

How can I help my active preschooler eat well on the run?



Preschoolers and their families lead active and busy lives and eating while out and about is sometimes necessary and even desirable. But the principles of healthy eating apply whether you eat a meal out or are planning a snack for a walk, hike or other family outing

Preschoolers need to eat small, frequent meals throughout the day because they have small stomachs and high energy needs. Plan on three meals and two to three snacks per day. To avoid spoiling a child's appetite serve snacks 1 - 2 hours before meal times. Sticky, sweet foods such as dried fruit and candy can cause cavities and should be avoided as snacks unless children can brush their teeth right after. Day-long nibbling on food or sipping on beverages should be avoided as this can also cause cavities.

Meals and snacks should include foods from the four food groups in **Canada's Food Guide**. Meals should include a serving from at least 3 different food groups. Snacks should include foods from at least 2 different food groups.

Before you head out on a hike, picnic or other outing, plan to take along some nutritious snacks or meals:

Nutrient-packed snack foods

- Whole-grain bread, buns, bagels, pita, tortillas
- Bran, oatmeal, corn or whole grain muffins
- Bread sticks or whole grain crackers

- Whole grain, low-sugar cereals
- Fruit, fruit salad and individual serving containers of fruit or unsweetened applesauce
- Unsweetened fruit juice instead of fruit drinks
- Fruit juice popsicles
- Raw vegetables, vegetable juice
- Milk, yogurt, cheese, milk-based pudding
- Cheese
- Peanut butter (unless children with allergies are present; smooth is preferred over chunky to reduce the chances of choking)

Mini meal suggestions

- Applesauce, cheese slices and graham crackers
- Bran or oatmeal muffin, yogurt, pear
- Bean burrito with shredded lettuce and cheese, fruit
- Bagel with cream cheese, tomato juice
- Garden salad or chicken Caesar salad in a whole wheat pita
- Cheese, turkey or ham sandwich on whole wheat bread or bun, banana
- Lentil and pasta soup, crackers and cheese, orange
- Cold pizza, fruit cup or fruit juice

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Fast food meals have become a reality for many busy families and are okay once in a while as a treat or in a pinch. They should not be relied on for regular meals. Besides being expensive, fast food meals typically don't provide enough fruit, vegetables or whole grains and are high in calories and fat. If you do make a "fast food" stop keep the following **tips** in mind:

- if the fast food meal did not provide any fruit or vegetables be sure to have these with other meals or snacks - or bring your own from home to round out the meal
- choose milk or 100% fruit juice instead of pop or other sugary drinks
- order sandwiches with whole grain bread, bagels or rolls
- try bean burritos or chili for something different and for added fibre
- order the small size servings, especially for younger children
- choose foods that are grilled or baked instead of deep-fried
- add your own salad dressing in small amounts and hold the extra sauce and gravy

Fluids are important to keep young children hydrated especially when the weather is hot or if they are very active and involved in strenuous exercises or activities. For hikes and family outings take along your own water bottles to avoid having to purchase expensive and sugary drinks.

- Water is the preferred choice for thirsty preschoolers.
- Avoid pop and sugary drinks such as fruit punch or fruit drinks made from packaged powders or crystals. Instead, choose 100% fruit juice but limit juice to one serving per day (125-175 mL or 4-6 oz.).
- Milk, soups and watery fruit and vegetables such as watermelon, oranges, lettuce, celery, cucumbers, and tomatoes also provide fluids.

- Avoid caffeinated beverages such as colas, coffee or tea, which can over-stimulate a child and promote fluid loss.

To keep foods safe to eat:

- Start clean. Make sure hands and all food preparation areas, utensils, and containers are clean and dry before making your meal or snack.
- Keep cold foods cold. Pack perishables in insulated bags with freezer packs. Foods that spoil quickly and need to be kept cold include salads and salad dressings, mayonnaise, meat and fish, milk and yogurt. Bottles filled with water or juice can be frozen the night before and used as freezer packs. They will be thawed by snack time but still nicely chilled.
- Keep hot foods hot. If you plan to take soups or stews these should be packed in a thermos meant for hot foods.

Young children, especially those under the age of three are at particular risk of choking. **To prevent choking:**

- Supervise children while eating and make sure they are sitting down and not laughing, playing or jumping around while eating. If you are on a walk or hike it's also important to take a break and have children sit while eating.
- Be aware of foods that can cause choking such as hot dogs, grapes, raw vegetables, chunky peanut butter, and nuts. If served, cut wieners/sausages lengthwise into strips, then cut into bite-size pieces; for raw fruit - remove pits, seeds and peels and cut into bite-size pieces; cut grapes in half; for raw vegetables - cut into narrow strips or grate; spread peanut butter thinly; never serve it right off a spoon. Don't serve young children popcorn or hard candies.

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