



# Good food fast

How to feed your child quickly  
and healthfully BY ASHLEY BRAZZEL

Many parents are clueless when it comes to getting and keeping their children on the right track nutritionally. Here are some simple suggestions to help feed your little ones in a healthy and affordably tasty way.

The foundation of every meal should be good nutrition. Start with the basics and aim for at least three of the five recommended food groups (fruits, vegetables, grains, low-fat dairy and meats/alternatives) in each meal; vary the colors of the fruits and veggies; and limit sweets and fats. Mypyramid.

gov has customizable food pyramids that can be adjusted by age, weight and exercise factors.

Once you have a solid base, brainstorm about foods and snacks you think your kids would like to eat. If you're drawing blanks, get your kids involved and have them create menus of foods they'd like. "Ask them to choose fruits and veggies — look for all the colors of the rainbow for example," says Elisa Zied, spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association, and author of *Feed Your Family Right!* "Or pick

*Continued on  
page 40*



*Continued from page 12*

a color for a meal and choose a fruit, vegetable [or] grain side dish that has that color, or make a meal with many different colors. [Just] make it fun!”

Cristina Caro, nutrition specialist and program coordinator at Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, says the idea is to have the children prefer the fun task of creating healthy meals and snacks instead of settling for the norm.

Meal options can include: bow-tie pasta salad with chopped veggies; salads with baby greens, melon cubes and light dressing; pitas or wrap sandwiches stuffed with grilled chicken and veggies; macaroni and cheese with carrots and peas; and teriyaki burgers with pineapple rings.

For quicker lunchtime fare, try mini-sub sandwiches on whole-wheat dinner rolls (substitute the mayo for mustard and leafy lettuce), baby carrots and baked chips; bean burritos and baked tortillas with salsa and fruit cups packed in its own juice; lean deli meat rolled and skewered with pretzel sticks, string cheese and grapes.

The idea is to incorporate food from each food group, and if you use a little imagination the list can be endless. Parents.com and cookinglight.com offer many kid-friendly and wholesome options.


“Encouraging kids to have a fruit or veggie each time they eat and before having a ‘snacky’ snack (cookies, candy, donut, etc.) is a good way to help them



meet their daily quota [of] fruits and veggies,” says Zied.

“Also, a good idea is to keep soda out of the house and to make it a once-in-a-while treat. Small changes like this can help kids make more healthful food and beverage selections, not feel deprived and get the key nutrients they need to grow.” She also says it’s okay to give cookies and chips as snacks, if you keep it in the context of their overall diet and only up to 100-200 calories a day. “A treat every day or every other day can fit into their diet, but again, only if they’re getting enough whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy foods and lean meats.”

Now that you know what to feed them, how do you go about doing it on a budget, especially when eating on the



go? Plan, organize and prepare. Cairo recommends you “clean and organize your pantry and refrigerator so you know what you have and [can] avoid waste. Doing this will save you time and money.” To save even more money, she suggests using weekly sale ads to find the best deals on grocery items and using coupons to help your dollars stretch further.

When shopping, try to buy foods in season and select fresh products over processed versions. Buy in bulk and avoid prepackaged items. It’s also helpful to be label savvy, especially if your kids have food allergies. To brush up on your label reading skills, check out [cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/foodlab.html](http://cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/foodlab.html). However, just because the label says it’s free of something doesn’t necessarily mean it is. Always scan the ingredient list to be sure.

To make fast food work when out and about, Cairo recommends choosing small, à la carte menu items rather than large value meals. Opt for unbreaded and non-fried foods, such as grilled chicken wraps, and order fruit or yogurt cups and water instead of fries and soda, or ask for a cup of ice to pour your own juice into. Whatever you choose, balance is key. McDonald’s and the like should not become an everyday indulgence for your child. If you decide to forgo fast food completely, keep a stock of non-perishable snack foods on hand, such as pita chips, pretzels, dried fruit, whole-wheat cracker sandwiches, homemade trail mix, mixed nuts and

## Healthy tips

Elisa Zied of the American Dietetic Association recommends these tips for sneaking in wholesome goodness while still giving your kids what they enjoy:

- **When making sandwiches, use one slice of wheat bread and one slice of white bread to get them to eat more whole grains.**
- **Give stovetop or air-popped popcorn sprinkled with cheese topping as a snack instead of chips.**
- **Replace flavored milks and yogurts with plain ones (add a little sugar free syrup to flavor the milk and fresh berries to sweeten the yogurt).**
- **Cut fruit and veggies in appealing shapes and sizes and put in a clear bowl towards the front of the fridge to entice kids to dig in.**
- **Mix half of a sugary cereal with half of a less sugary variety and use low-fat or non-fat milk.**

granola bars to stave off hunger. For more substance, you can create your own version of the “lunchable” with bagel pizzas and lean turkey roll-ups, whole-grain Goldfish crackers and a couple of Hershey’s Kisses.

If you put these suggestions to work, mealtime will be a delightful experience for you and your little ones. ■