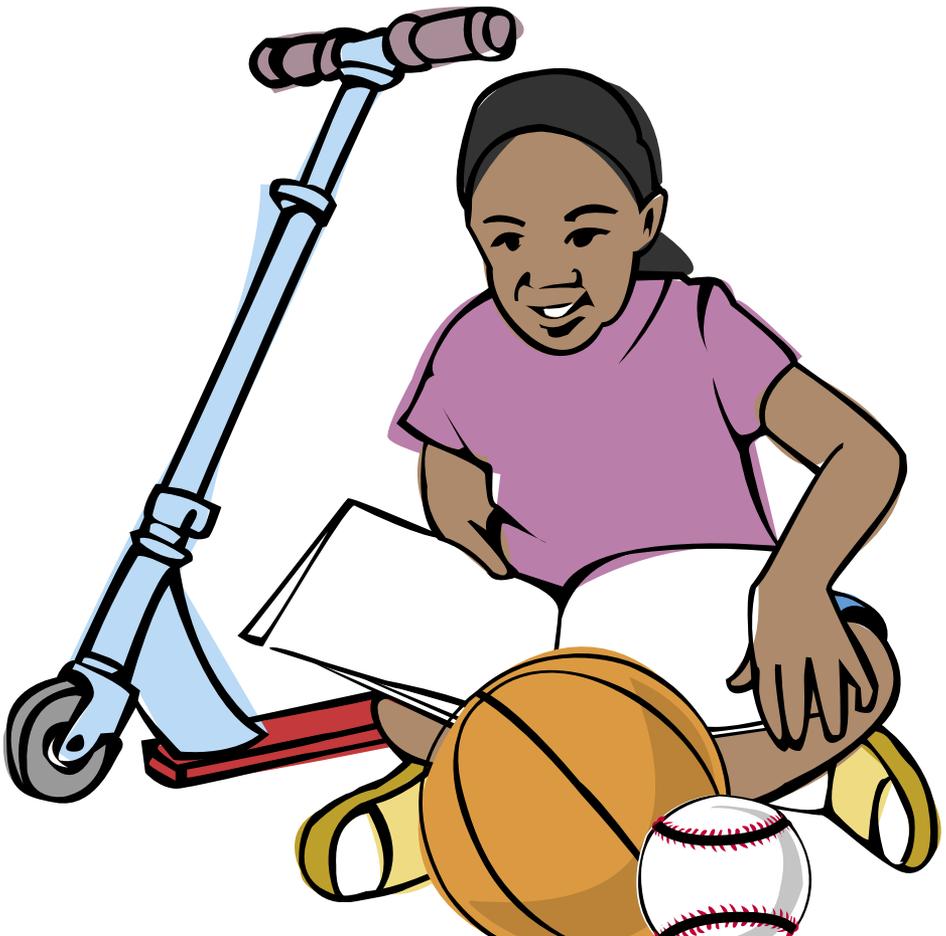




## For 6- to 12-Year-Old Children

By Cynthia Reeves Tuttle





**F**rom ages 6 to 12, children have more influence over the foods they eat than when they were younger. And their food choices, in turn, have an effect on what foods parents buy and which restaurants parents select for family meals out. A child's food likes and dislikes may be shaped by a variety of influences. These can be cultural, ethnic, parental, and environmental such as the media and peer groups.

Children's eating patterns are still developing at these ages. It is not uncommon for a child to go through periods of disliking a food, then find later that she likes it. Food preferences can change from week to week, day to day, even meal to meal. When starting school, children move into more of an adult-type mealtime pattern. For parents and other caregivers the challenge is twofold: one, to offer

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variety and encourage the child to taste new foods, including foods he once disliked; two, to act as role models, which means eating a variety of foods and being willing to try new foods in their own diets. During these years children grow more independent and test limits. Children may feel they have some power over their choice of

foods to eat. Luckily, there are some practical ways to handle mealtimes and snack choices.

