

Your Child's Nutrition: At Home & 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 and vegetables, whole grains and protein, you give them important vitamins and minerals. And you help them 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 and the last one with whole grains, like rice or pasta. Water and skim 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 himself and help prepare family meals in safe, simple ways. Many children love it, and it's a fun way to improve their motor skills.

Show them healthy habits.

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

Let them set the pace.

Why force your child to finish what's on her or his plate? Listen when your children say they're full. You'll teach them to listen to their own bodies' needs.

Make every bite matter.

Children who fill up on "empty" foods (high-calorie drinks and snacks without many nutrients) 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 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 nutrition with a child care provider you're considering? Here are a few simple questions to get the conversation started:

- Do you provide food for the children or are we expected to pack meals and/or snacks for our child?
- Do you work with a nutritionist? Who prepares the food?
- 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?
- Do you teach the children about nutrition?
- 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. Watch how the staff and children interact. And 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:

Does the staff eat with the children? Sharing meals is an important experience that can help your child build social skills.

Is there a weekly menu? A professional child care program plans meals ahead of time, keeps parents informed and provides a varied menu that encourages kids to try new things.

Are there food rules? Every child care program should have policies regarding food sharing among the children, food safety, handling leftovers, etc. There should even be rules for birthday and holiday treats.

Do the children learn about food? 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.

Do they have an emergency response plan? Staff members should be prepared to recognize and safely respond to food-related emergencies like allergic reactions and choking.