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AGES & STAGES

Preschoolers' Diets Shouldn't Be Fat-Free: Here's Why

Parents of preschoolers should not aim for low-fat meals. In fact, research has shown that low-fat diets may actually promote unhealthy weight gain—especially if dietary fats are replaced with added sugars.

In an effort to halt the rising rates of childhood obesity, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) policy statement, *Snacks, Sweetened Beverages, Added Sugars, and Schools* (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2015/02/17/peds.2014-3902>), recommends families take a broader approach to nutrition, considering children's whole diet pattern—rather than simply the amount of sugar, fat, or specific nutrients in individual foods.



Keep Brain-Booster Fats on the Menu & Cut the Trans Fat

Fat is an essential part of a well-balanced diet and critical for your child's growth ([/English/ages-stages/preschool/Pages/Your-Preschoolers-Physical-Appearance-and-Growth.aspx](#)) and brain development ([/English/ages-stages/preschool/Pages/Using-Their-Words.aspx](#)). So, instead of trying to cut out fat from diet, focus on replacing unhealthy fats with healthy fats ([/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Fat-Sa-Not-All-Bad.aspx](#)). For example, the saturated fat in whole milk, coconut oil, or salmon is different from the fat found in pizza, French fries, and processed meat products.

It is a good idea to routinely include oily fish (i.e., sardines and wild caught salmon) on the family menu. The fats in these delicious fish are critical for brain development and are extremely heart healthy. As with any new food, repeated exposure ([/English/ages-stages/toddler/nutrition/Pages/Picky-Eaters.aspx](#)) is the key to your child's eventual acceptance. So start early and serve often!

Trans fat ([/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Avoiding-Trans-Fats.aspx](#)), however, is one type of fat you should avoid completely. Industrially-produced trans fats are found only in certain heavily processed foods. Check the nutrition facts label for the list of ingredients and avoid bringing any products that list "partially hydrogenated" or "vegetable shortening" into your home.

Simple Meal Ideas for Preschoolers

A balanced meal ([/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/nutrition/Pages/Making-Healthy-Food-Choices.aspx](#)) for a preschool child should consist of a protein source, a generous serving of non-starchy vegetables, and a bit of whole starchy vegetable. A small serving of seasonal fruit for dessert helps to round out the meal. But, healthy meals don't mean boring or bland. The addition of healthy fats such as olive oil, coconut oil, avocado, and real butter makes meals that are more delicious and satisfying.

Example meal one:

- 2 to 3 ounces of fish that are browned in olive oil or baked and brushed with olive oil or real butter. Good choices are cod, flounder, and wild caught salmon.
- ½ small baked sweet potato with 1 teaspoon of real butter
- ¼ cup or more of broccoli, cooked in olive oil and seasoned with an herb blend

- A few slices of cucumber and cherry tomato halves
- A small dish of sliced fruit

Example meal two:

- Smothered black beans and rice: Place 2 tablespoons of brown rice in the bottom of a medium sized bowl with 1/3 cup black beans, shredded lettuce, chopped tomatoes, snipped cilantro, ¼ cup shredded cheddar cheese, several slices of avocado, and 2 to 4 crushed blue corn tortilla chips.
- Serve with a side of mixed fruit salad

"Can I Have a Snack?"

Planning mid-day snacks ([/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Choosing-Healthy-Snacks-for-Children](#)) for preschool or child care can help prevent overeating at meal time. Steer clear of heavily processed, carb-heavy snacks like pretzels, cereals, and flavored fish-shaped crackers—these do nothing to satisfy your child's hunger. Instead, serving protein-based foods that offer the needed fats hold your preschooler over until the next meal.

Satisfying snacks for preschoolers:

- A few apple slices with peanut butter, sunflower seed butter, almond butter, etc.
- Whole or 2% milk Greek yogurt with fruit (or plain with sliced or mashed fruit)
- Boiled egg served alone or with a bit of fresh fruit
- Small bite sized pieces of raw veggies served with hummus
- Small cheese cubes with 2 to 3 whole grain crackers

Remember: Good Eating Habits Must Be Learned

Preschool-age children are still developing their eating habits and need encouragement to eat healthy snacks. As your child establishes food preferences, be sure to pave the way for good habits by being a good role model. Offering a variety of nutritious foods and limiting your child's access to low-nutrient foods can help him to appreciate and make good food choices (</English/ages-stages/gradeschool/nutrition/Pages/Making-Healthy-Choices.aspx>).

Additional Information:

- [Fat, Salt and Sugar: Not All Bad \(/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Fat-Salt-and-Sugar-Not-All-Bad.aspx\)](/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Fat-Salt-and-Sugar-Not-All-Bad.aspx)
- [Sample Menu for a Preschooler \(/English/ages-stages/preschool/nutrition-fitness/Pages/Sample-Menu-for-a-Preschooler.aspx\)](/English/ages-stages/preschool/nutrition-fitness/Pages/Sample-Menu-for-a-Preschooler.aspx)
- [Choosing Healthy Snacks for Kids \(/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Choosing-Healthy-Snacks-for-Kids.aspx\)](/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Choosing-Healthy-Snacks-for-Kids.aspx)
- [10 No-Cost, Screen-Free Activities to Play with Your Preschooler \(/English/ages-stages/preschool/nutrition-fitness/Pages/Motor-Activity-and-Self-Play.aspx\)](/English/ages-stages/preschool/nutrition-fitness/Pages/Motor-Activity-and-Self-Play.aspx)

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ie HONcode standard for trustworthy health (<http://www.healthonnet.org/HONcode/Conduct.html>)

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