# Exercising Healthy Habits

## Family Meals

Family meals can be a special time of sharing well-liked family favorites, introducing new foods or recipes, and are important for school-age children. If you have a structured family mealtime at the dining table for several times a week. Mealtimes can be a social time, and children often associate good food and family closeness with family closeness.

At this age children can be involved in shopping for and planning and preparing meals. Children are often more willing to try a new food if they have helped in its preparation in any way. Encourage them to take part in these activities; it can help them widen the variety of foods they will eat.





Try growing small vegetable gardens with children. Or shop together at the grocery store or farmer's market. Or let your child play with pots and pans on the porch or patio. All of these activities can help to increase the variety of vegetables they will taste and include in their diet. Children may still have distinct likes and dislikes; however, encouraging them to be involved in any phase of food growing, buying, planning, and preparing goes a long way toward helping them to develop healthy eating habits for a lifetime.

Your child's after-school care program should also offer family-style meals and snacks. When you are searching for after-school care, be sure to ask about snacks or meals—what foods are served and the setting they are served in. Many care centers take part in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) sponsored Child and Adult Care Feeding Program. If so, USDA requires that the center serve specific foods to make sure children are getting the right nutrients. The center must post menus.

Children don't have to clean their plates for you to be sure they're getting enough to eat. Insisting children clean

their plates may lead to overeating and teaches children to eat in response to outside cues rather than to hunger.

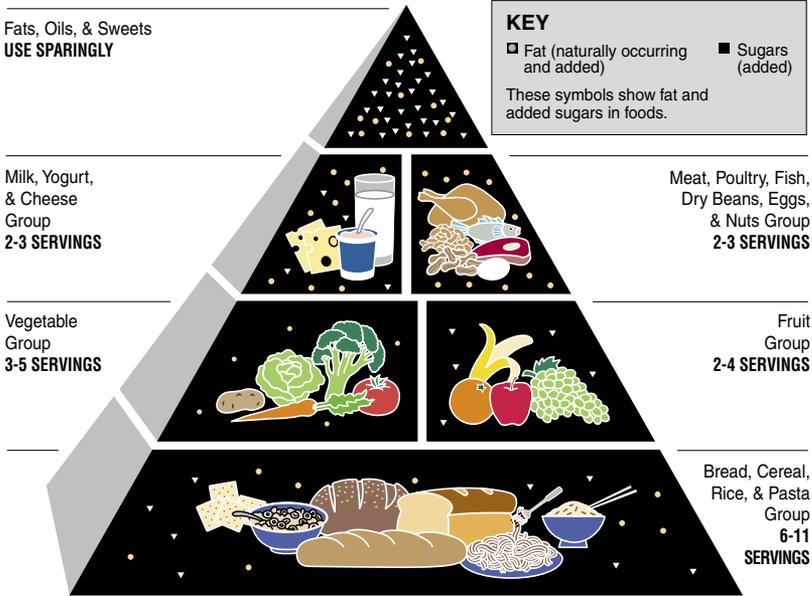
Allow children to serve themselves and encourage them to take small portions with a choice for seconds. This is a good way to help them figure out serving sizes that fit their appetite.

### **Eat Breakfast!**

Skipping breakfast has been identified as a growing problem among school-aged children. And the problem appears to increase with age. Eating breakfast is linked to improved health and learning in children. Skipping the meal is an increasing concern—especially since it appears that children who skip breakfast may not make up for the loss of nutrients at other meals. Wake children in time to eat a healthy breakfast. Oatmeal and other cereal, milk, toast,



bananas, berries, English muffins, and grits are some of the choices available for a good, quick breakfast.



