



**YOU ASKED  
ABOUT**

# **TODDLER**

**& CHILD NUTRITION**



**THE DANNON  
INFORMATION  
CENTER**

# HEALTHY DIET / HEALTHY CHILD

It's never too early to start your child on the path to good health through good nutrition. A good diet will help your child grow and develop normally, perform better in school, and have energy for physical activities. ♥ This brochure contains some basic facts about feeding your child, along with tips and guidelines that can help make healthy eating fun, pleasurable and easy – for your whole family.

## BUILDING A SOLID FOUNDATION

Good nutrition at any age starts with a solid foundation, and the best foundation is the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children. The Pyramid depicts food groups as blocks arranged into a pyramid shape. Food groups that



should be eaten more frequently are bigger blocks at the base of the pyramid, while foods that should be eaten in moderation are smaller blocks.



*The finicky and erratic eating habits of young children can challenge even the most well-informed, well-intentioned parents.*

Follow the Pyramid to build your child's daily diet. Start with a base of grain foods like bread, cereal, pasta and rice, along with an assortment of fruits and vegetables. Add moderate amounts of milk and other dairy products, and also of meat and protein-rich foods like poultry, fish, eggs and peanut butter. These five food groups provide essential nutrients for normal body functioning, growth, development and energy. Fats and sweets, shown at the top of the Pyramid, should be eaten only occasionally because they tend to be high in calories but low in nutrients.

## YOUR TODDLER, PRESCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILD

The finicky and erratic eating habits of young children can challenge even the most well-informed, well-intentioned parents. It may be reassuring to know that this behavior is very common, and that eating behaviors and physical needs change as your child grows. Read on to learn what to expect at each stage.

### TODDLERS

Toddlers are notoriously picky eaters! Many toddlers only eat small amounts of food at a time and can go on food "jags" and refuse all but one or two favorite foods. Some toddlers appear to lose interest in eating altogether! Your toddler eats this way because growth rate and, therefore, appetite have slowed down. Also, your child has learned to say "no."

As long as your toddler is growing within normal guidelines (as provided by your pediatrician), unusual eating behaviors are no cause for concern. Preserve your sanity and promote mealtime harmony by remembering this rule: parents and caregivers are responsible for providing a variety of healthy foods; children are responsible for deciding how much to eat. Offer your

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child a variety of nutritious food choices throughout the day and the week, and you can be reasonably assured that nutritional needs will be met over time.

The following tips can make it easier to feed your toddler:

- Portion sizes for small children are small. Refer to the Pyramid for guidance. A toddler's portions should be about 2/3 the size of an older child's portions.
- Introduce one new food at a time, and don't make a fuss if your child says no. Try again another time, it may take up to 10 times for your child to taste something new.
- Set up a daily schedule of meals and snacks to help establish good eating habits – but be flexible about food choices. It really doesn't matter if your child wants a cheese sandwich for breakfast and cereal for dinner! Always include one favorite food at each meal.
- Make nutritionally smart swaps. For example, if your child hates vegetables, serve fruit since it has many of the same vitamins and minerals. If he or she refuses meat or milk but loves yogurt, serve it frequently as an alternative for meat's protein and milk's protein and calcium. Yogurt has been recognized as one of the meat alternatives in the School Lunch Program. In that instance, eight ounces (one cup) of yogurt may be the alternate for two ounces of lean meat, poultry or fish.

## PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Like toddlers, preschoolers have relatively small appetites because they are growing slowly. They do need meals plus snacks because their little tummies cannot hold much food at one time. Preschoolers are great imitators – young children watch grown-ups and their friends, and mimic their behavior.

Foster healthy attitudes about food choices.

Encourage moderation, and teach your child that all foods can be a part of healthy eating. Take advantage of your preschooler's eagerness to learn by allowing your little helper to assist you in the kitchen.

Here are some fun ideas for your family to try:

- Make a shopping list together and include some of your child's favorites. At the market, encourage your preschooler to pick out unusual fruits and vegetables to try.
- Involve preschoolers in safe activities, like scrubbing fruits and vegetables clean, tearing lettuce, or tossing the fruit salad.
- Have fun with foods like yogurt. Stir up a yogurt-based dip for dunking vegetables. Create a layered yogurt "sundae" with granola and fresh fruit, or sprinkles and cookie crumbs.
- Let your preschooler make sandwiches – spreading peanut butter is a favorite activity. Preschoolers also enjoy sandwiches cut with cookie cutters or concocting their own sandwich creations.



