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KOOTENAY NUTRITION

Parent's Guide to Nutrition

Kootenay Nutrition
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Intro

School is back in motion!

In true 2020 fashion, it isn't how we expected it to be. Children are either sporting a new safety style 7 hours a day, or they're learning from home in a virtual fashion.

Either way, and with whichever decision you've chosen for your little one(s), this year has been stressful enough. Worrying about nutritious food, picky eaters, allergies, sensitivities, and each individual child's personal relationship with food is just an icing on the cake that is parental stress.

I will start by mentioning that I am not a parent at the time of writing this guide. That page will come eventually, but I am writing this from the perspective of a Nutritionist. I cannot begin to understand the responsibility, worry, frustration, stress, and irreplicable pride that comes with being a parent. I don't know how hard it is to keep your cool when your youngest throws their vegetables across the room, while your oldest is begging for ice cream. I don't know what it's like to juggle cooking dinner and planning school lunches, while trying to oversee homework or playtime. I don't know what it's like to have a sleepless night, only to wake up and get the kids ready for school. Oh and don't forget the mask!

I will completely admit that I have 0 experience with being a parent. But, I hope you keep reading this guide because:

- It's free
- I know things about stuff when it comes to nutrition, and
- I really want to help in these annoyingly stressful times.

So grab a glass of wine, beer, bubbly, water,
or whatever you want, and let's talk about nutrition!

Intro

Nutrition is about more than combining things that taste good with some green things we know we "should" eat.

Nutrition is the essential fuel our bodies need to be able to do the things we want to do. Much like a car cannot run without gas, we cannot run without nutrition.

I don't just mean calories either. Nutrition is made up of the macronutrients that give us energy (carbohydrates, fats & proteins), but also the micronutrients (vitamins & minerals) that give us our health, keep our organs functioning, allow our brains to work, and make us human.

When it comes to children, nutrition is arguably even MORE important.

In the growing years, nutrients are needed to form everything from strong bones, to cognitive function in the brain, and even the immune system. Who we turn into as adults is literally formed by what nutrients we consume as children.

This is a scary thought and it adds even more responsibility to your plate, but it doesn't have to be scary. It can be exciting and motivating and allows you to support your tiny humans, even when they aren't so tiny anymore.

This guide is written like a reverse mullet. Party in the front, and business in the back.

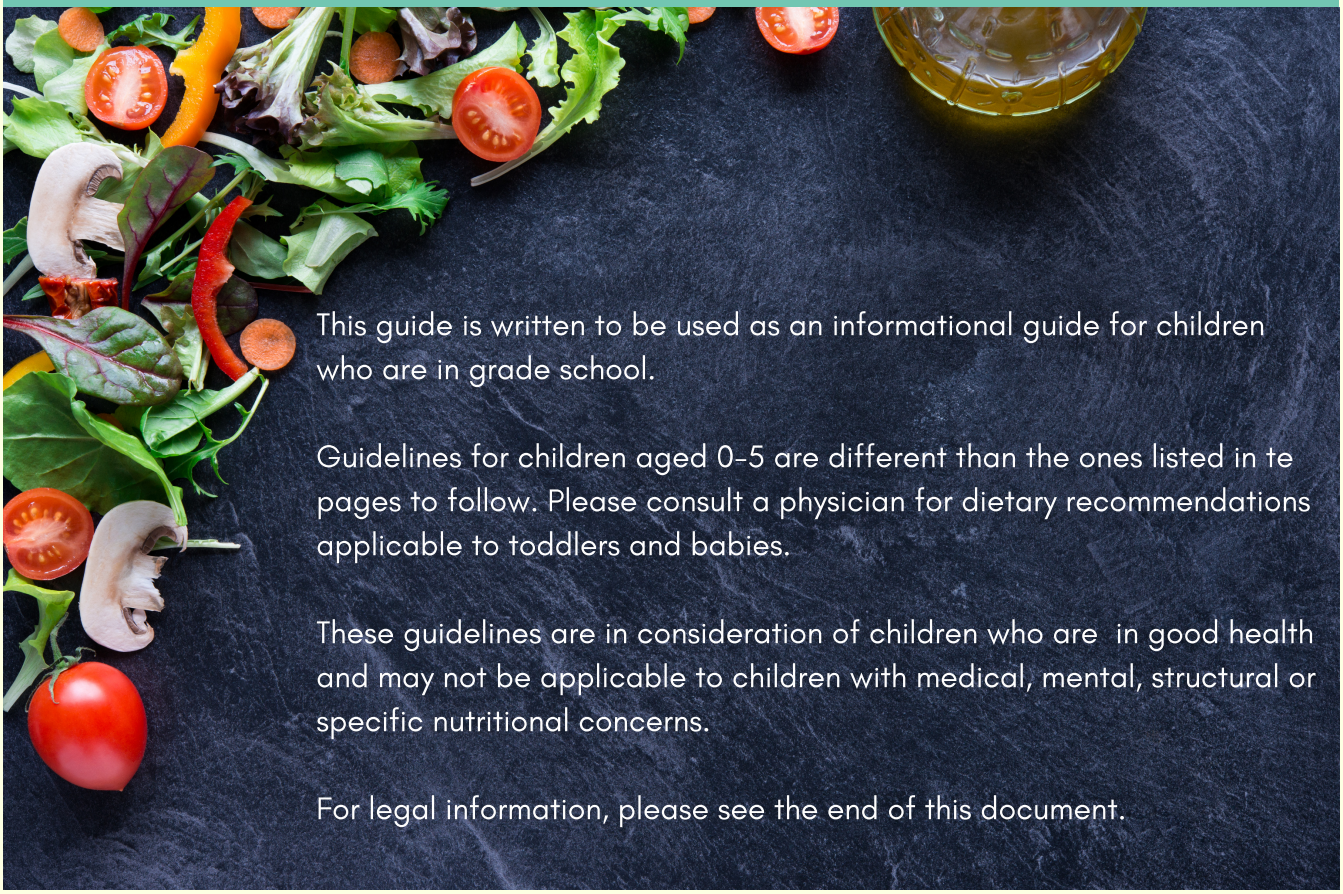
I will start by giving you ideas for snacks, treats and lunches for your kids to eat either at school or at home. I'll also provide helpful tips for getting them more involved, reducing some of their picky eating tendencies, and ways you can teach them about nutrition.

