?**

**A** Food allergies can cause everything from rashes to life-threatening emergencies. If your child has been diagnosed with a food allergy, help him take control with these suggestions:

- Teach him to read food labels and know the names his allergen might be called. For example, if he’s allergic to milk, he’ll need to watch for ingredients like casein, lactose, and whey.
- When your youngster’s going home with a friend or to an after-school activity, have him pack something

he can eat. He can also take his own snacks to parties in case he can’t have the foods served.

- If he’s not sure what a snack or meal contains, he should politely decline it. Remind him that it is better to gently refuse food than to get sick from eating it.
- For severe food allergies, make sure your child carries an epinephrine kit with him in case of emergencies.

**Q Does eating healthy mean giving up our favorite dishes?**

**A** Sometimes our favorite foods are those that are high in fat, sugar, salt, or calories. Try giving your recipes a makeover with ideas like these:

- Reduce fat and calories by replacing half the fat (butter, oil) with unsweetened applesauce (2/3 cup applesauce = 1 cup

butter). Use fat-free versions of ingredients like milk, sour cream, or cheese.

- When you make tacos, nachos, and spaghetti, use lean ground beef, chicken, or turkey, and drain after browning it. You’ll lower the cholesterol and calories.

- You can boost nutrients and also cut cholesterol with vegetarian versions of favorite dishes such as lasagna or chili. For a meatless lasagna, layer vegetables (zucchini, eggplant) in place of the meat. For chili, use more beans and skip the meat.

- Add fiber by switching to whole grains. Swap brown rice for white rice in stuffed peppers, or use whole-grain noodles instead of white noodles in chicken chow mein, for example.

*Note:* Remember, every now and then it’s okay to enjoy a treat, whether it’s a main course your family likes or a special dessert.

**Q How can we change our eating habits to lose weight?**

**A** Small steps can make a big difference when your family is trying to lose weight. Start with these suggestions:

- Eat breakfast. Skipping the morning meal can leave you hungry and often leads to overeating later in the day.
- Make calories count. Try not to eat foods that add calories without nutritional value (soda or chips, for instance). Instead, look for “nutrient-rich” foods—those that are packed with healthy vitamins and minerals and will fill you up. *Examples:* brightly colored fruits and vegetables, lean poultry, fish, fat-free milk, beans, whole grains.
- Put salad dressings and sauces on the side, and dip your food into them. You’ll still enjoy the flavor but will have fewer calories and less fat.
- Read food labels and measure out portions to learn what a healthy serving size looks like.

*Tip:* Talk to your family doctor, the school nurse, or a registered dietitian to create a healthy eating plan that will help your family meet weight goals.



*Editor’s Note:* Nutrition Nuggets™ is reviewed by a registered dietitian. Consult a physician before beginning any major change in diet or exercise.

## Nutrition Nuggets™