

Nutrition

This year your 4 year old will gain an average of 4.5 to 6.5 pounds and grow 2.5 to 3.5 inches in height. To promote healthy growth, offer your child meals (3 meals daily) and snacks (2-3 healthy snacks a day) at approximately the same times every day. Predictable eating times help control appetite.

There are many triggers for hunger, such as boredom, visual cues, situational cues, and television advertising. Distraction tactics, like talking, playing, or enjoyable activities like finger painting are options to try if your child requests food and it is not time for a meal or snack.

What should I serve my child for meals and snacks?

Utilize the MyPlate visual guide to create well-balanced meals and snacks for your family. It illustrates the 5 food groups that are important to include in your child's diet and the relative proportions of each. Goal: Make ½ the plate at meals fruits and vegetables. Your 4 year old may still be reluctant to try new foods, including vegetables, but by parents modeling a varied and healthy diet, continuing to offer these foods even if refused (remember it may take several times to present a food before your child will try it), never forcing a child to eat a certain food, and not rewarding eating a healthy food with dessert, this reluctance may be overcome.

Avoid high-fat, high-sugared snacks like chips, cookies, brownies, and ice cream as they may add empty calories to your child's diet. Also avoid giving only grains, such as cheese crackers, graham crackers, or finger-food "puffs" as snacks. Include fruits and vegetables for snacks. Also include snacks with a protein (like peanut butter, milk, and low-fat yogurt) to increase your child's fullness.

Your child's appetite will vary at times. Parents provide and the child decides. You, as the parent, are responsible for what foods are offered, what time meals and snacks are served, and where meals and snacks are eaten. Your child decides whether they eat what is offered or whether they will wait for the next meal or snack. Do not always cater to your child's likes and dislikes, offer a variety of foods. Join your child at mealtime and show how you enjoy eating healthy food. Set a good example.

Sample Menu and Serving Sizes for a 4-year-old Who Weighs About 36 lb (16.3 kg)	
Breakfast	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One-half cup of 1% or fat-free (skim) milk• One-half cup of cereal• Four to 6 oz. of 100% citrus or tomato juice or 1/2 cup of cantaloupe or strawberries
Snack	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One-half cup of 1% or fat-free (skim) milk• One-half cup of banana• One slice of whole wheat bread• One teaspoon of margarine (or butter)• One teaspoon of jelly
Lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One-half cup of 1% or fat-free skim milk• One sandwich—2 slices of whole wheat bread, 1 teaspoon of mustard, and 1 oz of meat or cheese• One-fourth cup of dark-yellow or dark-green vegetable
Snack	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One teaspoon of peanut butter or 1 slice of low-fat cheese• One slice of whole wheat bread or 5 crackers
Dinner	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One-half cup of 1% or fat-free (skim) milk• Two oz. (slightly less than a deck of cards) or about 1/4 cup of meat, fish, or chicken• One-half cup of pasta, rice, or potato• One-half cup of vegetables• One teaspoon of margarine (or butter) or 2 teaspoons of salad dressing

Healthy Habits Tips

Remember the message "7-5-2-1-0" for what healthy habits are important for your child.

- 7: Eat breakfast daily. Eating breakfast prevents children from getting too hungry and overeating later in the day---habits that lead to weight gain. If serving cereal, provide a breakfast cereal with at least 2 grams of fiber and less than 9 grams of sugar per serving.
- 5: Eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day. By making half your child's plate fruits and vegetables at meals and including fruits and vegetables for snack, your child will get the needed amount of fruits and vegetables.
- 2: Do not to let your child spend more than 1 to 2 hours on total screen time (TV, video games, recreational computer time, iPad, iPhones). 12% of 4 year old children use a computer daily, and with the increased availability of mobile devices, parents have to

monitor ALL screen time. Turn the TV off during meals and keep the TV and computer out of your child’s bedroom. If there already is a television in their bedroom, remove it. These steps will not only decrease screen time, but also help increase parent-child communication, and decrease disordered sleep. Preschoolers are a major target of advertising, and limited screen time will decrease your child’s unhealthy exposure to commercials and marketing to children that have been shown to influence and result in cravings for unhealthy foods, such as sugared-cereals, unhealthy snack foods, fast food, and sugar-sweetened beverages.

