Promoting Adequate Food Intake

Children who are "picky eaters" may or may not get all the foods and nutrients they need for growth. Some children may refuse foods from an entire food group, such as fruits and vegetables. Others will only drink fluids, refusing all solid foods. This section is designed to help parents encourage more variety in their children's diets.

Regular Meals and Snacks

Children usually need three meals and two or three snacks each day. When children have regular times to eat, instead of nibbling all day, they usually begin to experience hunger. Children are less picky when they are hungry because food tastes better and they have a bigger appetite. Children may not eat much food at any one meal, but if they eat some food at every meal and snack, they are more likely to get the food they need. Meal times can vary but should generally occur at the same time each day. Meals should be spaced about four to five hours apart. Snacks in between should be small enough so that children are hungry at the next meal. Meal times should have a definite start and end. A 15 to 20 minute meal is usually long enough. Meals usually include 3 to 4 foods (e.g., cereal, milk, fruit) while a snack is usually only 1 to 2 foods (e.g., crackers and/or cheese).

Balancing Food and Milk

Children who drink more than 40 ounces of milk or formula per day will probably not be hungry for other foods. While milk is nutritious (providing protein, calcium and vitamin D), it must be balanced with other foods. Children who drink too much milk do not get enough fiber, iron and other vitamins and minerals. The *Daily Food Guide* charts in this section show the recommended amount of milk for children by body weight. Young children after one year of age usually do not need more than 16 to 24 ounces of milk a day. It is still important for children to drink plenty of fluids, so it is good to offer water or small amounts of fruit juice some of the time. Some children drink milk from a bottle as a source of comfort. Cuddling, reading books, and other ways of showing loving

attention can help meet the child's need for comfort. Unless they have delayed feeding skills, children should be drinking only from a cup by two years of age.

Rewards for Appropriate Eating

For some children, refusing food is a way of seeking attention. When this is the case, the best strategy is to teach parents how to ignore their child's food refusal. By doing so, they prevent the child from getting attention for refusing food. A positive reward for eating will give the child the attention he or she seeks. For example, a smile, loving touch, or positive but calm verbal comment, given consistently, will help children learn that eating — not refusing to eat — gets attention. Acknowledging that these behaviors change slowly is one of the first steps in helping parents. Parents who are good role models and who persevere will affect a desirable change in their child's behavior, including a change in what he or she eats.

Accepting Some Limitations

Some children do not enjoy eating, especially if they have experienced aversive oral events following birth (breathing or feeding tubes) or if chewing or swallowing is difficult for them. Feeding therapy may be required in these situations. Also, remember that not all children will like all foods. Respect a child's dislikes as long as he or she eats foods from each food group. As children grow older their taste buds change, and their food preferences usually expand.

STRATEGIES
...for Children with Inadequate Food Intake

ASSESS FURTHER	PLAN FOR ACTION
A child's intake may be inadequate if they don't eat enough of a variety of foods or if they do not consume enough food. To identify possible causes of inadequate intake, ask the child's parent/caregiver the questions below.	With the child's parent/caregiver, develop a plan using the suggestions below and the education materials in this section: ♦ *Choose What You Can Use: Ways To Help A Child Try New Foods — for Children Who Eat Pureed Foods* ♦ *Choose What You Can Use: Ways To Help A Child Try New Foods — for Children Who Feed Themselves* ♦ *Tips for Picky Eaters (WIC Brochure)*
1. Is the child offered three meals and two snacks daily?	**1. If the answer is no:** ♦ Encourage the parent/caregiver to schedule meal and snack times. ♦ Allow four to five hours between meals so that the child begins to get hungry. ♦ Offer snacks between meals, but make them small enough so that the child is hungry for the next meal. ♦ Ask if there is enough food available to feed the child. If not, see the *Resources* section and refer them to food resources.
2. How much milk or formula is the child drinking each day? Review *Daily Food Guide for Children (by weight)* in this section to confirm recommended amounts for child's weight or age.	**2. If the child is drinking more than the recommended amount:** ♦ Explain that this could be interfering with the child's interest in eating other foods. Also, drinking too much milk can cause anemia and constipation. ♦ If the child is over two years of age, suggest offering lowfat or nonfat milk in place of whole milk or formula. ♦ Suggest alternative drinks (water, dilute juice) to offer when child is thirsty. ♦ Suggest activities (cuddling, reading books) to substitute for the comforting experience of drinking milk from a bottle.
3. Does the child have difficulty eating foods of a certain texture?	**3. If the answer is yes:** ♦ Child may need help with feeding. See the *Feeding Skills* section of this manual.

