

Growing Up Healthy: Fat, Cholesterol and More



Children and heart disease: a generation at risk

Many Americans consume too many calories and too much fat, especially saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol. These eating patterns are one cause of America's high rates of obesity and heart disease. As a parent or caregiver, you can help your child develop eating and physical activity habits to stay healthy now—and throughout life.

Read on to learn more about healthy eating and physical activity guidelines for healthy children ages 2 years and older. For specific food and nutrition advice, talk with your child's doctor or a registered dietitian.

What you can do

If heart disease runs in your family, your child is at greater risk for heart disease in adulthood. To help protect your child from heart disease later in life, help him or her learn healthy eating and lifestyle habits during childhood. Although many things influence children, adults are still the most important role models. In general, a child with a healthy weight and lifestyle is most likely to have parents who make healthy food choices and engage in regular physical activity.

Fat in food: how much for children?

Childhood is the best time to start heart healthy eating habits. But adult goals for cutting back on total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol aren't meant generally for children younger than 2 years. Fat is an essential nutrient that supplies the energy, or calories, they need for growth and active play and should not be severely restricted.

However, if your child is younger than 2 years and overweight or at risk for overweight, or has a family history of high cholesterol or heart disease, reduced fat dietary choices may be appropriate. Check with your child's doctor or registered dietitian before restricting fat in your child's diet.

Between the ages of 2 and 5, encourage children to gradually choose foods with less fat, saturated fat, and trans fat. By age 5, their overall food choices, like yours, should include heart-healthy foods such as low-fat dairy products, skinless chicken, fish, lean red meats, whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.

Caution

- Restricting a child's eating too much may harm growth and development, or encourage undesirable eating behaviors.
- Before making any drastic changes in a child's eating plan or physical activity habits, talk with your child's pediatrician or a registered dietitian.
- If your child is younger than 2 and is obese or overweight, consult your pediatrician before restricting fat or calories, as in reduced-fat milk.

How is saturated fat different than other fat?

Saturated fat is more solid at room temperature. Saturated fats come mostly from animal sources, such as butter, cheese, bacon, and meat, as well as stick margarine. Trans fats are fats that begin as good fats but are chemically changed and can raise your cholesterol levels. They are found in baked goods and processed foods. Reading nutrition information labels on foods for saturated and trans fats can help you determine how much of these fats are present in a particular food.

Milk—whole or reduced-fat?

The following are guidelines about what type of milk to give your child.

Age	Type of milk
Younger than 12 months	Breast milk and/or iron-fortified formula
12 to 24 months	Whole milk. Your child's doctor may recommend reduced-fat (2%) milk if your child is obese or overweight or if there is a family history of high cholesterol or heart disease. Check with your child's doctor or dietitian before switching from whole to reduced-fat milk.
Older than 24 months	Reduced-fat (2%), low-fat (1%), or nonfat (skim) milk

Good nutrition: it's a juggling act

Food that supplies energy and nutrients can fit into a healthy eating plan for your child. Chances are that some of your child's favorite foods are higher in fat and energy (or calories) compared with the amount of nutrients they provide. Try to select foods that have a high content of nutrients (protein, vitamins, and minerals) compared with the amount of calories, fat, and salt content.

Follow this nutrition advice: Offer your child a variety of foods from all 5 food groups. Be flexible; it's more important to focus on what children eat over several days, not in one day or at one meal (See "Food tips").

Smart ideas for the whole family

To promote healthy eating, offer foods from the 5 major food groups. Encourage nutrient-rich foods that contain protein, vitamins, and minerals. Try these tips to limit total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol.