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

## Food Guide Pyramid A Guide to Daily Food Choices

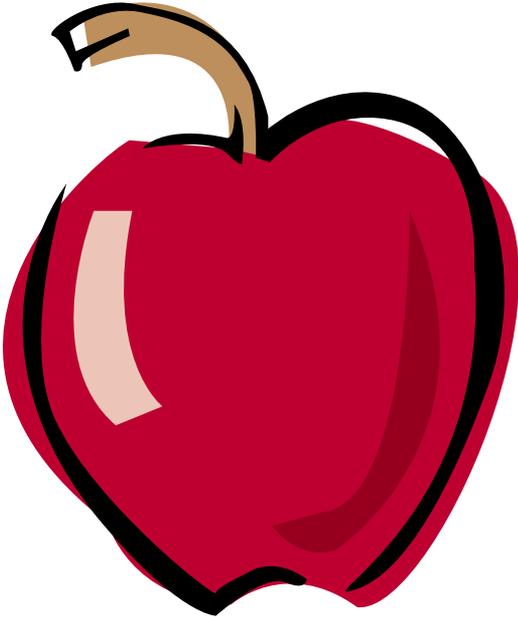
Let this food pyramid guide you in creating  
a healthy diet for your

### School Breakfast and Lunch Programs

Many schools now take part in the USDA School Breakfast and Lunch programs. Under these programs children can buy breakfast and lunch at the full rate or at a reduced rate or get the meals free, depending on income. Having their



children eat these meals at school is an important option for rushed parents with no time to make breakfast and sack lunches at home. USDA requires the school food service programs to provide a choice of healthy meals.



# Healthy Food

## Choices

**Breads, cereals, rice and pasta** (6–11 servings)—1 slice bread; ½ cup cooked cereal, rice, or pasta; 1 cup cornflakes, 1 muffin or roll

Examples: breakfast cereal, grits, cornbread, biscuits, English muffins, rice cakes, tortillas, pita bread, breadsticks, crackers. It is a good idea if children get about half of their grains from foods such as whole-grain cereals and bread.

**Vegetables** (3 servings)—½ cup cooked or raw vegetables, ¾ cup vegetable juice, 1 cup raw, green leafy vegetables

Examples: carrots, sweet potatoes, asparagus, broccoli, beets, corn, green and red peppers, green beans, peas, kale, collards, turnips, potatoes, pumpkin, squash, tomatoes, zucchini, salad greens. Frozen and canned vegetables are also good.



**Fruit** (2 servings)—1 medium apple, banana, orange; ½ cup chopped fruit (fresh, canned, or frozen), ¾ cup fruit juice

Examples: apples, applesauce, apricots, bananas, oranges, fruit cocktail, fruit juices, kiwifruit, nectarines, peaches, pears, plums, strawberries, watermelon. Frozen and canned fruit—packed in juice or lite syrup—are also good.

**Milk, yogurt, and cheese** (2 servings)—1 cup milk and yogurt, 1½ oz. natural cheese, 2 oz. processed cheese

Examples: 1% or nonfat milk and





yogurt; chocolate milk, milk puddings, or custards; frozen yogurt or low-fat ice cream; cottage cheese and low-fat cheeses. Alternative sources of calcium for those who are lactose intolerant include: canned salmon and sardines, calcium-fortified soy milk, tofu made with calcium, calcium-enriched orange juice, broccoli, dried beans and peas, almonds.

***Meat, fish, poultry, dried beans and peas, eggs, tofu, and nuts (2 servings)—2–3 oz. cooked lean meat, fish, poultry, or tofu; ½ cup cooked dried beans, 1 egg, 2 tbsp. peanut butter (same as 1 oz. meat)***