Continued on next page

ASSESS FURTHER	PLAN FOR ACTION
4. Does the child refuse foods from one particular food group?	**4. If the answer is yes:** ♦ Suggest other foods from that food group which the child might try (refer to the Food Guide Pyramid in the *Food Guidelines* section). Give the parent/caregiver a copy of *Choose What You Can Use: Ways To Help A Child Try New Foods.* ♦ Try offering snacks between meals with different foods. ♦ Until the child can eat a wider variety of foods, the child may need a general vitamin/mineral supplement. See the *Supplements* section of this manual.
5. What do the parents/caregivers do when the child refuses a food?	**5. If the child gets special attention upon refusing a food:** ♦ Encourage the parent/caregiver to ignore their child's refusal to eat. ♦ Suggest that they smile, touch, or somehow let the child know they are pleased when the child eats a food. ♦ Encourage the parent/caregiver to follow through. For example, when they say they will do something if the child refuses food, they need to do it.
6. Does the child eat with other family members?	**6. If the answer is no:** ♦ Encourage the parent/caregiver to have the family eat together. This sets a good example and encourages children to imitate others' eating habits.

Daily Food Guide for Children 15 to 23 Pounds

The amount of food a baby needs depends in part on the baby's size and weight. It also depends on how fast the baby is growing and on how active the baby is. One way to help your baby get the right amount of food is to feed him or her based on his or her weight. Use the charts on this and the next page as a guide for amounts of food to offer your child. If your child cannot eat this much food, get help from a nutritionist who may recommend concentrated formula or special foods.

Breastmilk or formula will give a baby all the nutrition needed until he or she weighs about 15 pounds. Some babies develop more slowly than others do. These children may need to feel and taste food on their lips before they are actually ready to take food from the spoon and swallow it. The child's teacher or therapist can suggest food experiences to help him/her learn to eat.

	AMOUNTS OF FOOD YOUR BABY NEEDS EACH DAY				
FOOD	**15 lb. infant**	**17 lb. infant**	**19 lb. infant**	**21 lb. infant**	**23 lb. infant**
Breastmilk or iron-fortified formula	26-32 oz.	26-32 oz.	26-32 oz.	26-32 oz.	24-30 oz.
Infant cereal* — iron-fortified (measured dry)	2-4 Tbsp.	4-8 Tbsp.	4-8 Tbsp.	4-8 Tbsp.	4-8 Tbsp.
Vegetables (9 Tbsp. in a 4.5 oz. jar)		Start strained: 2-6 Tbsp.	4-9 Tbsp. strained	4-9 Tbsp. mashed	6-9 Tbsp. mashed
Fruits (9 Tbsp. in a 4.5 oz. jar)		Start strained: 2-6 Tbsp.	4-9 Tbsp. strained	4-9 Tbsp. mashed	6-9 Tbsp. mashed
Juice** (offer in a cup when possible)			4 oz. (not orange)	4 oz. (add orange)	4 oz.
Meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, tofu, egg yolk, yogurt, cottage cheese			Start strained: 2-3 Tbsp.	4-5 Tbsp. strained or finely chopped	5 Tbsp. finely chopped
Potato, macaroni, spaghetti, and other starch***				8-12 Tbsp. chopped	8-12 Tbsp. chopped
Whole egg (no more than 4 times a week)					One

* Before starting cereals, an infant could consume as much as 35-40 oz. of formula per day; ** Avoid putting juice in a bottle; pooling of juice on baby's teeth can cause decay; *** Depending on the child's ability to self-feed, offer small amounts of crackers and teething biscuits. Adapted from *Feeding and Caring for Infants and Children with Special Needs*, AOTA, 1987.

