



Smart Food Choices

Healthy Meals & Snacks for Families

Fact Sheet FS1057

Cooperative Extension

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY HEALTH SCIENCES

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ChooseMyPlate.gov Guidelines

- The most practical method of teaching adults and youth about nutrition is using ChooseMyPlate.gov developed by a collaboration of federal government departments.
- MyPlate is based in part on the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and includes recommendations on food and physical activity for people over the age of two.
- Each part of MyPlate represents a different food group. Most choices from each food group should be healthful, which leaves only a small number of “extra” calories each day that can be from foods your family wants to “splurge” on.

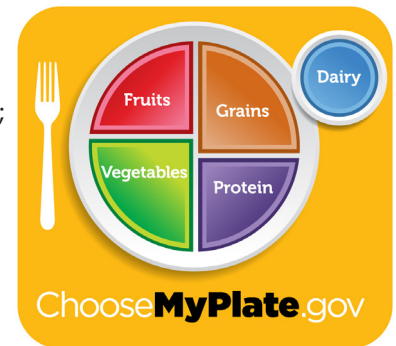
Healthy Family Eating

- Parents are busy people trying to make sure the family is eating a nutritious, balanced diet which can be a challenge in a “fast-food” world.
- Here are some easy suggestions to make healthy eating a way of life for your family.
- Have meals together on a regular basis.
- Don't skip breakfast. Studies show that kids learn better if they eat breakfast.
- Make healthy foods available at home.
- Limit fast-food and other low-nutrient foods.
- Keep portion sizes small.
- Follow MyPlate suggestions.

Orange: Grains. Grains are foods such as bread, oatmeal, rice and pasta. At least half of the grain products your family eats should be whole grains. These are foods that have not been processed. Examples include whole wheat bread, brown rice, and whole oats/oatmeal. Whole grain products have more fiber and nutrients than white bread or those made with bleached white flour. Fiber helps keep the digestive system regular. Grains are also sources of carbohydrates, or “carbs” and provide quick energy for the body.

Green: Vegetables.

There are 5 main categories of vegetables: dark green, like spinach; orange, like carrots; legumes (dried beans), like lentils; starchy, like sweet potatoes; other vegetables, like onions. Eating a variety of vegetables of different colors can reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and some cancers. Vegetables also contain important nutrients like Vitamins A and C as well as fiber.



Red: Fruits. Examples of fruit are oranges, apples, pears, strawberries and melon. Fruits are important sources of vitamins and minerals that your family needs. Eat whole fruit which is rich in fiber rather than drinking fruit juices.

Oils and Fats. The two types of fat we worry about most are saturated and trans fats, because they contribute to heart disease. You should limit butter and foods such as cookies, pastries, French fries, high-fat cheeses, hamburgers, hot dogs, deli meats, chips and high fat desserts. Avoid foods that say “partially hydrogenated vegetable oil” on the label as they contain a lot of saturated and trans fats. Instead, consume unsaturated fats/oils like olive oil, corn oil, canola oil, soy oil or soft margarines.

Blue: Milk Products & Calcium-Rich Foods. This group includes milk, cheeses and yogurt. It is especially important that families get enough servings of this group because calcium builds bone strength. If children are under two, they should drink whole milk, and eat cheese and yogurt made from whole milk. For kids over the age of two, choose 1% low-fat or fat-free milk products. If family members are lactose intolerant, lactose-free products are available. Those who do

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not consume cow's milk for various reasons can have calcium-containing soy or almond milk or tofu.

Purple: Proteins. This group includes meat (choose lean cuts of meat) fish, beans, eggs and soy-based foods like tofu. Proteins help build muscle in our bodies.

How Much of Each Food Group Should Children Eat?

A child's age, sex and activity level, are all factors that determine how much to eat every day to stay healthy. Boys and girls even of the same age grow at different rates and thus may be of different size and need more or less calories. You can go to www.choosemyplate.gov and enter specific information on your child to get an individual diet just for them.

Tips for Healthy Families

1. **Have meals together on a regular basis.** Eating together as a family will help your children learn healthy eating habits. Meal planning, food shopping and preparation should be a team effort. Try a family breakfast if dinner is too hard to get everyone together. Buy healthy ready-to-eat foods from a store or restaurant when time is limited.
2. **Don't skip breakfast.** Studies show that kids learn better if they eat breakfast. Start the night before; mix juice, get foods ready and set the table. Encourage family members to leave enough time to eat in the morning by offering them quick, easy foods they like, such as low-fat granola bars, fruit, and yogurt.

3. **Make healthy foods available at home.** If you stock your home with nutritious foods, your family's meals will be healthier. Limit sugary sodas and soft drinks. Try to have at least two or more fruits or vegetables with every meal. Keep a bowl of fruit on your kitchen table or counter for snacks. Canned and frozen vegetables are often less expensive and have a longer shelf-life. Serve lean meats (like chicken and turkey) and other good sources of protein (like eggs and fish). Choose whole-grain breads and cereals. For children over age two, choose 1% or fat free milk rather than whole or 2% milk.
4. **Keep portion sizes small and do not over-feed your family.** Never force children to eat if they are not hungry and make sure they eat healthy foods BEFORE they eat sweets or snack foods. There's no need to ban the chips and candy forever-just make these "once-in-a-while" foods. Help your family have healthy attitudes about food.

For more info: <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/fchs/> & <http://www.getmovinggethealthynj.rutgers.edu/>

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