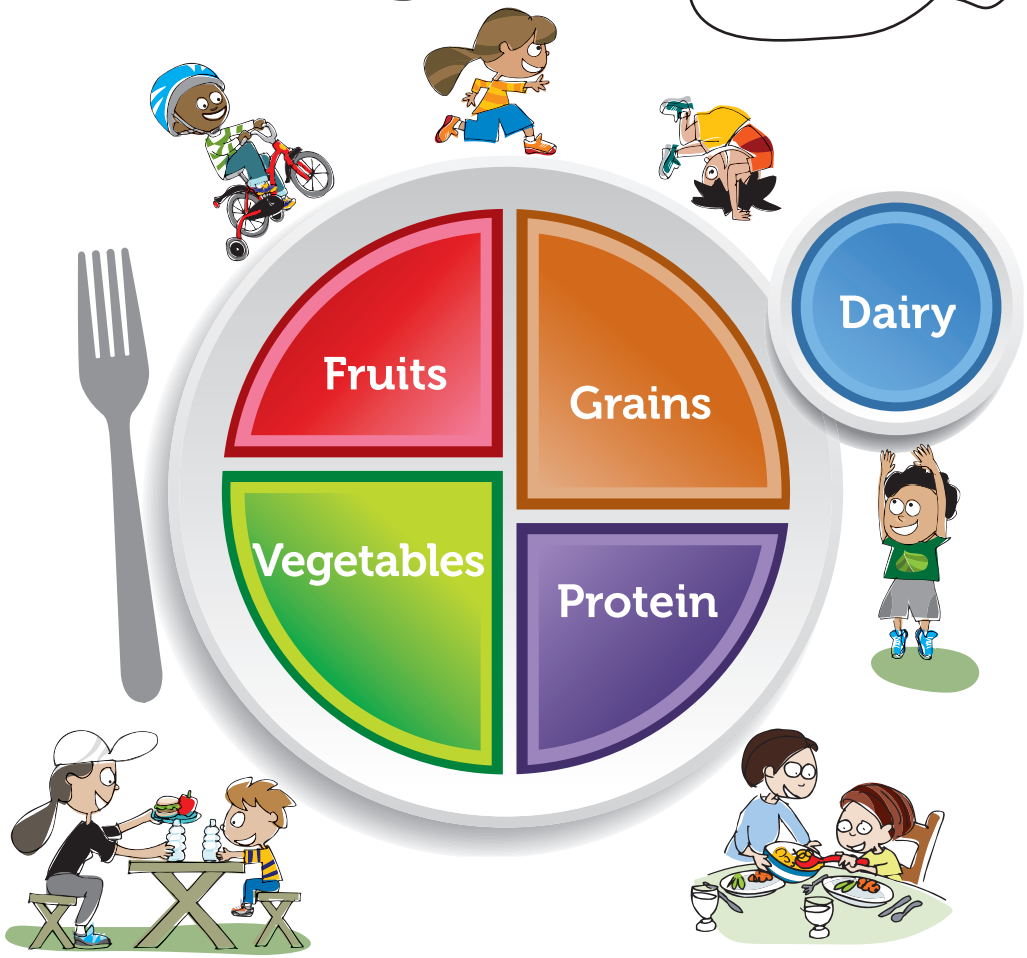
USDA
United States Department of Agriculture

# Healthy Eating for Preschoolers

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## Get your child on the path to healthy eating.

### Offer a variety of healthy foods.

Choose foods from each MyPlate food group. Pay attention to dairy foods, whole grains, and vegetables to build healthy habits that will last a lifetime.

### Be mindful of sweet drinks and other foods.

Offer water instead of sugary drinks like regular soda and fruit drinks. Other foods like hot dogs, burgers, pizza, cookies, cakes, and candy are only occasional treats.

### Focus on the meal and each other.

Your child learns by watching you. Let your child choose how much to eat of foods you provide. Children copy your likes, dislikes, and your interest in trying new foods.

### Be patient with your child.

Children enjoy food when eating it is their own choice. Some new foods take time. Give a taste at first and wait a bit. Let children serve themselves by taking small amounts. Offer new foods many times.

### Cook together.
### Eat together.
### Talk together.
### Make meal time family time.

# Healthy Eating for Preschoolers

# Daily Food Checklist

## Use this Checklist as a general guide.

- This food checklist is based on average needs. Do not be concerned if your child does not eat the exact amounts suggested. Your child may need more or less than average. For example, food needs increase during growth spurts.
- Children's appetites vary from day to day. Some days they may eat less than these amounts; other days they may want more. Let your child choose how much to eat. Throughout a day, offer amounts shown below.

| Food group | 2 year olds | 3 year olds | 4 and 5 year olds | What counts as: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Fruits**<br>Focus on whole fruits | 1 cup | 1 – 1½ cups | 1 – 1½ cups | **½ cup of fruit?**<br>½ cup mashed, sliced, or chopped fruit<br>½ cup 100% fruit juice<br>½ small banana<br>4-5 large strawberries |
| **Vegetables**<br>Vary your veggies | 1 cup | 1 – 1½ cups | 1½ – 2 cups | **½ cup of veggies?**<br>½ cup mashed, sliced, or chopped vegetables<br>1 cup raw leafy greens<br>½ cup vegetable juice<br>1 small ear of corn |
| **Grains**<br>Make half your grains whole grains | 3 ounces | 3 – 5 ounces | 4 – 5 ounces | **1 ounce of grains?**<br>1 slice bread<br>1 cup ready-to-eat cereal flakes<br>½ cup cooked oatmeal, rice, or pasta<br>1 tortilla (6" across) |
| **Protein Foods**<br>Vary your protein routine | 2 ounces | 2 – 4 ounces | 3 – 5 ounces | **1 ounce of protein foods?**<br>1 ounce cooked meat, poultry, or seafood<br>1 egg<br>1 Tablespoon peanut butter<br>¼ cup cooked beans or peas (kidney, pinto, lentils) |
| **Dairy**<br>Choose low-fat or fat-free milk or yogurt | 2 cups | 2 – 2½ cups | 2½ cups | **½ cup of dairy?**<br>½ cup milk<br>4 ounces yogurt<br>¾ ounce cheese |

Some foods are easy to choke on while eating. Children need to sit when eating. Foods like hot dogs, grapes, and raw carrots need to be cut into small pieces the size of a nickel. Be alert if serving 3- to 5-year-olds foods like popcorn, nuts, seeds, or other hard foods.

There are many ways to divide the Daily Food Checklist into meals and snacks. View the "Meal and Snack Patterns and Ideas" to see how these amounts might look on your preschooler's plate at www.ChooseMyPlate.gov/preschoolers-meal-and-snack-patterns.