Daily Food Guide for Children 24 to 44 Pounds

Adapt the information in this chart to fit your child's needs with the help of a nutritionist or physician. Consider your child's energy level, physical size, medications and physical ability to handle foods of different textures. Caution: Children under age 4 years can easily choke on raw carrots, popcorn, hot dogs, nuts, grapes, candy, gum or other small, hard food pieces. Never leave a child alone while he or she is eating.

AMOUNTS YOUR CHILD NEEDS		SERVING SIZE FOR EACH FOOD		
FOOD GROUPS	FOODS	24-29 lb. child	30-39 lb. child	40-44 lb. child
Bread, Cereal, Rice and Pasta 6 servings each day	Bread	½ to 1 slice	1 slice	1 slice
	Cereal	¼ cup	1/3 cup	½ cup
	Rice (cooked)	¼ cup	1/3 cup	½ cup
	Pasta (cooked spaghetti, macaroni, etc.)	¼ cup	1/3 cup	½ cup
	Crackers	2 to 4 small	4 to 6 small	6 small
Vegetables 3 -5 servings each day	Potatoes	2 Tbsp.	3 Tbsp.	4 Tbsp.
	Cooked vegetables	2 Tbsp.	3 Tbsp.	4 Tbsp.
	Raw vegetables*		2 to 3 small pieces	3 to 4 small pieces
Fruits 2-4 servings each day	Fruit	¼ cup	1/3 cup	½ cup
	Juices	1/3 to 1/2 cup	1/3 to 1/2 cup	½ cup
Milk, Yogurt and Cheese 3 servings each day	Milk (whole until age 2)	½ to ¾ cup	½ to ¾ cup	¾ cup
	Yogurt	½ to ¾ cup	½ to ¾ cup	¾ cup
	Cheese	¾ oz.	1 oz.	1 oz.
	Cottage cheese	2 Tbsp.	3 Tbsp.	4 Tbsp.
Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs and Nuts 2-3 servings each day	Lean, cooked meat, fish, poultry	2 Tbsp.**	2-3 Tbsp.**	3 Tbsp.**
	Eggs, medium	1	1	1
	Peanut butter	1 Tbsp.	2 Tbsp.	2 Tbsp.
	Dry beans (cooked)	1/3 cup	1/3 to 1/2 cup	½ cup

*Raw vegetables should be offered only if the child chews well.
**Two tablespoons (2 Tbsp.) is about one ounce (1 oz.) of meat.
Adapted from *Feeding and Caring for Infants and Children with Special Needs*, AOTA, 1987.

Ways to Help a Child Try New Foods — for Children Who Eat Pureed Foods

Eating a variety of foods is one of the healthiest things you can do for your body. Yet many people, especially some children, tend to want to eat the same foods every day. You can help your child increase the variety of foods he or she eats in two ways: introducing a new food along with favorite foods, and hiding new foods in a favorite food.

Below are some suggested strategies for offering new foods to children who eat pureed foods. Not every strategy will work with every child or with every food. Try them and see what works for you and your child. Remember — don't give up with the first refusal! Try another strategy and/or try the same one a few days later.

Give new foods at the start of a meal.

Offer the new food at the start of a meal or snack when the child is the hungriest. At first, offer only 1 to 2 spoonfuls. Then offer a favorite food. At the next meal, offer more spoonfuls of the new food before the favorite food. Gradually increase the amount of the new food and decrease the preferred food.

Example: Offer one to two bites of peas, then feed a normal serving of carrots. After a few meals, the child may accept half a serving of peas and half of carrots.

Mix two foods together.

