

CHILDREN AND NUTRITION

We've all heard that nutrition is important, as is "eating healthy." We all want our children to be healthy, but 'healthy' is a very nebulous term, these days. Does it mean going on this or that diet or eating plan? Does it mean taking these or those vitamins? Pretty much all of us know it has something to do with eating right—particularly fruits and vegetables—and getting daily exercise in. But what does it mean to 'eat right,' anyway?

THE BASICS OF NUTRITION

THE FOOD PYRAMID

We all know the idea that what you put into something is what you get out of it—effort, time, quality of materials. Your little one's nutrition works the same way. Most parents have heard of the food pyramid and some may even consider it when preparing food for children. The food pyramid is a notion the USDA came up with that illustrates the amount of food and macronutrients you should have in a day. According to this guide, our diet should consist mostly of grains, pastas and cereal; followed by fruits and vegetables; and then dairy and meats, nuts, and beans; and finally fats, oils, and sweets.

What if you were told that the food pyramid is basically upside down? Let's explain it this way. You need to eat what your body is made of in order for your body to be able to repair and maintain the various organs and processes in the body. Makes sense, right? You wouldn't give a mechanic bricks to make a car out of—you'd give him car parts because you want a car. So what is the body made of?

45% of your body is protein, 35% is fat, and 5% is carbohydrates. The rest of your body is made up of vitamins and minerals. Your brain—a crucial part of child development—is 61% fat, 35% proteins, and 4% glucose sugar. Your body, then, needs mostly fat, then protein, then carbohydrates and sugars. How does that measure up against the food pyramid?

It doesn't, and we've seen the evidence of that in the rising rates of health issues over the last several decades. The food pyramid as it is today, was first introduced in public schools in 1977. The CDC has a

record of obesity trends (<https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/81474>) in America from 1985 to 2010, and the increase is astounding.

ALLERGENS AND TOXINS

One size does not fit all, especially when it comes to health and wellness. Giving your body what it needs to repair and maintain itself is important, without a doubt, but there are also nuances to that. For vegetables, there's the [dirty dozen](https://www.thewellnessway.com/dirtydozen/) (<https://www.thewellnessway.com/dirtydozen/>) – a list of what to stay away from because they're sprayed with the most pesticides. Those sprays are toxins and put stress on your little one's immune system and body as a whole. Things like [GMOs](https://www.thewellnessway.com/well-know-gmos/) (<https://www.thewellnessway.com/well-know-gmos/>), [dyes](https://www.thewellnessway.com/food-coloring-and-kids/) (<https://www.thewellnessway.com/food-coloring-and-kids/>), [processed sugar](https://www.thewellnessway.com/5-ways-cutting-sugar-intake-benefits-the-gut/) (<https://www.thewellnessway.com/5-ways-cutting-sugar-intake-benefits-the-gut/>), and [dairy](https://www.thewellnessway.com/the-benefits-of-giving-up-dairy/) (<https://www.thewellnessway.com/the-benefits-of-giving-up-dairy/>) will also put stress on your child, as will their [allergies](https://www.thewellnessway.com/whats-the-big-deal-with-allergies/) (<https://www.thewellnessway.com/whats-the-big-deal-with-allergies/>).

If your child is eating something they're allergic to—even if it's “healthy,” their body isn't taking it as nutrition. Our bodies see allergies as foreign invaders and attack them much like they attack viruses or bad bacteria. This results in inflammation, which, as we state elsewhere:

Studies show that chronic stress may result in atherosclerosis in the arteries or inflammation in other organs. If you knew that your constipation or diarrhea meant inflammation that would lead to cancer, would you find out what was causing it? There is a lot of evidence that chronic inflammation predisposes you to cancer and the longer you have that inflammation, the higher the risk. Inflammation is the root of disease, but many people miss the hidden inflammation in their daily life.

Your body attacks the foods your little one is allergic to because it sees them as potentially harmful. That takes energy, which means your child has less energy during the day. What happens when we're tired? We have a much lower threshold for dealing with annoyances and frustrations. Our body is stressed and gets sick easier. That makes life in general much harder.

Taking these few things into consideration and cutting them from your weekly menu will make everyone in your family feel a lot better. It will decrease inflammation and set your family up for success in many more areas than you may suspect.

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR...

SCHOOL LUNCHES?

School lunches can often feel like a godsend for the time and money they free up. Buying a school lunch means you don't have to use precious mind space figuring out what and when to pack. You don't have to spend the time at night or in the mornings making, portioning, and packing.

School lunches are easier for hurried and harried parents and kids. Someone else is planning and taking care of it; it's supplied by the school. It falls within the 'healthy' guidelines because the USDA itself is giving the school the parameters to stay within in order to get the reimbursement that helps pay for everything.