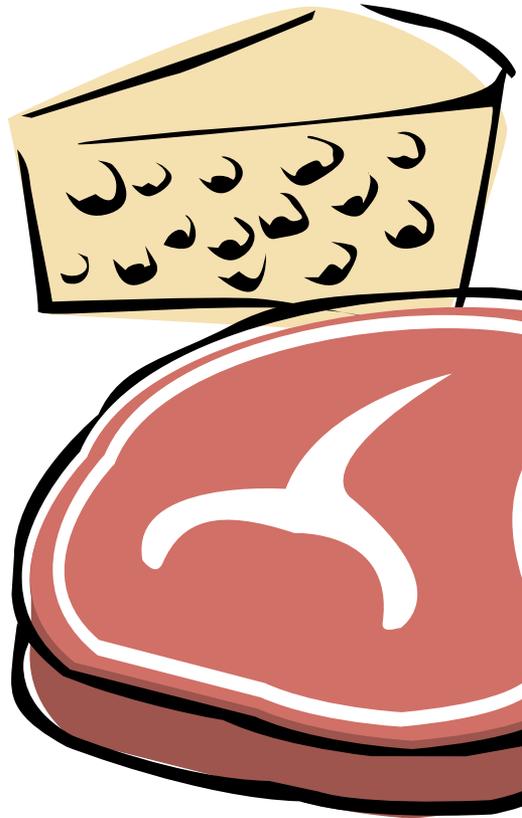
Examples: beef, chicken, pork, shellfish, salmon, dried peas, lentils, any dried beans, low-fat luncheon meats, and peanut butter.

## **Sweets and High-Fat Treats—for Special Occasions Only**

Treat foods are not the same as snack foods. Children need snacks every day; save treats for special occasions. Everyone enjoys sweets to some degree and children are no different than adults in this respect. Yet children lack the discipline of adults. It can be hard to keep children from choosing sweets over healthier foods if sweets are freely available.

Parents have an important role as the “gatekeeper” of what foods are bought and eaten in the home. If you don’t want your children to eat unhealthy snack foods, don’t buy them.

However, when treat foods are present in the home, parents can use these times to help their children develop skills in decision-making and problem solving. Decide together the right times to eat treat foods, how often to eat them, and how much may be eaten at a sitting. Parents who also eat treat foods in moderation provide good role models for their children. In this way, parents can help reinforce the concept that treats aren’t to be eaten as everyday foods.



According to the latest research, eating sugary foods or drinks does not lead to hyperactive behavior in children; however, these treats can help to cause cavities in teeth, are sources of excess calories, and may crowd healthier foods out of the diet. Treat foods include cakes and pastries, granola bars, candy, chocolate bars, cookies, sodas, potato chips, fruit leathers and roll-ups, ice cream, and fruit drinks. Offer healthy snacks such as fruits, raw vegetables, cheese, crackers, yogurt, raisins, hard-boiled eggs, or toast. Save visits to fast-food restaurants for when your schedule is overly rushed.



For parties, serve sliced grapes, mandarin oranges, cubes of cheese, pineapple chunks, fancy-shaped mini-sandwiches, French bread pizza, breakfast cereals, mini quiche, popcorn, oven-baked potato slices, fruit and vegetable sticks with dip, or dried fruits and vegetables. When buying

boxed cereal, read the labels and choose brands that are low in sugar (10 grams or less) and high in fiber. Keep lots of healthy snacks around and offer them in place of sweets. Make fruits and vegetables “free” foods! Keep a container of raw, cut vegetables in the refrigerator and a basket filled with fresh fruit for children to eat anytime!

### Children Need Small Drinks Often and All Day Long

Water is the best choice: it’s low cost and usually available. Keep a small pitcher of cold water in the fridge. To make it special, serve it in the child’s own water bottle or in a colored glass with a straw and a slice of lemon or lime.

Milk is a good drink for children. Always keep it in the refrigerator. Serve milk after, between, or with meals. You may be able to coax a reluctant milk drinker into drinking more milk if you stir in a little bit of chocolate drink mix or syrup.