Try mixing two purees together, such as meat with a favorite vegetable. Even if the combination is not one that you like, your child may decide that she likes it. Start by mixing a very small amount of the new food with the preferred food.

Example: Mix 1 teaspoon of pureed chicken (a new food) with 2 ounces of squash (a favorite). Gradually increase the amount of chicken until the mixture is mostly chicken.

Introduce new liquids, too.

This same technique can be used to introduce a new liquid, even if a child initially refused the new liquid. Start with a small amount of the new liquid or flavor, and add it to the current liquid. Gradually increase the proportion of the new flavor to the preferred flavor until the mixture is mostly the new liquid.

Example: To wean a child off of formula, mix 1 ounce of whole milk with 6 to 8 ounces of formula. Next, try 2 ounces of milk and 4 to 6 ounces of formula. Continue until the child drinks all whole milk. This can also work to change to a new type of formula.

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Try new textures.

If your child prefers very smooth purees and will not accept lumpier foods, you can add thickeners to the purees to gradually alter the texture.

- Dry infant cereal is a nutritious and easy thickener. Simply add 1 to 3 tablespoons of dry cereal to 2 to 4 ounces of puree. (The mixture will become thin again after standing, so use it right away.)
- Commercial thickeners (such as Thick-it®) are more expensive but do not break down as quickly.
- Wheat germ is an easy, available and less expensive thickener. Added 1 teaspoon at a time to a puree, it will not break down and will give the puree a slightly coarser texture without producing actual lumps. After adding wheat germ gradually so that the food is quite thick, you can add lumps of soft-cooked vegetables or fruits.
- Oatmeal is another good food for adding texture. To introduce a child to lumpier textures, add small pieces of soft-cooked vegetables or fruits to fairly thick oatmeal.
- When you puree soup, save some original soup aside and then add it back to the pureed soup to add more texture but retain the same flavor.

Maneras de Ayudar a un Niño Comer Comidas Nuevas—para Niños que Comen Comidas Molidas

Una de las cosas más saludables que Ud. puede hacer para su cuerpo, es comer una variedad de alimentos. Sin embargo muchas personas, especialmente algunos niños, quieren comer las mismas comidas todos los días. Hay dos maneras en que Ud. puede ayudar a que su hijo coma más comidas: puede introducir comidas nuevas con comidas favoritas, y puede esconder comidas nuevas entre las comidas favoritas.

Estas son algunas sugerencias para ofrecer comidas nuevas a niños que comen comidas molidas. No todas las sugerencias trabajan con todos los niños ni con todas las comidas. Trate de implementar algunas de estas sugerencias para saber que es lo que funciona para Ud. y para su niño. Recuerde — no se dé por vencida la primera vez que le rechaze alguna comida. Trate otra sugerencia o la misma unos días después.

Ofrezca comidas nuevas al principio de las comidas.

Ofrezca las comidas nuevas al principio de la hora de la comida o de los bocadillos, cuando el niño tiene más hambre. Ofrezca solamente 1 o 2 cucharadas al empezar. A la hora de la siguiente comida, ofrezca más cucharadas de la comida nueva antes de ofrecer la comida favorita. Gradualmente vaya aumentando la cantidad de la comida nueva y disminuyendo la cantidad de la comida preferida.

Ejemplo: Ofrezca uno o dos bocados de chícharos, luego ofrezca una porción normal de zanahorias. Después de algunas comidas, puede ser que el acepte media porción de chícharos y media porción de zanahorias.

Mezcle dos comidas.

Trate de mezclar dos purés juntos, como carne con una verdura favorita. Aunque la combinación de comidas sea una que no le guste a Ud., tal vez a su niño si le guste. Empiece con una cantidad muy pequeña de la comida nueva con la comida preferida.

Ejemplo: Mezcle una cucharadita de pollo molido (comida nueva) con 2 onzas de calabaza (comida favorita). Gradualmente aumente la cantidad de pollo hasta que la mezcla sea más pollo que calabaza.

Introduzca líquidos nuevos también.

