

Nutritional requirements for children are similar to those for adults. While specific nutritional requirements may change with different stages of development, following some general guidelines can ensure that your child is well-nourished.

Feed your child protein-rich foods, especially at breakfast. Starting the day with protein and getting adequate levels of protein throughout the day helps regulate blood sugar and mood, cognitive function, and attention, and to reduce anxiety. Ideas for protein-rich breakfasts include:

- Hard-boiled eggs with sausage and a side of fruit
- Scrambled eggs with beans and sautéed vegetables
- Unsweetened almond butter on toast with a banana
- Leftover proteins from dinner (e.g., roasted chicken, fish, meatballs, etc.) with leftover vegetables
- A fruit and vegetable smoothie mixed with protein powder

Get creative with fruits and vegetables. One way to get children to eat more fruit and vegetables is to add them, pureed or finely chopped, to foods like spaghetti sauce, smoothies, burgers, muffins, pasta and rice. Other ideas include:

- *Making smoothies and fresh juices.* It may be easier to get your child to drink their fruits and vegetables, especially if they get to see the juicing and blending happen before their eyes. Try combinations like carrot and orange, or banana and spinach.
- *Letting your child play with food.* Exploring different textures and tastes can increase the chances that your child will eat a food.
- *Arranging foods into familiar patterns and fun shapes.* Try cutting food into circles, squares, or hearts, or arranging different fruits and vegetables on the plate to make funny faces, animals, trees, flowers, boats, etc.



Rotate foods to prevent nutrient deficiencies or food sensitivities. A diverse diet ensures that your child has access to a wider supply of vitamins and nutrients, making nutritional insufficiencies or deficiencies less likely. A varied, diverse diet also promotes good health and helps protect against chronic disease and the development of food allergies or sensitivities. Like adults, children tend to crave foods to which they are most sensitive, and food rotation can prevent those sensitivities from developing. Ideas for rotating foods include:

- *Teaching children to “eat the rainbow”.* Create a game of eating one fruit or vegetable from each color of the rainbow every day.
- *Follow the “one bite” rule.* Children who initially reject a food are more likely to accept the food after they are exposed to the food 8–10 times. Requiring children to try at least one mouthful of a food whenever it is served increases the chances that they will become familiar with the food and stop rejecting it down the road.

Get your child involved with food preparation. Children are more likely to take an interest in a meal if they help with its preparation. Some ideas for involving children in the cooking process include:

- *Enlisting your child’s help in preparing meals and snacks.* Children are more likely to eat something they had a hand in making.

- *Allowing your child to have input in the meal.* Allow younger children to pick out one or two foods to help you cook for dinner. Get older children involved by allowing them to choose and prepare (with supervision) one recipe to make for dinner every week.
- *Teach your child where food comes from.* Start a backyard garden and teach children how to plant and harvest foods. Let them plant one food they love so they can watch it grow. The sense of pride they feel about growing their own food makes it more likely that they will show an interest in eating the food later.

Avoid processed foods when possible. It is unrealistic to expect that your child will eat only fresh, whole, organic foods all of the time, both inside and outside the home. Make a plan to save the processed treats for special occasions like friends' birthday parties, and stock the pantry with unprocessed snacks (i.e., foods without a barcode). Some ideas for snacks are dehydrated vegetables chips with hummus, nuts, and dried fruit.