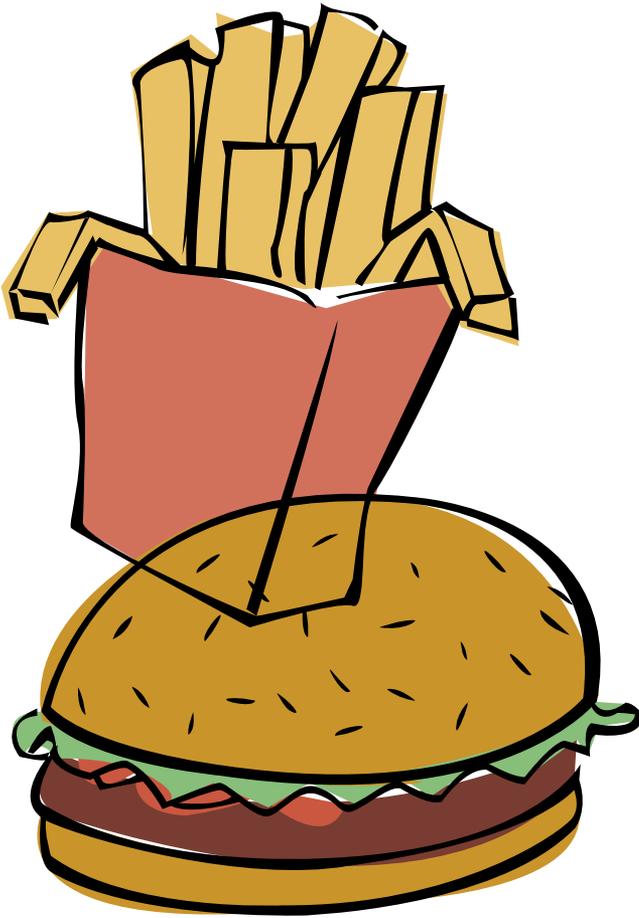


Fruit juice that is 100-percent juice has more vitamins, minerals, and fiber than most fruit drinks or Kool-Aid-type drinks.

However, even these latter drinks may be fortified with vitamins. Read the labels to make an informed choice. Fruit juice and fruit drinks are high in sugar (labeled sucrose, fructose, or corn syrup); therefore, like many high-sugar foods, they can be filling and they may lead to cavities if drunk too often. Make water or

milk the drinks of choice. One serving of juice a day is fine.

Tannin in tea and coffee can prevent children from getting the iron they



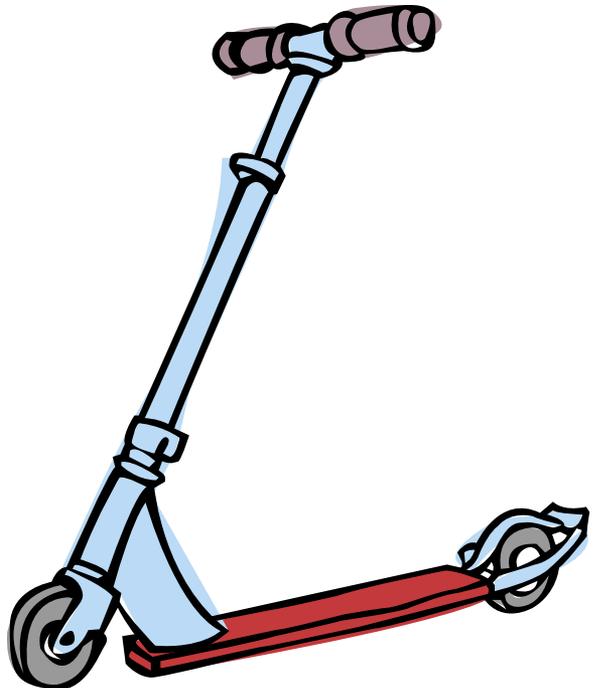
need from their food; if your children drink tea or coffee, provide it only in small amounts. Caffeine—found in some foods, tea (iced tea, too), coffee, colas, and some other soft drinks—is a stimulant and doesn't belong in your child's diet. Caffeine can have a negative effect on your child's behavior, ability to concentrate, and sleep patterns. Soft drinks are also loaded with sugar.

Keep a choice of healthy drinks readily available.

