

NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR CHILDREN

When it comes to feeding children, it may seem like there are a dizzying number of rules to follow. We all know that children need nutrients to grow strong and healthy. Different foods have different mixes of nutrients, so it's important that children consume a variety of foods on a regular basis. Keep in mind that the servings are guidelines and that on some days, your child may eat more or less of a certain food or food group than on other days. That's OK, that's how we all eat – some days we eat lots of vegetables, the next day fewer. So we look how children eat over a period of a few days or a week to evaluate whether their diet is balanced. When we need to be concerned however, is when day-after-day-after-day a child's intake contains predominately one or two "favorites", even if it's a "healthy food" to the exclusion of a well-balanced diet.

Even a good thing like milk can be not so good if a child is filling their tummy with fluid milk at the start of a meal, then doesn't have appetite or room in their tummies for some vegetables, fruit or protein and the nutrients that are found exclusively in those foods. Many of the children's sippy cups when full hold 12-16 ounces of fluid. For a 2-8 year old, one of those sippy cups full of milk is about a complete day's worth of milk servings in a single sippy cup. As important as water is for adult's general health, it's equally important for children too and a good choice to replace milk in a few sippy cups each day.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Dietetic Association have set guidelines that we can use to evaluate our children's daily nutritional intake. Below are their recommendations:

Grains

At least half of the grains your child consumes each day should be whole grains, such as oatmeal, brown rice, and rye bread. They are different from refined grains, such as those in white bread and white rice, which have been processed, and many of the nutrients have been taken out.

- 2- to 3-year-olds: 3 ounces
- 4- to 8-year-olds: 4 to 5 ounces
- 9- to 13-year-olds: 5 ounces

What's an ounce? Each of the following equals about 1 ounce:

- 1 slice of bread
- 1/2 cup of cooked rice or pasta
- 1/2 cup of oatmeal

Vegetables

- 2- to 3-year-olds: 1 cup
- 4- to 8-year-olds: 1 1/2 cups
- 9- to 13-year-olds: 2 cups

Fruits

- 2- to 3-year-olds: 1 cup
- 4- to 8-year-olds: 1 1/2 cups
- 9- to 13-year-olds: 1 1/2 cups

Dairy

Fluid milk is the easiest to track, but don't forget to count yogurts and cheeses which are densely packed with milk's nutrition!

- 2- to 3-year-olds: 2 cups
- 4- to 8-year-olds: 2 cups
- 9- to 13-year-olds: 3 cups

Meat, Fish, Beans, and Nuts

- 2- to 3-year-olds: 2 ounces
- 4- to 8-year-olds: 3 to 4 ounces
- 9- to 13-year-olds: 5 ounces

These foods are a little more difficult to judge/measure. Think of a deck of playing cards. A serving of meat (poultry, beef, pork, veal or fish) the size and thickness of that deck of cards will be about 3 ounces. Of course, 1 ounce of meat, poultry, or fish counts as a 1-ounce serving for this group. In general, the following each equal about 1 ounce:

- 1/4 cup cooked dry beans
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon of peanut butter
- 1/2 ounce of nuts or seeds

Water

Children 2-8 should have 32- 48 ounces of water daily. Plain cold water is preferred over reconstituted fruit juices or Kool-Aids which contain extra calories and minimal nutritional value.

While your children are at daycare, be assured that they are receiving at least 2/3 of their daily nutritional needs in their breakfast, lunch and snacks through diverse and varied food offerings. If you have additional questions or concerns, please be sure to talk with me at drop-off/pick-up times.