- 1: Have your child participate in at least 1 hour of physical activity per day. Many children under 5 fail to meet physical activity guidelines. Outdoor play in this age group naturally yields more physical activity. Plan for unstructured, outdoor play time every day.
- 0: Encourage your child to drink almost no sugar sweetened beverages. Soda, sports drinks, lemonade, fruit drinks, and even 100% fruit juice (collectively called sugar-sweetened beverages) all contain a large amount of sugar which contributes greatly to excess weight, so try not to buy or bring these beverages into your home. Water and low-fat (1%) or nonfat (skim) milk are the best drinks for you to drink. Remember 2% milk is not considered low-fat. Many parents assume that child care, preschool, and other caregivers, including family members are providing good nutrition and activity options for their child. It is important for families to ask about these options and provide healthy alternatives if needed.
- Examples of Healthy Snacks: Fruit, Low-fat/frozen yogurt, Celery stalks, cucumber slices, frozen banana slices, Bran muffins, Sugar-free cereals, Low-fat cheeses, Crackers or unsalted pretzels.

Food Group	Girls (4-8 Years)	Boys (4-8 Years)
Grains	4-5 ounces	4-5 ounces
Fruit	1 – 1 ½ cups	1 – 1 ½ cups
Vegetables	1 ½ – 2 ½ cups	1 ½ – 2 ½ cups
Protein	3-4 ounces	3-4 ounces
Dairy	2 cups	2 cups

What counts as an ounce of grain?

- 1 regular slice of bread = 1 ounce
- 1 cup of cold cereal = 1 ounce
- 1 cup of cooked rice = 2 ounces
- 1 small bagel or English muffin = the size of a yo-yo = 2 ounces

Aim to make ½ your grains whole grains such whole wheat pasta, whole wheat bread, and brown rice.

What does a cup of fruit look like?

- 1 cup = size of a baseball = 1 small apple
- ½ cup chopped fruit = 1 small computer mouse
- 1 cup = 8 large strawberries
- ½ cup 100% fruit juice = 4-6 ounces = size of a juice box

Try to limit 100% juice to 4-6 ounces/day for children up to 6 years of age.

What does a cup of vegetables look like?

- 1 cup = 5 broccoli florets
- 1 cup = 10-12 baby carrots
- 1 cup = 1 large, raw tomato
- 1 cup = 1 large sweet potato

What does an ounce of protein look like?

- 1 ounce = 1 (large) egg
- 1 ounce = 1 Tablespoon of peanut butter
- 1 ounce = 1 sandwich slice of turkey
- 3-4 ounces = 1 can of tuna/canned fish
- 4-6 ounces = 1 salmon steak

What counts as a serving of dairy?

- 1 cup = 1 (small) carton of milk
- 1 cup = 8 ounce carton of yogurt
- ½ cup = 1 slice of cheese

You can also find milk and yogurt substitutes like soy milk, almond milk, rice milk, and soy yogurt. Get the substitutions that are fortified with calcium.

Is my child overweight/obese?

Childhood obesity is increasing at an alarming rate in the United States. According to a 2011 report from the Institute of Medicine, slightly over 20 percent of children aged 2 -5 are overweight or obese. Contrary to the belief that young children will “grow out it,” excess weight persists into later life and increases the risk for weight-related diseases in both childhood and adulthood. Body Mass Index (BMI) is widely used to help define overweight and obese children. BMI compares height and weight and varies by age and sex. A BMI between the 85th and 95th percentile is defined as overweight, and a BMI above the 95th is defined as obese. BMI and BMI % will be shared at your child’s visit. Do not hesitate to ask your child’s doctor about any concerns you have about your child’s weight or eating habits. The table below outlines the general, daily recommended amounts of each food group for your child.