- Have plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables available and ready to eat. Wash and prepare these ahead of time if possible—so that your family will grab these when they are "on the go" instead of less healthful foods.
- Include high-fiber, whole-grain foods, such as potatoes, especially sweet potatoes (not fried); rice; pasta; corns; peas; and breads and cereals at meals.
- Choose lower-fat or fat-free toppings like grated low-fat parmesan cheese, salsa, herbed cottage cheese, nonfat/low-fat gravy, low-fat sour cream, low-fat salad dressing, or yogurt.
- Select lean meats, such as skinless chicken and turkey, fish, lean beef cuts (round, sirloin, chuck, loin, lean ground beef—no more than 15% fat content) and lean pork cuts (tenderloin, chops, ham). Buy "choice" or "select" grades of beef rather than "prime." Trim off all visible fat, and remove skin from poultry before eating.
- Choose trans fat-free margarine and vegetable oils made from canola, corn, sunflower, soybean, or olive oils. Choose tub and liquid margarine, rather than stick margarine, which contains trans fats.
- Use nonstick vegetable sprays when cooking.
- Use fat-free cooking methods, such as baking, broiling, grilling, poaching, or steaming, when preparing meat, poultry, or fish.
- Try angel food cake, frozen fruit bars, and low-fat/fat-free frozen desserts such as fudge bars for a sweet treat.
- Serve vegetable- and broth-based soups. Or use skim or 1% milk or evaporated skim milk when making cream soups.
- Use the nutrition facts label on food packages to find foods with less fat per serving. Be sure to be mindful of the serving size as you make choices. Remember that the percent daily values on food labels are based on portion sizes and calorie levels for adults.

Parent tip: forget "forbidden" foods

Forcing children to eat food doesn't work. Neither does forbidding foods. When children think that a food is forbidden by their parents the food often becomes more desirable.

It's important for both children and adults to be sensible and enjoy all foods, but not to overdo it on one type of food. Sweets and higher-fat snack foods in appropriate portions are OK sometimes. But your child should also be offered healthy food choices from all of the food groups. Foods of any kind should not be used as a reward or bribe.

Get up and move...turn off that tube!

Too much TV or video game time usually results in not enough physical activity or creative play. Pediatricians recommend limiting TV time to no more than 1 or 2 hours each day. Children younger than 2 should not watch TV or videos. Be active. Join your children in doing other activities. These activities will please almost any young child.

- Playing tag
- Jumping rope
- Throwing balls
- Riding a tricycle or bicycle
- Pulling a wagon
- Flying a kite
- Digging in the sand
- Making a snowman
- Ice skating or sledding
- Playing on swings
- "Driving" a toy truck
- Swimming
- Walking with the family
- Dancing
- Pushing a toy shopping cart

The daily recommendation for exercise for children (adults also) is at least 1 hour per day. This takes commitment from parents to make the activity fun and enjoyable.

MyPyramid.gov food and menu planner

For the latest information from the US Department of Agriculture about making healthy food choices and keeping physically active, visit their Web site at www.mypyramid.gov. MyPyramid offers individualized tools, including a food and menu planner. Dietary information is available for the general public starting at age 2 and older.

Food tips

The following are ways to make good food choices when considering fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol in food choices.

Food group...	Most days...	Some days...
Whole-grain bread, cereal, pasta, and rice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole-grain mini bagel or English muffin • Pretzels, baked chips • Graham crackers, crackers, fig bars, vanilla wafers • Low-sugar, high-fiber granola bars and baked goods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donut or Danish • Fried potato or corn chips • Cookie or cupcake
Vegetable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baked potato • Raw or cooked vegetables 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • French fries • Creamy cole slaw
Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh fruit, dried fruit, and 100% fruit juice (unsweetened) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pies or desserts with fruit
Low fat milk, yogurt, and cheese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced-fat or skim milk • Reduced-fat cottage cheese or reduced-fat cheese • Low-fat yogurt or low-fat frozen yogurt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ice cream
Meat, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baked or grilled skinless chicken • Baked fish • Beans, eggs, nuts, seeds, peanut butter (1 to 2 tablespoons) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fried fish sticks • Fried chicken fingers

Note: Do not feed children younger than 4 round, firm food unless it is chopped completely. The following foods are choking hazards: nuts and seeds; chunks of meat or cheese; hot dogs; whole grapes; fruit chunks (such as apples); popcorn; raw vegetables; hard, gooey, or sticky candy; and chewing gum. Peanut butter can be a choking hazard for children younger than 2.

Developed in collaboration with the American Dietetic Association (ADA). For more information about the ADA, visit their web site at www.eatright.org.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

