



Eating Well, Starting Early: Healthy Eating Habits From 0 to 3

Children are born all different sizes and weights, and can be healthy at many different sizes. A baby's size—whether bigger or smaller than “normal”—does not tell us much about whether that child will be big or small as an adult.

Sometimes you—or a child's parents—may worry about a child's eating habits. Is she eating a balanced diet? Is she eating too much? Is she eating too little? *There is not one right amount of food children need to grow.* How much food children need is based on many factors such as their height, activity level, and how quickly their body burns calories. If a child is growing well, enjoys eating, and has the energy to play and interact with others, then she is probably fine. *But it's always good for parents to ask their child's health care provider to make sure.*

To learn more about appropriate serving sizes for children ages 2–6, visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture's food pyramid site for young children at <http://www.mypyramid.gov/preschoolers/index.html>.

Reading Children's Signals About Hunger and Eating

Babies and young children know when they are hungry or full. They have many signals for letting us know what their bodies need by using their voices, faces, and actions. Reading a child's signals means watching and listening to him, and trying to understand what his behavior means. Responding to a child's signals lets him know that

- he can trust himself to know when he is hungry and full,
- he is a good communicator, and
- his needs will be met.

Babies each have their own signals. For example, when 3-month-old Jenna is hungry, she nuzzles at her mother's shirt. When 3-month-old Damon is hungry, he sucks on his fingers and makes fussy noises.

Sometimes the same signal can have more than one meaning. For example, 9-month-old Ricky pushes the spoon away when he is full. Bianca, also 9 months, pushes the spoon away when she wants to feed herself.

Toddlers have signals, too. When 18-month-old Tomas is hungry, he takes his mother's hand and walks her to where the bananas are on the counter. Twenty-four-month-old Liza simply says, “Nana! Want nana!”

To learn more about how to nurture healthy eating habits in the young children in your care, go to the age-based documents in this section.