Development

- **Social.** Four years is often a difficult age. Many parents are reminded of the earlier struggles they experienced when their child was two. This year is often characterized by “out-of-bounds” behavior. The emotional highs and lows are often extreme - secure and bragging one moment, and insecure and whining the next. Many four year olds become set in their routines and feel insecure when change occurs. Foul language is often “tried out” to see what response they can get out of their parents. Most four year olds have a poor sense of property. Possession means ownership. Many four year olds have a tremendous imagination. You may hear “tall tales” about “monsters” and “dragons.” Children at this age are often trying to distinguish fact from fantasy, and their fantasies sometimes get out of control. All of these behaviors will help your child build a secure foundation as he emerges into the world of kindergarten.
 - Tips:
 - Help your child to have a “social life.” Encourage friendship by arranging playtimes and inviting playmates to your home. These friends are not just playmates, they will influence thinking and behavior. You still need to supervise and at times provide guidance during play.
 - If your child challenges your authority, express disapproval but try not to be emotional. If calm disapproval doesn’t work, a “time out” is the most effective form of discipline. Always make sure that he understands that you disapprove of a particular act that he has done, not that he is bad. Describe what he did wrong. Clearly separate the behavior from the person. Try not to get upset yourself.
 - Give your preschooler tasks that he can perform and then praise him (i.e., put away toys).
 - When you go on family outings, explain that you expect him to behave well. Be sure to congratulate him when he does so.
 - Be realistic in your expectations. A four year old will constantly involve his body as well as his mind in his play and his daily life. If you want your four year old to be quiet and still for more than a minute or two, provide a quiet activity such as a coloring book or a favorite book to “read.”
 - Do not use physical punishment. Spanking teaches your child to hit.
 - Tell him that you are proud when he shares or is helpful to another youngster.
- **Language.** At about age four, language skills blossom. Pronunciation improves, although f, v, s, z, sh, l, th and r may remain difficult for another year or so. Sentences are relatively complex and may contain eight or more words. He will elaborate on events, dreams and fantasies.
 - Tips:
 - Continue to read to your child at least a half hour a day. Make story time a fun and pleasurable time for your child. Use this time to enjoy each other. You can also use stories to teach social lessons.
 - Teach your child to show respect through language, like saying “please” and “thank you.” Set a good example. Encourage respectful communication between family members.
 - Teach your child songs, limericks and simple poems. Not only will your child learn new language skills, but it may offer your child another verbal outlet if he is prone to constant “chatter.”

- **Gross Motor (Movement) Skills.** Coordination and balance improve rapidly at this age. Motor skills are still way ahead of judgment. Visual tracking skills and reaction time can still be quite slow.
 - Tips:
 - Play simple ball games involving kicking, throwing and catching. Playing on playscapes allows your child to practice his motor skills and use his imagination. Children need time for imaginary play.
 - Encourage your child to play outside: swinging, somersaults, skipping, games that involve hopping and leaping.
- **Fine Motor (Hand and Finger) Skills.** Fine motor skills are also improving rapidly at this age. Arts and crafts become more fun and stimulating at this age. Provide a broad range of activities and materials. The following activities can help prepare your child for school and provide opportunities to be creative.
 - Tips:
 - Provide opportunities for writing, drawing, tracing and copying geometric patterns.
 - Teach simple card and board games.
 - Paint with brushes or fingers.
 - Play with clay.
 - Cut and paste.
 - Build complex structures with blocks.
- **Sleep.** Evidence suggests a decrease in sleep duration across all age groups over the past 20 years. Preschoolers should sleep between 10-12 hours each night. Naps should cease by 5 years old.

Electronics and Media in Your Home

Video Games/The Internet Studies of interactive media indicate that the effect of interactive “virtual violence” may be more harmful than passive media, like television. Studies show that after playing violent video games, young people show a decrease in helpful behaviors and an increase in violent behavior when provoked. Video games are an ideal environment in which to learn violence and in some people, can be addictive. Parents need to monitor and help their children with media choices. Sports and non-violent strategic video games are preferable to games that glamorize carrying and using weapons.

Television/Entertainment Media ALERT!

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) wants all parents to be aware that television viewing can contribute to:

- Violent and aggressive behavior
- Obesity
- Poor body concept and self-image
- Substance abuse
- Early sexual behavior

Monitor the shows that your child watches. Most programs should be informational, educational, and nonviolent. View television with your child. Encourage alternative entertainment for your child, such as reading, athletics, or other forms of exercise.

