

Choose MyPlate for kids

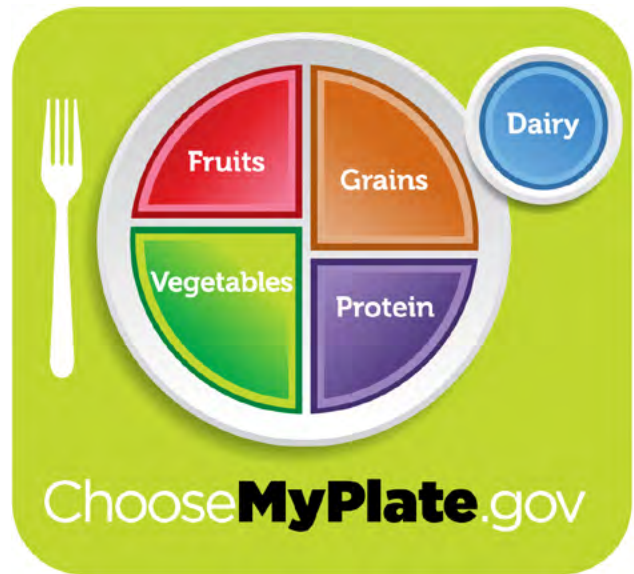
Feeding young children is not without its challenges. Encouraging children to eat healthy food, knowing the types and amounts that are needed to promote good health, and struggling with picky eaters can be a few of the issues that parents and caregivers will navigate at some point during childhood.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers some basic guidelines and helpful resources that help to promote health and nutrition for children of all ages. Based on the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, MyPlate is the current nutrition icon representing the five food groups for healthy eating.

Resources for educators, caregivers and families can be found on the MyPlate web site (<http://myplate.gov/>). A separate section for preschoolers includes the following resources:

- Daily food plans for preschoolers
- Information on growth during the preschool years
- Strategies for developing healthy eating habits
- How to handle picky eaters
- Physical activity ideas
- Food safety information.
- Ideas for meals and snacks

The newest addition to this part of the web site is a mini-poster portraying Healthy Eating for Preschoolers. A helpful download, this can be shared with parents and provides tips for encouraging children to eat healthy. Among the recommendations are having meals together as a family and the importance of offering a variety of healthy foods. Family style dining is also encouraged when the children are old enough to serve themselves. All of these are important in helping children learn appropriate serving sizes and to be able to eat when they are hungry and stop when they are full.



Looking for some new and fun ideas for snacks and meals? Under sample menus and recipes, there are some delicious sounding options that will offer creative ways to include more fruits and vegetables. The 2013 Healthy Lunch Challenge Cookbook contains a variety of healthy, affordable and delicious recipes that were featured at the Kids' State Dinner at the White House and is available for download. If there is concern about children being willing to try some new foods, involving them in age-appropriate food preparation can be one way to encourage them. The web site contains a helpful page explaining developmental milestones for children's capabilities in the kitchen.

Many handouts are available in the 10 Tips Nutrition Education series, which offers ideas for ways to balance calories, healthy foods to choose more often and foods that should be eaten less often. The recommendation to make half the plate fruits and vegetables and to make half the grains whole grains will help children and adults to develop healthy eating patterns.

Young children can become conditioned to foods that are high in sugar, salt and fat (empty calories). For this reason, it is important to limit these items. Avoid serving foods that are fried or high in fat. Processed foods can be high in sugar and salt so it is important to read the labels. Serving water or low fat milk as beverages is the best option for avoiding sugary beverages, including juice.

Promoting physical activity is important as well. There are tips for ways to increase physical activity at home, work and play. Being a good role model is important since studies show that when parents and caregivers are active with the children, the children tend to be more active so everyone benefits! Safety is often a concern and the web site contains a link to recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control for important tips to help protect children.

Keep in mind that children between the ages of two and five are growing and developing in many ways and this includes eating. Knowing behavioral milestones (<http://myplate.gov/preschoolers/healthy-habits/Milestones.pdf>) will help in understanding mealtime behavior. Exposing young children early and often to healthy foods will improve the possibility of them growing up to be healthier adults. Caregivers and parents have a significant influence in helping to establish those habits, not only by offering healthy choices, but by modeling them as well.

Visit <http://MyPlate.gov> for other nutrition and health related information, including games, songs, activity sheets and other educational materials. A helpful tip page is also available at <http://extension.psu.edu/youth/betterkidcare/news/2014/youth/betterkidcare/early-care/our-resources/tip-pages/tips/myplate>.