La misma estrategia se puede usar para introducir líquidos nuevos, aunque el niño haya rechazado el líquido inicialmente. Al líquido favorito, agregue una cantidad pequeña del líquido o sabor nuevo. Gradualmente aumente la cantidad del líquido nuevo hasta que la mezcla sea mayoría líquido nuevo.

Ejemplo: Para quitarle la fórmula a un niño, mezcle una onza de leche entera con 8 onzas de fórmula. Luego agregue 2 onzas de leche entera a 4-6 onzas de fórmula. Siga haciendo esto hasta que el niño tome leche entera solamente. También puede hacer esto cuando está cambiando fórmulas.

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Trate de introducir texturas nuevas.

Si su niño prefiere purés muy molidos y no acepta comidas con más textura (o más gruesas), puede agregar algo para espezar los purés y cambiar la textura gradualmente.

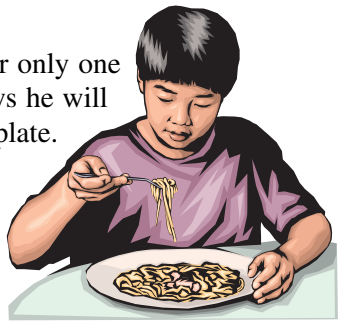
- Cereal de bebé seco es nutritivo y se puede usar para espezar. Simplemente, agregue 1-3 cucharadas de cereal seco a 2-4 onzas de puré (La mezcla se hace más espeza con el tiempo, así que úsela inmediatamente).
- Espezantes comerciales (como Thick-it®) son más caros, pero mantienen su textura por más tiempo.
- Germen de trigo es fácil de usar, se encuentra facilmente y no es caro. Agregue una cucharada a la vez a los purés. El germen de trigo mantiene su textura por un largo tiempo y le da una textura más gruesa sin producir borones. Después de agregar el germen de trigo gradualmente hasta que la comida esté espeza, puede agregar pedazos de fruta o verdura cocida.
- Avena es otra comida que se puede usar para agregar textura. Para introducir al niño a texturas más gruesas, agregue pedazos pequeños de fruta o verdura cocida a una avena gruesa.
- Cuando haga purés de sopas, agregue poca sopa actual para darle más textura al puré. Esto también mantiene el mismo sabor de la sopa.

Ways to Help a Child Try New Foods— for Children Who Feed Themselves

Eating a variety of foods is one of the healthiest things you can do for your body. Yet many people, especially some children, tend to want to eat the same foods every day. You can help your child increase the variety of foods he or she eats in two ways: introducing a new food along with favorite foods, and hiding new foods in a favorite food.

Below are some ways to offer new foods to children who feed themselves. Not every strategy will work with every child or with every food. Try them and see what works for you and your child. Remember—don't give up with the first refusal! Try another strategy and/or try the same one a few days later.

Give new foods at the start of a meal.



Offer the new food at the start of a meal or snack when the child is hungriest. Offer only one new food at a meal, and serve it with several other familiar foods so the child knows he will not be hungry at the end of the meal. Put 1 to 2 bites of the new food on your child's plate. Offer more if he eats it all, but never force him to eat it.

Hide new foods in familiar foods.

For example, add very small pieces of a new vegetable to a favorite soup or stew, or grate vegetables into muffin batter. You can also do this with drinks, such as water in juice, diet soda in regular soda, or a new kind of juice with an old favorite. If your child notices the difference, make the addition even smaller, so that she almost can't taste the difference. Don't make your child's food different from the other family members'. Remember you are modeling for your child. If she is old enough to understand what the new food is, you can discuss the addition after she has learned to eat the food.

Be creative.

Prepare the new food creatively or in a new form. For example, make faces with raisins or banana slices on a slice of bread spread with peanut butter. Make a game out of eating the fruits and bread. Use dips for raw vegetables (ranch dressing is easy), or marinate the vegetables (Italian dressing is good for this).

Tell your child what you expect.

