

How much food does my school age child need to eat every day?

Children need the same nutrients as adults. The amounts of specific nutrients, however, differ according to their genetic make-up, size, shape, and physical activity levels. This document outlines the key energy and maintenance requirements for children and adolescents via the MyPyramid Food Guidance System, based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005. These recommendations are an important tool to help children attain optimal physical and cognitive development.

Position of the American Dietetic Association

Children ages 2 to 11 years should achieve an optimal physical and cognitive development, attain a healthy weight, enjoy food, and reduce the risk of chronic disease through appropriate eating habits and participation in regular physical activity.

What are Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005?

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans is a product of collaboration between the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The guidelines are used to develop all Federal food and nutrition education programs. They are updated every 5 years. Look for the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010 to come out soon.

<http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines>



MyPyramid combines the USDA requirements for protein, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and minerals into 6 food groups:

1. Grains,
2. Vegetables
3. Fruits
4. Oils
5. Milk
6. Meat and Beans

MyPyramid realizes, that “one size does not fit all”. It provides an individual food plan with appropriate calorie level, according to your age, gender and level of physical activity.

What can I expect to find when I visit MyPyramid?

When you click on MyPyramid Menu Tracker and enter your child’s age, weight and level of physical activity, you will get a MyPyramid Menu Plan, designed specifically for your child. The Menu Plan includes the number of calories and servings from each of the food groups. Following is a sample of the food groups and amounts from each food group that are recommended for different age groups. Find out which serving size is right for your child.

<http://www.mypyramidtracker.gov/planner/launchPage.aspx>

Grains. 4-7 ounce equivalents.¹ Make ½ the grains WHOLE.

An ounce is 1 slice of bread, or 1 cup of ready-to-eat cereal, or ½ cup of hot cereal, or ½ cup of rice or pasta, or 1 small flour tortilla, or ½ of an English muffin. In addition to providing the energy that growing children need, grains (especially whole grains), contain fiber, which leads to a feeling of fullness and prevents constipation. Grains contain magnesium, B vitamins, including folate, and iron. Iron is vital for prevention of iron-deficiency anemia, which is often found in adolescent girls.

Vegetables. 1 ½ - 3 cups. Vary your veggies.

A cup is 1 cup of vegetable juice, raw or cooked carrots, tomatoes, bell peppers, corn, or 2 cups of lettuce or leafy greens. Vegetables provide an array of healthful benefits, such as vitamins A, C, and E, as well as fiber to help with digestion as well as to reduce cholesterol levels, and potassium to maintain good blood pressure.

Fruits. 1 ½ - 2 cups. Focus on Fruits.

A serving is 1 cup of fruit (banana, 2 plums, 32 seedless grapes, 1/8 medium cantaloupe), or ½ cup of fruit juice or ¼ cup of raisins. Just like vegetables, fruits have no cholesterol. They are low in calories and are packed with nutrients such as Vitamin C, fiber, potassium and folate, as well as phytochemicals, which help prevent disease.

Oils. Use sparingly.

Mono- and polyunsaturated oils, such as canola, olive, and corn oil contain fatty acids, which are essential for proper brain and organ development, as well as absorption of vitamins A, D, E, K and beta-carotene. Their use should be limited, because of their high calorie content: 120 calories in 1 tablespoon. These oils are also found in fish, nuts, olives and avocados.

Milk. 2-3 cups.

A serving is 1 cup of milk (choose the low-fat or fat-free variety), or 8 oz yogurt, or 1 ½ oz of cheese or 1 ½ cups of ice cream. The milk group is important, because it provides Calcium for strong bones and teeth. It is also a valuable source of protein, B vitamins, and vitamins A and D. Vitamin D helps our bodies absorb and use Calcium.

Meat and Beans. 3-6 ounce equivalents/servings.

A serving is 1 ounce of meat (choose lean cuts of meats to keep cholesterol at a healthy level), poultry or fish, ¼ cup of cooked dry beans, 1 egg, 1 tablespoon of peanut butter, or ½ ounce of nuts or seeds. This group provides B vitamins, iron, antioxidants, such as vitamins C and E, and protein. Protein provides essential building blocks for healthy skin, muscles and bones.

¹ http://kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/food/pyramid.html#

With so much information, how do I put it all together?

Become familiar with MyPyramid. The information provided there is based on the most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans. For example, MyPyramid takes the key recommendations for children and adolescents, such as the one below, places them into 6 appropriate categories, and provides user-specific serving sizes of foods for each age group in a fun, interactive way.

Children and adolescents.

- **Consume whole-grain products often; at least half the grains should be whole grains.**
- **Children 2 to 8 years should consume 2 cups per day of fat-free or low-fat milk or equivalent milk products.**
- **Children 9 years of age and older should consume 3 cups per day of fat-free or low-fat milk or equivalent milk products.**

***Key Recommendations for Specific Population Groups
Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005***

When to consult a professional:

If your child is not thriving, or if you suspect an underlying health problem or an eating disorder, be sure to discuss it with your pediatrician. If you have concerns that your child is not eating nutritiously, consult a registered dietitian.