

## **Regular, balanced meals and snacks**

### **Did you know?**

One of the best ways to improve your child's health and well being is to, start eating regular, balanced meals and snacks yourself.

Your habits will rub off on your child.

Plus, children that learn healthy eating habits at a young age are more likely to make healthy eating choices throughout life.

Children need to eat a balanced combination of foods everyday from each of the four major food groups:

- whole grains
- vegetables and fruit
- milk products
- meat or alternates

The foods in each group are important for providing kids with the nutrients that they need to grow, and help reduce their risk of developing preventable diseases like those related to childhood obesity.

Eating a healthy breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and small nutritious snacks between meals helps children stay healthy and energized.

### **Breaking the Fast**

Although it is the meal that most people often choose to skip, breakfast really is the most important meal of the day.

In many families, breakfast is simply squeezed out of the busy morning routine. But many specialists say that breakfast is not something to overlook, especially for children.

Preparing a healthy breakfast doesn't have to take a long time in the morning.

Doctors, dietitians, and the Canada Food Guide agree a balanced breakfast should include three of the four foods groups.

**Fast and healthy breakfast options:**

1. Cereal with milk and fruit
2. Toast with peanut butter and a glass of juice
3. An egg and toast and a glass of juice
4. A yogurt and fruit shake with a muffin

## **Skipping breakfast?**

50% of BC teens skip breakfast on school days \*

Skipping breakfast often leads to overeating during the rest of the day and we end up overcompensating for what we missed at breakfast time.

Our bodies need to refuel after fasting for 8 to 12 hours while we sleep. If children and adults don't get the fuel they need in the morning, their bodies will not function as well throughout the day. You would not starve yourself all day, so why do it after sleeping all night?

Studies indicate that children who eat a balanced breakfast

- have better concentration and learning abilities in school
- make healthier eating choices throughout the day
- have fewer problems controlling their weight

For children in particular, starting the day with a nutritious breakfast helps to provide the right sources of energy and fuel needed to focus and stay active all day.

## **Get Creative**

When you make pancakes or french toast, make an extra batch and keep them in the freezer. Kids can pop them in the toaster or microwave for a quick breakfast.

Prepare cut up fruit and keep it in the fridge so kids can easily add it to cereal on their own.

Plus, fruit makes a healthier sweetener than sugared cereals.

## Don't Forget To Eat Your Veggies!

Fruits and vegetables provide children with the energy and vitamins they need to grow.

Today there are more options than ever before when it comes to vegetables.

- Ask a friend
- Pick up a recipes magazine
- Or flip through a cookbook

There are many sources all around us of new ideas and ways to serve vegetables.

**Snack idea:** hummus or tzatziki with raw vegetables

This puts a new and healthy twist on veggies and dip.  
Plus it makes a great option for kids' lunches or snacks.

## Put health back into your snacks

Eating a small snack between breakfast and lunch, and again between lunch and dinner, helps to prevent large peaks and dips in your blood sugar level. Keeping your child's blood sugar which can radically affect your child's energy level and mood

Many great snacks are easy to prepare and to eat. Some healthy snack options to revive children between meals:

- Nuts and apple slices,
- cheese and crackers,
- yogurt with peaches,
- cereal mix and carrot sticks with dip,
- a fruit smoothie,
- a bowl of cereal,
- or half a sandwich

## Things to avoid

Avoid offering your children high calorie, low nutrient snacks between meals.



Foods like potato or corn chips, chocolate bars or candy, or chewy granola bars will satisfy your child's hunger but they do not provide very much nutritional value.

Soft drinks and even fruit juice consumption should be limited for children due to the high amounts of sugar they contain.

## **Family Meals**

When it comes to serving balanced dinner options, it's helpful to think of your dinner plate like a pie. Doctors and dietitians suggest that a healthy plate should consist of

- ½ salad/vegetables,
- ¼ starch (potatoes, rice, etc), and
- ¼ protein (meat, poultry/fish/soy)

Get your child involved in helping with the meals, with your guidance and nutrition in mind.

This will help them learn that healthy eating is not hard. Serve a variety of foods at meals to help keep your children interested in mealtime.

If you're in a mealtime rut, visit the Dietitians of Canada website, call Dial a Dietitian at 1 800 667-3438, or speak to your community nutritionist to get some child-friendly meal ideas.

**By setting a good example, and providing your children with healthy food, you are laying the ground work for them to become healthy adults and become aware of making healthy choices.**

\*Healthy Youth Development: Highlights from the 2003 Adolescent Health Survey, The McCreary Centre Society, Vancouver BC