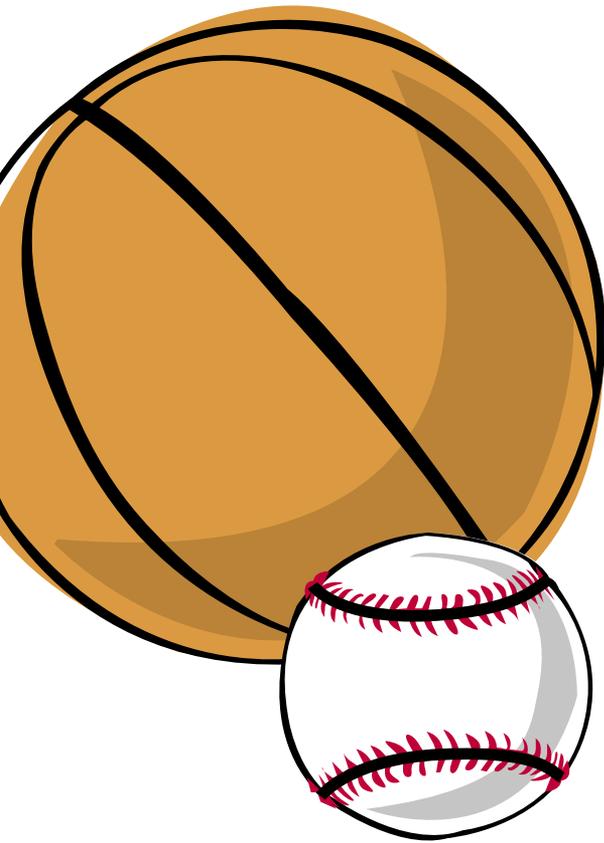
## Fat in the Diet

Children

need energy for growth and activity. Fat is one of the biggest sources of energy and an important part of their diet. About 30% of a child's



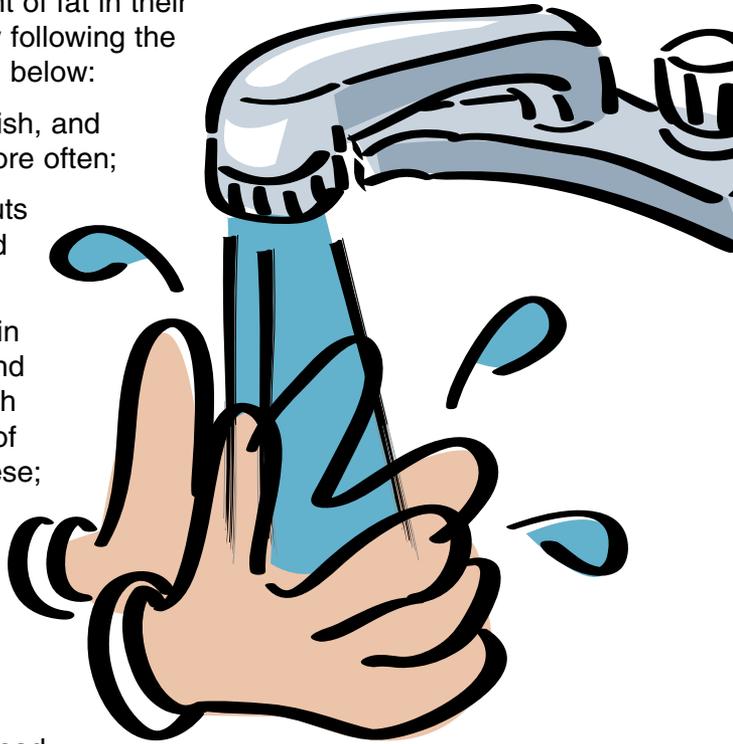
daily calorie intake should come from fat; the majority of fat should come from vegetable sources such as oils and margarines. This will help reduce



the possible risk of the child's developing heart disease and some cancers in later life. Choose lean cuts of meat, 1% or nonfat dairy products and cheese, and low-fat baked goods. Eat fried foods and high-fat snacks such as chips rarely.

