

Dietary Guidelines for American Children

Ages Two to Five

One of the best things to teach a young child is how to enjoy healthy food. The dietary guidelines can help.

How they apply to young children

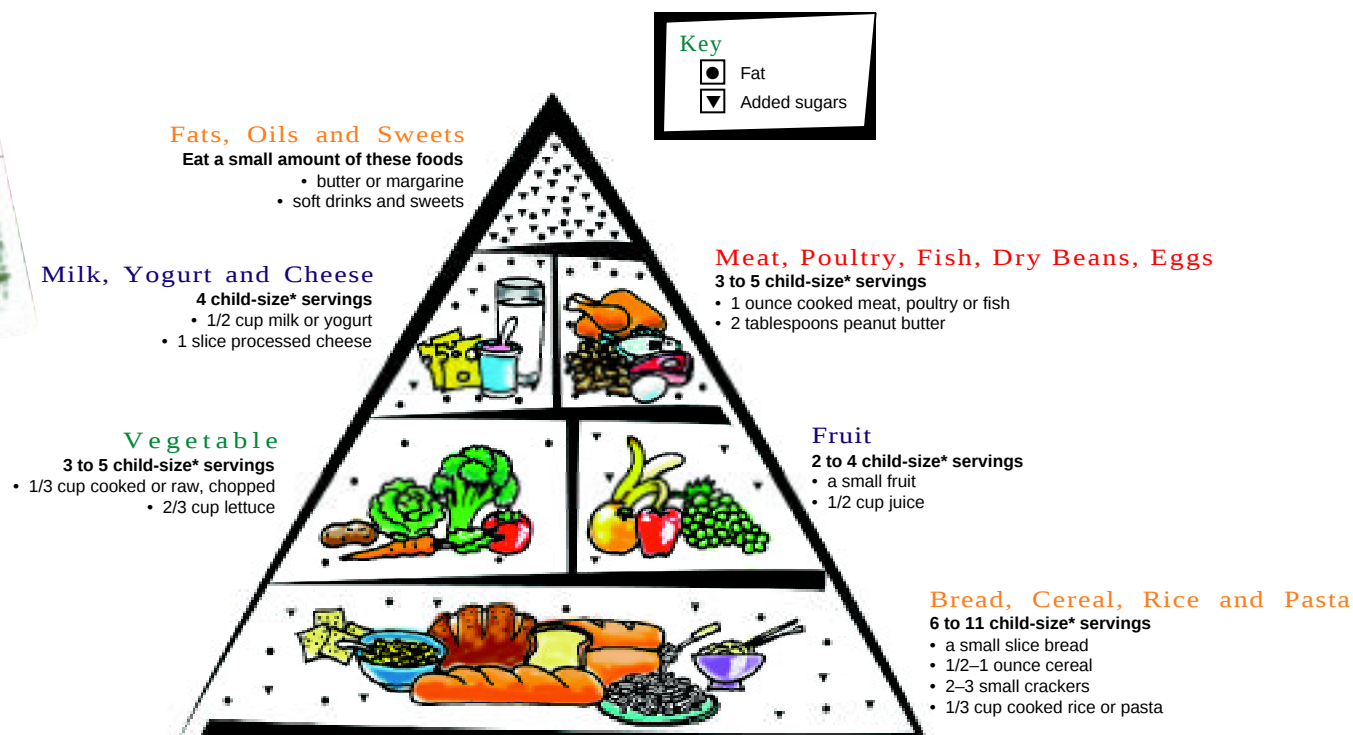
Children between the ages of two and five need the same types of foods that we all need to stay healthy. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans give advice on food choices for healthy people over age two. Diet is important to health at all ages.

- Healthful diets help children grow, develop, and learn.
- Many eating habits developed at this young age will follow children as they grow older.
- Good habits lower risk for heart disease, certain cancers, diabetes, stroke, and osteoporosis (brittle bones) later in life.

Eat a variety of foods

Children differ in growth, activity and thus in amount of food needed. They do need a variety of foods from each of the five major food groups in the Food Guide Pyramid.

Number of servings needed by young children each day is shown on the pyramid below and some examples of child-sized servings are listed.



*A preschool child-size serving for the bread, vegetable or fruit group is 2/3 of an adult-size serving and for the milk or meat group is 1/2 of an adult-size serving.

Balance the food you eat with physical activity— maintain or improve your weight

Encourage your child to play actively and limit amount of time watching TV. Keep the activities fun and join in! Some ideas for active play are:

- walk with the family
- ride a tricycle
- play in the park
- run and skip
- dance to music

Children come in all shapes and sizes. They should not be put on weight loss diets. They need enough food to grow and develop well. Teach your child to enjoy healthy foods.

If you think your child is overweight or underweight, talk with your doctor.

Choose a diet with plenty of grain products, vegetables, and fruits

These foods are key parts of a healthy diet, but most Americans of all ages don't eat enough...

Grain products: Include a variety of whole grains, such as whole-wheat bread and whole-grain cereal.

Vegetables: Include dark-green leafy and deep-yellow vegetables, and starchy vegetables (like potatoes and corn) often.

Fruits: Choose oranges, grapefruit, melons, or berries often. Serve fruit for dessert or snacks.

Choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol

Children need some fat in their diet to be healthy. Don't limit fat in children under the age of two. After that age, gradually reduce fat so that by the age of five or so, 30 percent or less of calories come from fat.

Tips to reduce fat include:

- limit use of fats and oils in cooking
- broil, bake or boil rather than fry
- choose lowfat milk products
- choose lean meat and trim fat
- take skin off chicken
- check food labels and choose foods lower in fat and saturated fat

Choose a diet moderate in sugars

Sugar does not cause hyperactivity or diabetes. But when young children eat a lot of sweet foods that are low in other nutrients, they may not have room for healthier foods. And eating sugars can lead to tooth decay.

How can I limit sugar?

Read food labels. Sugars include:

- brown sugar
- corn sweetener
- corn syrup
- fructose
- fruit juice concentrate
- glucose
- high-fructose corn syrup
- honey
- invert sugar
- lactose
- maltose
- molasses
- raw sugar
- sucrose (table sugar)
- syrup

A food is likely to be high in sugars if one of the above terms appears first or second in the ingredients list, or if several of them are listed.

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Choose a diet moderate in salt and sodium

Most of us, even young children, eat more salt and sodium than we need.

How can I help my child eat less salt?

- read the Nutrition Facts Label and choose foods lower in sodium
- cook without added salt, or use less
- choose fresh or frozen vegetables over canned
- choose fresh meat, chicken, or fish over processed
- choose fresh fruits and vegetables for snacks over salted snack foods

Summary

These guidelines do not differ very much from guidelines for you as an adult. What you do for your two to five year old child are the same types of things you should to do for yourself. Your children learn from you, so you need to be a good model.

Note:

These guidelines do not pertain to children under the age of two. Infants and very young children are unique and have special dietary needs. For more information, contact your doctor, a dietitian, or your local county extension office.

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