

THE MUNCHSTERS

Questions Parents Ask About Nutrition

Q: *"Is it all right to offer my child a "treat" such as candy or a favorite food for good behavior?"*

A: Food should never be used as a reward for good behavior or withheld as a punishment. When you use food in this way, eating becomes an emotional experience. Your child needs to know that nutritious food is important to his or her health and that eating is a very enjoyable social activity. If there is an over emphasis on food during the preschool years, there is a risk of developing food problems later in life. Child development experts say the best motivations for young children are the simplest -- hugs and praise.

Q: *"We eat out at fast food restaurants a lot. Is this food nutritious for my preschooler?"*

A: Most fast food menus provide good sources of some nutrients and poor sources of others. Any diet that consists of only one type of food will not be nutritionally sound. However, an occasional meal from a fast food restaurant will not do nutritional harm. Order milk or juice rather than soft drinks or order a milkshake with extra cups and divide it among several children. Order salads if they're available. If salads aren't available, be sure to include fruits and vegetables at another meal.

Q: *"My child never completely finishes his dinner. What can I do to get him to clean his plate?"*

A: Never insist that your child clean his or her plate. Let your child decide how much he or she wants to eat. Most adults presume that children should eat larger portions of food than is necessary. A **Food Guide Pyramid Chart** that lists the recommend serving sizes for children aged 2 to 5 is available from your child's teacher.

Q: *"Are there certain foods I should avoid feeding my young child?"*

A: Use caution when serving foods to preschoolers that may cause choking such as nuts, popcorn, celery, hot dogs, and grapes. Hot dogs should be cut into four slices lengthwise and grapes should be cut into halves.

Q: *"Are there any nutrition problems I should be aware of regarding my preschooler's diet?"*

A: A lack of iron is a common nutrition problem among toddlers in the United States. It is very important to include iron-rich foods such as meat and enriched cereals in the diet of young children. The iron found in meat is more readily absorbed by the body than the iron found in plant foods. Eating meat at the same meal with fruits, vegetables and grains has been shown to increase the absorption of the iron from these foods two to three times. The absorption of iron found in fruits, vegetables and grains can also be increased by eating vitamin C-rich foods at the same meal. Serving orange juice with enriched cereal is one way to help meet your child's need for iron.