



Nutrition and the Young Child

By Gina Moore

I can't get my child to eat, much less to eat healthy! As a parent, you have probably expressed this frustration. We're concerned about what our children watch on TV, how much sun they get and medicines they are prescribed. It's only natural to be concerned about their diets. Generally, the basic eating habits your child learns as a preschooler will remain lifetime eating habits, so read on for tips on feeding your youngster (and family!) a healthy diet.

Caring for Your Baby and Child: Birth to Age 5 by the American Academy of Pediatrics states, "Your child's diet will balance out over several days if **you make a range of wholesome foods available** and don't pressure one at any given time." Obviously, if you only offer doughnuts and fries, your child will be unable to compose a balanced diet as his or her body dictates. If you're not only concerned with *what* but *how much* your young child eats, Beansprout.net also contains detailed information on appropriate infant and child serving sizes from birth to age 12.

Family Eating Tips:

In his book, 8 Weeks to Optimum Health, Dr. Andrew Weil lays out a plan for healthy eating appropriate for the whole family. He first suggests throwing out solid vegetable shortenings and anything containing partially hydrogenated oils (as they contain trans-fatty acids, believed to clog arteries and encourage cancer, among other things) and cottonseed oil (due to its high levels of pesticides). Good label reading reveals the latter two ingredients hide in most baked goods.

Babies 0-12 months rely on breast milk or formula to provide *all (from 0 to 4-6 months) or most (from 6-12 months)* of their required vitamins and minerals. Regardless of what Aunt Minnie may tell you, your baby will not sleep better with cereal in his/her stomach before 4 months. Actually, that situation could endanger your child. Your child's biological clock is set to wake him or her for feedings every 1 to 3 - 4 hours, so as to ensure adequate vitamins and minerals are taken in as well as to discourage dehydration.