## Children in Daycare

- ♥ Discuss your nutrition concerns and your child's eating preferences with all caregivers.
- ♥ If your child has very strong food preferences or chooses not to eat the meal or snack provided, pack and send favorite foods.
- ♥ Check daily with the caregiver regarding what your child has eaten.



Make lists together of favorite meals and snacks and allow your child to make food choices.

## ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

If you've set the stage for healthy eating, the elementary school years are usually much easier for parents. Growth until the onset of adolescence is slow and steady. Appetites may vary, but not with the wide swings of the early years. Food "jags" are a thing of the past. In most cases, children at this age eat the same foods as the rest of the family.

♥ Take advantage of your child's interest in meal planning and preparation. Make lists together of favorite meals and after-school snacks and allow your child to make food choices. Find out about the nutrition curriculum in your child's school and reinforce this nutrition education with some home-taught skills:

♥ Aim for five daily servings of fruits and vegetables. Encourage your child to keep track on a graph, with fruit and vegetable stickers to record daily servings. Also count colors and textures – the more colors, the more nutrition.

♥ Pair together "snack mates" from at least two food groups for good taste and good nutrition. Try veggies and yogurt dip, cheese and fruit, peanut butter and carrots, or an English muffin with melted cheese.

♥ Dish up plenty of calcium-rich foods like milk, yogurt, pudding made with milk, and lower fat cheeses. Children nine years of age or older should be consuming three to four daily servings to help build strong bones during adolescence.

Studies show that elementary school children who eat breakfast have better diets and perform better in school than children who do not. Don't let your children leave the house without it! Stock up on fast, easy choices, such as whole grain cereals and breads, milk, whole grain frozen waffles, fresh fruit and yogurts.

## FAT FACTS

Young children need fat in their diet in order to grow healthfully. You should not restrict fat in the diet of a child under the age of two. After your child's second birthday, gradually reduce fat intake until, by age five, fat makes up 30 percent of your child's daily calories. Serve plenty of whole grain products, fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products and lean meats. Limit "hidden fat" foods such as cookies, cakes, crackers and chips. Control the amount of fat and oil you use when cooking. Remember that your goal is to reduce fat, not eliminate it entirely.



## SUGAR

The Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children recommends limiting sweets. "Treats" like soft drinks, candy and sweet desserts are typically high in calories and low or lacking in essential nutrients. It's wise to offer nutritious foods first, and serve sweets only on occasion.

## WEIGHING IN ON WEIGHT

Maintaining a healthy weight is important for health. Wise food choices may be linked to a reduced risk for heart disease, certain cancers, diabetes, stroke and osteoporosis in the adult years. If you are concerned about your child's weight, ask your doctor or a registered dietitian for weight management guidelines.

### Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- ♥ Set a good example — if your children see you enjoy physical activity and healthy, nutritious foods, they will be more likely to do the same.
- ♥ Keep your family active — play ball, ride bikes, go bowling, play tennis, or go for a walk.
- ♥ Set limits on television and computer time to allow for time to incorporate physical activity.
- ♥ Avoid using food as a reward or comfort — doing so can establish poor eating habits.
- ♥ Practice moderation. All foods can fit into a healthy diet. Note that forbidden foods may become even more attractive to a child.



*Better every day™*

DANNON Yogurt can be a parent's best friend. It is an excellent, nutritious food that can be offered even to very young children. DANNON Yogurt is a significant source of calcium and a good source of protein—nutrients that are essential to your child's growth and development. Many DANNON Yogurts are also a good source of potassium, and several are fat free. DANNON Yogurt contains live and active yogurt cultures. DANNON Danimals® contains no artificial colors or flavors.

*Best of all — kids love it!*

*It's a perfect choice for healthy, kid-friendly meals and snacks — every day.*

**REFERENCES:**

**U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children, 1999.**

**AAP Guide to Your Child's Nutrition, 1998.**

**Federal Register, Volume 62, 1997, (U.S.D.A.)**

*Plush toys courtesy of Gund, Inc.®*



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