



Important Nutrition for Health and Growth

Children Need a Variety of Foods

Throughout childhood, it is important that the diet include a variety of foods for proper growth and development. The USDA's MyPlate program is a guide to help you build a healthy plate at every meal. The principles of MyPlate apply to a child's diet as well as an adult's, although portions and number of servings per day are less for children. The amount of foods needed daily depends on age, gender, and level of physical activity.

Use the MyPlate guide to help you determine how much your child needs at <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/>. A diet that contains a variety of foods from each of the food groups (breads and grains, protein foods, fruits, vegetables, and dairy) will help meet your child's growth and activity needs, as well as prevent nutrient deficiencies.

To provide your child a nutritious diet:

- Make half of what is on your child's plate (or in their lunchbox) fruits and vegetables.
- Serve healthy sources of protein, such as lean meat, beans, nuts, and eggs.
- Provide whole-grain breads and cereals that are high in fiber, and reduce your use of refined grains like white bread, white rice, and sugary cereals.
- Limit fast food and highly processed foods.
- Offer water or milk instead of sugary fruit drinks and sodas.
- Serve low-fat milk, yogurt, and other dairy products for bone health.

Nutrients

The American Medical Association and the American Dietetic Association recommend that healthy children should get all their nutrients from foods rather than vitamin supplements. While all nutrients are important, the nutrients that are most likely to be deficient in a child's diet are **calcium**, **iron**, **vitamin C**, **vitamin D**, **vitamin A**, **folic acid**, and **vitamin B6**. Adequate **fiber** may also be lacking in a child's diet.

Be sure to include foods in your child's meal that are high in these nutrients. The table to the left provides some ideas of foods that contain these nutrients.

Good Food Sources of Important Nutrients

Nutrient	Foods Containing Nutrient
Calcium	Low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese, broccoli, fortified soy milk
Iron	Meat, fish, poultry, iron-fortified cereals, spinach, dried beans
Vitamin C	Orange juice, citrus fruits, bell pepper, kiwifruit, broccoli, strawberries
Vitamin D	Low-fat milk, salmon, fortified orange juice, yogurt
Vitamin A	Sweet potato, spinach, carrots, cantaloupe, red bell pepper
Folic Acid	Spinach, fortified cereals, whole grains
Vitamin B6	Chickpeas, tuna, chicken, potatoes, whole grains
Fiber	Whole grains, fruits, vegetables, beans

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