Because the USDA is giving the parameters, the lunches fall neatly into the food pyramid. As shown above, those proportions aren't the key to health the USDA would have you believe it is. Schools don't really have much of a choice but to fall in line, however. As [Healthy Food Choices in Schools](https://healthy-food-choices-in-schools.extension.org/the-money-question-how-is-the-school-cafeteria-funded/) (<https://healthy-food-choices-in-schools.extension.org/the-money-question-how-is-the-school-cafeteria-funded/>) puts it:

Imagine running your own restaurant with a captive audience of customers who eat lunch each day. Now imagine providing these customers a complete, five component meal that consists of a meat entrée, fruit, vegetable, whole grain item and milk. Finally, imagine

having only \$2.93 to purchase the items necessary to provide this entire meal! And don't forget the other things you need to run your restaurant and prepare those meals – things like equipment, (ovens, stoves, coolers, freezers), electricity, small wares (pots, pans, dishes, serving utensils) and all of the wages and benefits for your staff. That is what school cafeterias all over the United States do each and every day!

The job of school cafeterias isn't an easy one, and they do what they can to do their job well. For parents worried about the nutrition of their children's lunches, however, school lunches aren't a perfect choice.

SNACKS

Every parent knows the appeal of a snack to a child. When they're bored, they want a snack. If they're thirsty, they want a snack. When they just finished playing, they'll want a snack. Growing kids need fuel for their bodies—there's nothing out of the ordinary about that. This is why it's important to choose your child's snacks wisely. [Choose snacks that'll help their growing bodies](https://www.thewellnessway.com/connect-to-wellness/healthy-recipes/snacks/) (<https://www.thewellnessway.com/connect-to-wellness/healthy-recipes/snacks/>). Snacks low on sugar that'll go towards the amount of each kind of food they're supposed to have in a day.

Children don't typically reach for carrots or a celery stick for a snack, and most adults don't want one more battle on their plate, but there are ways to make these snacks appealing. Mix some peanut butter and honey to make a dip for their carrot sticks. Make ants on a log out of the celery. Mix pears, grapes, nuts, and seeds, together into a fruit salad. Get natural fruit leathers rather than fruit leathers with a lot of added sugar. Apples with salt and cinnamon sprinkled on top is a great snack, as well. Put out some cheese along with some cooked chicken or beef sticks for a snack with a bit more fat and

protein. For more ideas, check out our [snack recipes \(https://www.thewellnessway.com/connect-to-wellness/healthy-recipes/snacks/\)](https://www.thewellnessway.com/connect-to-wellness/healthy-recipes/snacks/).

If you have littles home during the school year, spread out some apple slices, raisins, carrots, other good foods, some sort of nut butter or honey, and toothpicks. Let them play around with the foods and see what sort of creations they think up. The food will be fun and keep them entertained while they eat, it'll give you a bit of time off your feet, and clean up is eating the creations and washing hands and the table.

HOW TO ADDRESS NUTRITIOUS EATING

Getting your little one's allergies tested is important. All the healthy food in the world won't do much if your child's body reads it as a foreign invader. Cut the toxins from your child's menu—GMOs, dyes, dairy, refined sugar, the dirty dozen, and other naturally inflammatory foods.

Make packing school lunches a family event. Make it a sort of scavenger hunt or puzzle to get the right amount of fruits and veggies, some sort of protein, a healthy fat or two, and keep grains and sugars to a minimum. What sort of snack can you add that helps reach those targets? Who can get all the pieces they need first? How can you do it with the greatest variety of foods? How about doing it while using none of the food that was packed for today? Who ate all of their lunch today—getting the nutrition they needed? When your child hits all the necessary amounts of food, let them pick a fun treat or maybe a sticker chart as a reward. If you need some ideas about tasty and healthy snacks, check out our ideas and suggestions [here \(https://www.thewellnessway.com/connect-to-wellness/healthy-recipes/snacks/\)](https://www.thewellnessway.com/connect-to-wellness/healthy-recipes/snacks/)! For ideas about healthy desserts, check out our recipes [here \(https://www.thewellnessway.com/connect-to-wellness/healthy-recipes/desserts/\)](https://www.thewellnessway.com/connect-to-wellness/healthy-recipes/desserts/)!

WHAT ABOUT WATER?

Water is another important part of making sure your little ones are getting all their nutritional needs met. If you're eating the right things, but your body doesn't have enough water, it still won't function to its highest capability. Getting enough water in a day can be challenging for parents and little ones, because juices and other sugary drinks just taste better. For some ways to make water more fun and appealing, take a look at [these ideas \(https://www.thewellnessway.com/top-10-water-infusions-](https://www.thewellnessway.com/top-10-water-infusions-)

[health-and-hydration/](#)). You can also add good quality, organic sea salt and a splash of lemon to their water for a bit of a different flavor.

Nutrition and eating right can be a struggle with yourself, some days—let alone with little ones. The good news is, there are ways to tackle this challenge that make it much easier on everyone. To find more ways to make meals healthy and allergy-friendly, check out our [recipes](#) (<https://www.thewellnessway.com/connect-to-wellness/healthy-recipes/>). To get your child's allergies tested and learn more about nutrition and ways to set your little ones up for success with health, contact a Wellness Way clinic, today!