

Your Child's Nutrition At Home and Away from Home

A YoungStar Guide for Families

By the time children are three years old, their brains are almost 90% fully developed. What fuels that growth? A nutritious diet.

When you offer your children a balanced mix of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and protein, you give them the important vitamins and minerals they need. You also help them to develop the healthy eating habits they'll need to live a long, active life.

At Home

A Healthy Plate

Preparing a healthy meal is easier than you think. Just divide a kid-size plate into four sections. Fill two sections with fresh fruits and veggies, one section with a little lean protein, such as chicken, and the last section with whole grains, like rice or pasta. A glass of water or low-fat milk are great for kids over the age of two. A little fruit juice is okay, but stay away from sugary soft drinks. Finally, remember to keep the portions small; the serving sizes you see on most food labels are meant for adults.

Quick Tips

Feed them a little (a lot).

Most children like frequent, smaller meals best. Your child should eat a little something every two or three hours.

Give them the spoon.

Encourage your child to serve themselves and let them help prepare family meals in safe, simple ways. Many children love to help and it's a fun way to improve their motor skills as well.

Show them healthy habits.

Children learn from watching the adults around them, so make sure to include lots of fruits and veggies in your diet too. You'll need the energy!

Let them set the pace.

It's important that we help children learn to listen to their bodies and its needs. It's easy to want to force your child to finish everything on their plate, but if they say they're full, they probably are.

Make every bite matter.

Children who fill up on "empty" foods (high-calorie, low nutrient drinks and snacks) won't be hungry for the healthy fruits and vegetables their bodies need.

Using YoungStar Is Easy

Visit youngstar.wi.gov to compare child care providers and find helpful parenting advice.

Look for the **YoungStar rating window sticker or certificate** when you're interviewing providers.

Call **1-888-713-KIDS (5437)** to get personalized help from a local child care resource and referral specialist.

Want to Learn More?

At youngstar.wi.gov, parents can watch videos, download articles and find useful information on early childhood education, nutrition and more. You can even discover activities that encourage healthy brain development.

Read about obesity prevention and Healthy Bites information at:

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/physical-activity/childcare.htm>

Away From Home

What to Ask

Finding the right child care program for your family isn't easy. But asking questions can help. Want to talk about nutrition with a child care provider you're considering, but don't know what to ask? Here are a few simple questions to get the conversation started:

- Do you provide food and snacks for the children or is that something the family is expected to provide?
- Where do you purchase your food? Is it local? Is it organic?
- How often do you provide meals and snacks?
- What do you do if a child doesn't want to eat?
- How do you deal with food allergies?
- What do the children get to drink?
- Do you serve processed or prepackaged foods? How often?

What to Look For

Sometimes a visit is the easiest way to see if a child care program is right for your family. If you're concerned about the program's nutrition policies, try planning your visit around a snack or meal time. Here are a few food-focused things to look for:

- Sharing meals is an important experience that can help your child build social skills. Observe a meal or snack time and see if the teachers eat with the children?
- A professional child care program plans meals ahead of time and provides a varied menu that encourages kids to try new things. Ask to see the programs weekly menu in order to know what kind of meals are served.
- Every child care program should have policies regarding things such as food sharing among the children, food safety, handling leftovers, etc. There should even be rules for birthday and holiday treats. Ask to see the parent handbook and specifically the nutrition policies.
- It's never too early to teach children about nutrition. Lessons on eating well and where food comes from can help kids develop healthy food habits. Ask the teachers if they talk to the children about healthy eating habits and nutrition.
- Staff members should be prepared to recognize and safely respond to food-related emergencies like allergic reactions and choking. Ask the program how they keep track of and respond to a child's food and allergy needs.

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please call the Division of Early Care and Education at 608-422-6002. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the department.