Safety

Injuries are the leading cause of death of children younger than 4 years in the United States. Your child is at special risk for injuries from falls, drowning, poisons, burns, and car crashes. Your child doesn’t always understand dangers or remember “no” while playing and exploring.

- **Falls.** Your child will find an endless variety of dangerous situations at home and elsewhere. Your child can fall off play equipment, out windows, down stairs, off a tricycle, or anything that can be climbed. Make sure the surface under play equipment is soft enough to absorb a fall. Use safety-tested mats or loose-fill materials, like shredded rubber, sand, wood chips, or bark, maintained to a depth of at least 9 inches and extending at least 6 feet (more for swings and slides) from play equipment. Household items may pose a danger to your child. Children can have serious injuries from improperly secured television sets that topple on them. Avoid the recreational use trampolines at home. Children, especially those 5 years or younger, are at risk of serious trampoline-related injuries. Lock doors to dangerous areas. Use gates on stairways and install operable window guards above the first floor. Fence in the play yard.
- **Water Safety.** Most drowning injuries occur in backyard pools. Water safety truly begins at home. Never leave a child alone in or near water, even for a moment. Constant adult supervision is essential. Children can even drown in wading pools or bathtubs in just a few inches of water. Use Coast-Guard approved personal flotation devices (life jackets) if boating. If you own a pool, be sure it is enclosed by a fence or wall with a self-closing, self-locking gate. Avoid fences, like chain-link, that can be climbed easily.

- **Poisonings.** Your child will be able open any drawer and climb anywhere. Use only household products and medicines that are absolutely necessary and keep them safely capped and out of sight and reach. Keep all products in their original containers. If your child does put something poisonous in his mouth, call the Poison Help Line immediately and do not make your child vomit. Add the Poison Help Line (1-800-222-1222) to your cell phone contacts and attach the number to your home phone.
- **Burns.** The kitchen is a dangerous place for your child, especially while you are cooking. Hot liquids, grease, and hot foods can spill and cause serious burns. Find something safe for your child to do while you are cooking. Be careful with hot appliances. Irons, curling irons, ovens, heaters, and outdoor grills can burn your child long after you have finished using them. To protect your child from hot water scalds, reduce the maximum temperature of your hot water heater to 120 degrees F. Make sure that you have a working smoke alarm on every level of your home, especially in sleep areas. It is best to use smoke alarms that use long-life batteries, but if you do not, change batteries at least once a year. If your child does get burned, immediately put cold (but not ice-cold) water on the burned area. Keep the burned area in cold water for a few minutes to cool it off. Then cover the burn loosely with a dry bandage or clean cloth.
- **Sun Exposure.** Use sunscreen with SPF 30 or greater when your child is outside during the day. Avoid sun between the hours of 10am and 4pm. Sun exposure during childhood will increase your child's chance of skin cancer and photo aging (wrinkles) later in life.
- **Car Safety.** Car crashes are the greatest danger to your child's safety and health. To prevent serious injuries to your child use a forward facing car safety seat check your car seat manufacturer's guidelines for weight and height limits. Keep your child in a 5-point harness car seat as long as he does not exceed height or weight limits. After your child as exceeded the 5-point harness car seat, transition him to a booster seat with a high-back attachment. Children up to 4 feet 9 inches (57 inches) need to be restrained in booster seat. For more information about car safety seats call 1-800-252-8255 (Safe Riders Program) or 1-800-SEAT-CHECK (www.seatcheck.org). The safest spot for a car seat is in the middle of the back seat. If your child must sit in the front seat, make sure that the seat is pushed back as far as possible to avoid air bag injury in the event of an accident. Do not allow your child to play or ride a tricycle in the street. Driveways are also dangerous. Walk behind your car to check for little ones before you back up. You may not see your child in the rear view mirror. Children should play in fenced areas, like a yard or playground.
- **Gun Safety.** It is best to keep guns out of your home. If your family chooses to keep a gun, store it unloaded in a locked place, separate from the ammunition. Children in homes with guns are more likely to be shot by themselves, friends, or family than an intruder. Handguns are especially dangerous. Ask if the homes where your child visit or is cared for have guns and how they are stored.