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YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER FOR LIFE

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Feeding Guidelines for Toddlers and Preschool Children

The second year of life is one of the most important years in feeding your child. This is the year that your child should transition from eating like an infant to eating like an older child. The basic goal is to have your child eating essentially what and when the rest of the family eats by the age of two or three. Making this transition is challenging because most toddlers eat sporadically, develop foods they like and dislike, and have daily fluctuations in their appetite.

As a parent your "job" is to teach your child good habits and provide him with good nutritional foods. Eating is your child's job – not yours. Healthy children will consume an adequate number of calories but this will fluctuate from day to day (a number of studies have confirmed this). It is not necessary or productive to bribe, force or pressure your child to eat. Studies have shown that new foods often need to be presented as many as 10 times before children will try them.

Some feeding guidelines are as follows:

1. Have your child off the bottle by 15 months – by then they can use a cup.
2. By 15 months your baby should be on table foods and very little, if any, baby foods.
3. Transition your toddler to 3 meals a day with 2-3 snacks a day. Meals should be at regular times and the snacks should be nutritious food. Your child should not have unlimited access to food.
4. Change your baby from formula to whole milk at 12 months of age. Milk should eventually be the beverage of choice at meal times. Toddlers and preschoolers should ideally drink 16-24 oz. of milk a day. Breast fed babies may continue to nurse and whole milk can be introduced.
5. Juice should be limited to 4-6 oz. a day and your child should eventually drink only water between meals. Do not offer him any other caloric, flavored, or artificially sweetened beverages.
6. All foods should be given with your child seated and supervised by an adult. Children should eat with the rest of the family and not in front of the television.
7. Avoid hard foods that are easily aspirated (e.g. nuts, raw carrots, hard candy, popcorn).

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SPECIFIC NUTRITIONAL ISSUES

1 Iron

Iron deficiency is the most common childhood nutritional deficiency in the United States affecting 9% of preschool age children. Excessive milk intake can cause iron deficiency so milk intake should not exceed 24 oz/day. Foods that are good sources of iron are grains and cereals, beans, shellfish, and dried fruits.

2 Calcium

Calcium is a nutrient that has recently received much attention in the media and has been the focus of much research. Calcium absorption is limited in prepubertal children and a diet with large amounts of calcium is not necessary. Dairy products are the best source of calcium followed by most vegetables. Orange juice and breakfast cereals are often fortified with calcium.

3 Vitamins and Minerals

There is no evidence supporting the need for supplemental vitamins and minerals in children after one year of age. Children with certain chronic illnesses may be the exception. Giving vitamin and mineral supplements is never a substitute for good nutritional foods. If you elect to give your child vitamins only use children's multivitamins from a reputable pharmaceutical company. Large doses of many vitamins are toxic!

4 Fat

Fat is an important nutrient. Growing children need certain fats and fatty acids included in their diet on a regular basis. Milk is a good source fat during the second year of life and therefore we do not recommend low or nonfat milk before the age of two. However diets extremely high in fat should be avoided in all children.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

Some important points to consider in the older preschool and school-age children:

- Always require your child to attend and participate in family meals whether they eat or not. Avoid eating in front of the TV!
- Remember that children require less calories than adults. Make their portion sizes smaller. Studies have shown that large portion sizes encourage overeating.
- Discuss eating and nutrition with your child. Children like to learn and are usually interested in helping decide meals.
- Continue to limit beverages to 16-24 oz/day of milk at meals, water only between meals, and other beverages to 4-6 oz/day.