Tell your child your expectations for eating a new food. It you just want her to try one bite, let her know she will need to do that before eating the rest of the meal. Reward your child by giving lots of verbal encouragement and praise when she tries the new food (whether she liked it or not) but not necessarily for cleaning her plate. Model trying new foods for your child.

Be realistic.

Choose which foods are important for your child to learn to eat, and don't worry about all foods. Some children will never really "like" a food, but will learn to eat it with proper encouragement and positive reinforcement. Try a new food more than once, and at more than one age. As children (and adults) get older, their tastebuds change so that foods they once refused they may accept. Remember that the best example is your own good eating habits.

Maneras de Ayudar a un Niño Comer Comidas Nuevas—para Niños que Se Pueden Alimentar Solos

Una de las cosas más saludables que Ud. puede hacer para su cuerpo, es comer una variedad de alimentos. Sin embargo muchas personas, especialmente algunos niños, quieren comer las mismas comidas todos los días. Hay dos maneras en que Ud. puede ayudar a que su hijo coma más comidas: puede introducir comidas nuevas con comidas favoritas, y puede esconder comidas nuevas entre las comidas favoritas.

Estas son algunas sugerencias para ofrecer comidas nuevas a niños que comen por si solos. No todas las sugerencias trabajan con todos los niños ni con todas las comidas. Trate de implementar algunas de estas sugerencias para saber que es lo que funciona para Ud. y para su niño. Recuerde—no se dé por vencida la primera vez que le rechaze alguna comida. Trate otra sugerencia o la misma unos días después.

Ofrezca comidas nuevas al principio de las comidas.

Ofrezca las comidas nuevas al principio de la hora de la comida o de los bocadillos, cuando el niño tiene más hambre. Ofrezca solamente una comida nueva a cada hora de comer y ofrézcala con comidas conocidas para que el niño sepa que no se va a quedar con hambre. Ponga 1 o 2 bocados de la comida nueva en el plato de su niño. Ofrezca más si se la come toda, pero nunca haga que su niño coma a la fuerza.

Esconda comidas nuevas entre comidas favoritas.

Por ejemplo, agregue pedacitos pequeños de una verdura nueva a una sopa o guiso favorito. Puede rayar verduras y agregar a la masa de panecillos. También puede hacerlo con bebidas, tal como agua en jugo, soda de dieta en soda regular, agregue muy poco de la bebida nueva para que no sepa la diferencia. Que la comida de su niño no sea diferente de la comida del resto de la familia. Recuerde que Ud. es un ejemplo para su niño. Si su niño tiene suficiente edad para comprender que es la comida nueva y ya aprendió a comérsela, puede platicar con el sobre la comida nueva.

Sea creativa.

Prepare la comida nueva de una manera distinta o creativa. Por ejemplo, haga caritas con pasas y plátanos, en una rebanada de pan con crema de cacahuate (maní). Haga un juego de comer las frutas y el pan. Use aderezos para las verduras crudas (aderezo estilo “ranch” es fácil), o agregue aderezo a las verduras (aderezo italiano es bueno para esto).

Dígale a su niño lo que Ud. espera de él.

Dígale a su niño lo que Ud. espera de él tocante a las comidas nuevas. Si Ud. quiere que solamente pruebe la comida nueva, dígale que tiene que hacerlo antes de poder comer otras comidas. Apoye a su niño verbalmente y alábelo cuando pruebe la comida nueva (le guste o no le guste) pero no necesariamente por limpiar el plato. Enséñele a su niño que Ud. también prueba comidas nuevas.

Sea Realista.

Escoja las comidas que son importantes para que aprenda a comer su hijo(a) y no se preocupe por todas las comidas. Algunos niños nunca les gustan ciertas comidas sin embargo aprenden a comérselas con apoyo y refuerzo positivo. Introduzca comidas más de una vez y a todas las edades. Con el tiempo algunos niños (y adultos) cambiarán de parecer, y las comidas que rechazaban serán aceptadas. Recuerde que el mejor ejemplo son los buenos hábitos alimenticios de Ud.