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FOOD FOR SMALL CHILDREN

Esther Wilson
Extension Nutrition Specialist

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
College of Agriculture ★ University of Idaho

Everyone is concerned with nutrition these days. Mothers of preschoolers are no exception. Nutrition and good eating habits formed early will remain with your child the rest of his life.

THE 1-2-3-4 WAY

Everyone needs nutrients — carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, minerals, and water. Preschoolers needs are filled with smaller quantities. These nutrients are found in everyday foods. The 4-Food Groups is a grouping of foods roughly equivalent to each other in the nutrients they supply.

First is the milk group. The second is the meat group and includes meat, fish, eggs, dried peas, and similar foods. Fruits and vegetables make up the third group. And whole grain and enriched bread and cereals are the key foods in the fourth group.

The following table shows approximate realistic servings a pre-school child needs to fulfill his nutrient requirement every day. Some chil-

dren may eat larger amounts to satisfy caloric needs. Fats and sweets will add to this but should never be used to the extent that a child is not hungry for the foods so necessary to his best growth and development.

QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

When feeding little folks the quality of the food is more important than quantity. A child is better fed by eating small quantities of food high in nutrients than large amounts of foods low in nutritive value. Be sure to have one citrus fruit and one green or yellow vegetable each day. The rest of the needed nutrients in the vegetable and fruit group may be made up from other kinds.

The amount of food a child eats depends on his development. Active children naturally eat more. Size and age also dictate a child's appetite. Heredity may set the limits your child will achieve, but the food he eats determines if he will achieve the maximum in growth and development. All nutrients work toward making a child healthy, happy, growing, and alert.

"WITH NOT AGAINST"

Feeding a preschooler should be a happy experience for all concerned. By working "with" and not "against" him, you can teach your child good eating habits for the rest of his life.

A preschooler is ever changing and unpredictable. You can depend on him to be himself, to be independent, to vary from day to day, and to want to learn by doing. Remember no two children are alike.

As a child grows, he becomes more and more independent. He will want to pour his milk, butter his bread, and serve himself. Let him, even though he spills some. Be tolerant of his awkwardness in doing these things. As he practices, accidents will be less frequent.

A child's tastes are different from day to day and his capacity for food also will change. What was a favorite food yesterday may be on the reject list today.

To promote good eating habits the atmosphere is most important. He learns from example. Let youngsters eat with the family. When other fam-

FOOD GROUP	AMOUNTS OF FOOD PER GROUP	
	1-3 Years	3-6 Years
I. Milk	2 to 3 8-oz. cups	2 or more 8-oz. cups
II. Meats, etc.	2-3 servings about 3 oz./day	2-3 servings, 1½-2 oz. each, about 4 oz./day
III. Vegetables and Fruit	½ cup citrus, plus 3 servings of others 1-2 tablespoons each	½ cup citrus, plus 3-4 servings of others ¼ cup each
IV. Bread and Cereals	4 half-size servings	4 half size servings or larger
Fats and sweets (as needed in addition to other foods).		

ily members enjoy eating, young children want to "join the crowd." Happiness at mealtime, pleasant conversation, and a relaxed atmosphere should be a part of family eating. This creates feelings of security and pleasure and makes food more acceptable. When your child is relaxed he will finish eating in less time and will digest the food better.

If at all possible meal times should be regular. A child becomes rebellious if he must wait for his food.

Realistic portions of food are a must when feeding young children. A plate heaped high overwhelms a child, small amounts entice him.

Children love to **help prepare** what they will eat. Even by opening a carton a child feels he has contributed to the meal.

SNACKS BETWEEN MEALS

Snacks are a way of life for most people. They should be considered a part of the daily food intake. A child has a small capacity and therefore often cannot wait several hours between meals.

Snacks should be varied and include foods with the necessary nutrients, especially for small or finicky appetites. Such foods include fresh fruit, milk, carrot or celery sticks, dried fruit, peanut butter or cheese sandwiches, and ready-to-eat cereal (not sugar-coated).

If your preschooler depends on snacks and eats little at mealtime these suggestions may help to reduce snacks and increase his intake at meals.

1. Make mealtime pleasant and regular so a child will eat enough to last 3-4 hours.
2. Discourage snacking too close to mealtime. By interesting a child in some activity, waiting is easier.
3. Discourage other members of the family from snacking. Remember children learn from example.
4. Keep snacks at a minimum and space them at least one hour before meals.

LEARN BY DOING

Young children can create messes when learning to feed themselves. Broad based cups with large handles are easier for small hands to use. Small glasses, half-full, are also suggested. Plates with rims help food stay on forks and spoons. And lastly, child size forks and spoons make the task of feeding himself more enjoyable.

By placing a piece of sheet plastic under a child's chair, clean-ups are easier and mother's disposition remains calm. Feet should rest on floor, chair, or step—not dangling in mid air. Comfort is as desirable for youngsters as for adults.

Preschoolers eat more slowly than adults. Sibling rivalries may contribute to problems at mealtime. Some children dawdle to get attention even if it means parents shouting at them. Extra affection between meals may help. Each child needs his own special time for affection and loving.

By using common sense and planning your meals around the 4-food groups, your child should become a good eater. The eating habits your child develops in the first four or five years of life will influence the rest of his life. Make sure he gets off to a good start!

Children are not small adults, points out Dr. Miriam Lowenberg, Nutrition Consultant, Well Child Clinic, University of Washington Hospital, and co-author of some editions of Dr. Spock's Baby Book. They have quite different tastes and preferences from adults. Following are some of the points you should keep in mind when preparing and serving food for your children, as Dr. Lowenberg sees it:

1. Children have keener senses of taste and smell than adults and those under six usually **like mild-flavored foods**. Mildness is especially important when considering vegetables, fruits, and organ meats for children.

2. At two to six years, children often **prefer raw vegetables and fruits**.

3. They **appreciate some crisp foods** in a meal if, for no other reason, than to hear the sound associated with the chewing of crisp, crunchy carrot sticks or toast.

4. Children are not venturesome in regard to food. **They are not gourmets**.

5. Children in general **prefer uncomplicated foods**. It was found that a stew in which vegetables and meat were ground and cooked together was much more popular with young children than one with separate pieces of vegetables and meat.

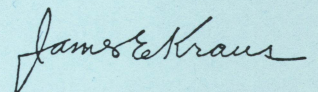
6. Serve **slightly less** than you think your child is going to eat. This gives him the advantage of feeling successful, even to the point of asking for a second helping. It has been found a two year old child will take only approximately two level tablespoonsful of most vegetables or a meat, and about twice this amount of a mixed soup or a dessert.

7. Because young hands are awkward before any marked degree of coordination is achieved, it is wise to make it legitimate for young children to pick up "finger foods" such as pieces of raw vegetables, fruits, strips of meat, and quarters of hard cooked eggs.

8. Children show preferences for certain textures. It was found in Iowa and Texas studies that children in grades 5 and 6 disliked soft foods while in grades 7 and 8 some firm foods were disliked.

9. Stiff, or even slightly gummy, textures in starchy foods are especially disliked by children. Mashed potatoes can be either a popular or highly unpopular food with young children, **depending solely on the moisture content and smoothness** of the texture. As a rule, children do not eat dry foods easily.

10. Do not **force** anything on a child. It is always easier to change the food than it is to change the child.



JAMES E. KRAUS, Director