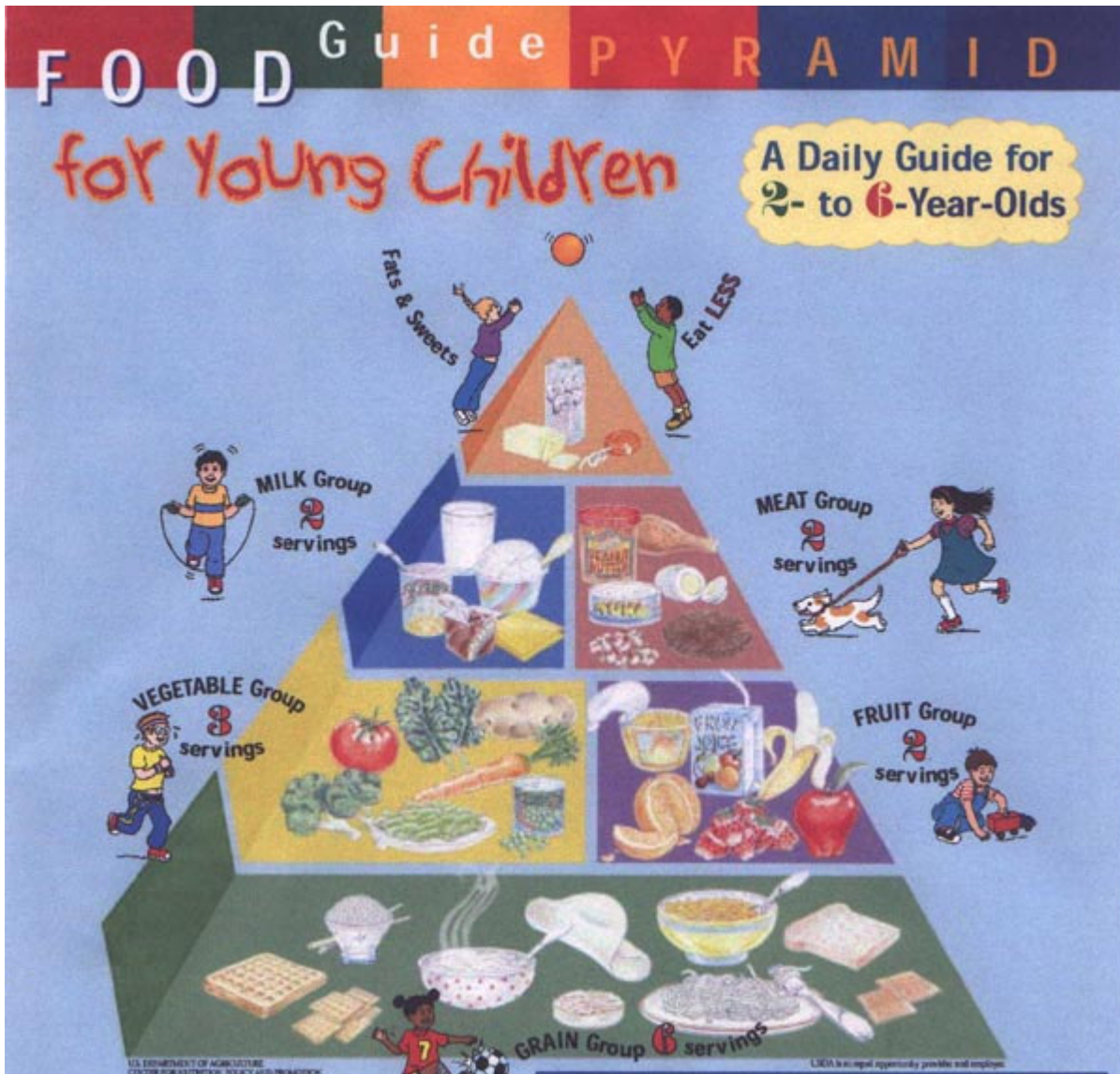
Children from 1-2 have begun eating solids but require a mere 1,000 calories a day! The appetite now adjusts itself to coincide with a slowed growth rate during the second year. Expect erratic eating also. One meal your child may seem starved, eating everything offered including seconds; the next few he or she may eat only a bite or two of a favorite food, if you're lucky! Due to the independent nature of the toddler, he or she may be more excited about eating if allowed to feed him/herself finger foods. Continue offering 3 meals a day with snacks spaced throughout and breastfeeding/formula/milk as appropriate for your situation – following your doctor's advice, of course. As far as serving sizes, the USDA states, "*From the time an infant starts solids (4 to 6 months of age) until the age of 6, the recommended serving size for fruits and vegetables is one tablespoon per each year of life. After age 6, the recommended three or*

more servings of vegetables and two or more servings of fruit per day is based on a one-half cup serving size, which is the same serving size for adults."

Children aged 2 – 6 Below is an easy-to-read guide for toddlers and preschoolers has been created by the USDA.

Preschooler Serving Sizes (ages 2-6)

Meat/Protein Group (2 a day) each equivalent to 1 oz. meat 2-3 ounces of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish ½ cup cooked dry beans, 1 egg, 2 tablespoons peanut butter	Milk Group 1 cup milk or yogurt 2 oz. cheese
Vegetable Group (3 a day) ½ cup chopped raw or cooked vegetables 1 cup raw leafy vegetables	Fruit Group (2 a day) 1 piece fruit or melon wedge ¾ cup juice ½ cup canned fruit ¼ cup dried fruit
Grain Group (6 a day) 1 slice of bread ½ cup cooked rice or pasta ½ cup cooked cereal 1 ounce ready-to-eat cereal	Fats/Sweets Limit calories



Access more food guide pyramids for various cultural and dietary needs at www.cnpp.usda.gov

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**Gina Moore**, a.k.a. **Mommy Nature**, had her share of food battles with her three daughters (ages 18, 2 and 7 months) before learning some of the tips shared here. She is a certified pre-k through 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, freelance authors many parent/child articles and runs a free forum on her website, <http://www.MommyNature.com> helping parents teach and understand their young children..