Most Americans eat more fat than health experts advise. Families can reduce the amount of fat in their children's diets by following the suggestions listed below:

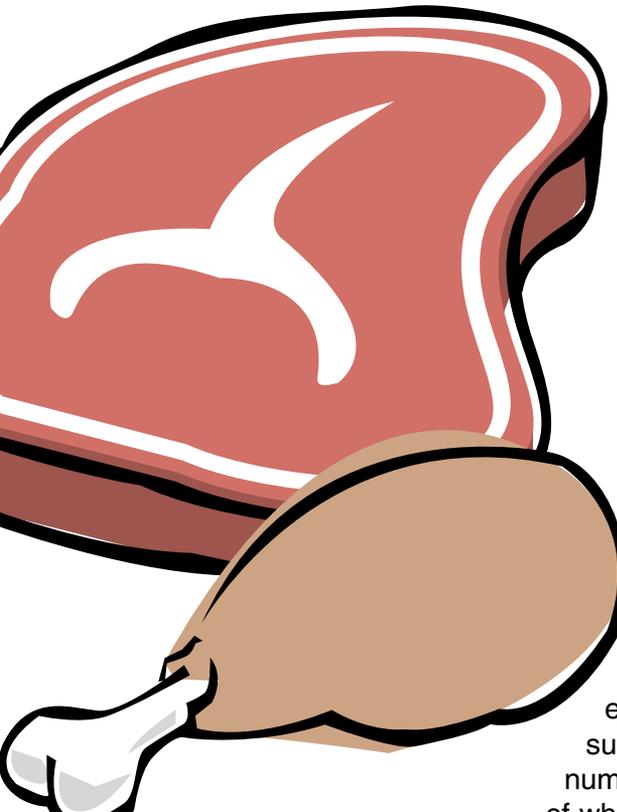
- Serve poultry, fish, and bean dishes more often;
- Choose lean cuts of red meat and trim the fat;
- Remove the skin from chicken and flavor lightly with spices or a bit of parmesan cheese;
- Use only small amounts of oil, margarine, and butter for cooking or spreading;
- Use yogurt instead of sour cream or cream cheese;
- Use low-fat cooking methods such as baking, broiling, grilling, poaching, steaming, and stir-frying;
- Serve food high in fiber, including whole-grain breads and cereals,





dried peas and beans, and fruits and vegetables.

## Is Fiber Important at This Age?



Fiber is important for your child because it plays a role in keeping your child's bowel movements regular. Fiber helps lower cholesterol in blood and reduces the risk of heart disease and some cancers in later life. Fiber also helps regulate appetite by helping children feel full

without having eaten a lot of calories. It's easy for children to get enough fiber: simply make sure they're eating the right number of servings each day of whole grains, cereals, and fruit and vegetables. Make sure half of your child's total servings from the grains group—3 to 5 servings—are whole-grain foods. Try steamed veggies with a light spice such as lemon pepper. A dip of yogurt or low-fat ranch dressing often

raises the appeal of raw vegetables. Dried beans, peas, and lentils are also great sources of fiber. A good rule of thumb

for figuring out how many grams of fiber a child should eat on most days is “the age of the child plus 5 grams of fiber.” For example, on most days a child age 6 needs  $6 + 5$  or 11 grams of fiber. You can look at the nutrition labels of foods to estimate your child’s fiber intake. Or simply follow what the Food Guide Pyramid advises about eating fruit, vegetables, and whole-grain foods.

### Is a Vegetarian Diet Healthy for Children?

As long as the diet is not too limited, a vegetarian diet can be a healthy choice for children. Include some milk or yogurt (or fortified soy milk with added calcium) and eggs so the child gets enough vitamin D, calcium, protein, iron, and zinc. Over the course of a day, be sure to serve





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