The second half of this guide is going to be the "business" part, but will get into some really nitty gritty details about nutrition. What are carbs, fats and proteins, why are they important and how much do children need? What vitamins and minerals are needed? What if they're in sports? These will all be answered here.

I will also provide information about what to look for in processed foods, why some will be "better" and others should be eaten in moderation, as well as things to consider if your child has gut and digestive concerns, sensitivities or intolerances, allergies, hyperactivity, they have a hard time concentrating in class, or if your children are involved in sports.

I highly recommend reading the business part, but I've structured this so you get the fun parts first.

Intro



This guide is written to be used as an informational guide for children who are in grade school.

Guidelines for children aged 0-5 are different than the ones listed in te pages to follow. Please consult a physician for dietary recommendations applicable to toddlers and babies.

These guidelines are in consideration of children who are in good health and may not be applicable to children with medical, mental, structural or specific nutritional concerns.

For legal information, please see the end of this document.

Homemade Snack Ideas

- Fruit & seed butter
- Berries on plain yogurt, sweetened with honey
- Greek vanilla yogurt with pumpkin seeds & dried unsweetened cranberries
- Homemade morning glory cookies - use seeds instead of pecans/walnuts if needed
- Veggies & hummus (I have a great smokey bbq hummus recipe on my instagram/facebook)
- Hummus with pretzels or crackers
- Edible cookie dough (on my instagram)
- Homemade granola bars or granola bites (from scratch or from a kit like Made With Local)
- Energy Balls
- Smoothies
- Guacamole cup & veggies or pretzels
- Mini pancakes & fruit
- Candied or seasoned roasted pumpkin seeds
- Banana oat muffins
- Homemade coconut clusters
- Raw veggies & dip
- Roasted chickpeas
- Roasted veggies & sliced cooked chicken breast
- Olives, cheese & crackers
- Homemade unsweetened fruit leather
- Candied Ginger (great for cold season)
- Fruit alone (just aim for protein & fat at meals)
- Veggies alone (same as above)

Quick-Grab & Packaged Snack Ideas

- Lara bars
- Rx Bars
- This Saves Lives bars
- Bobo's Bars
- Jerky
- Unsweetened dried fruit
- Banana chips
- Simply Protein Kids Bars
- Unsweetened apple & fruit sauces
- Fruit cups in water
- Sweet Smarts Candies
- Herbaland gummies
- FreeYumm cookies
- NaKd Bars

Snack Tips

Snacks should be easy to eat so your kids can have them between class, while socializing and playing or even while at home, but they're also an important opportunity to boost energy, concentration and cognitive function. Letting your children guide their own hunger cues is really important here (something they're often better at than us big kids). Have good options on hand or packed and available for them so when they do get those cues, they have something that's healthy and satiating.

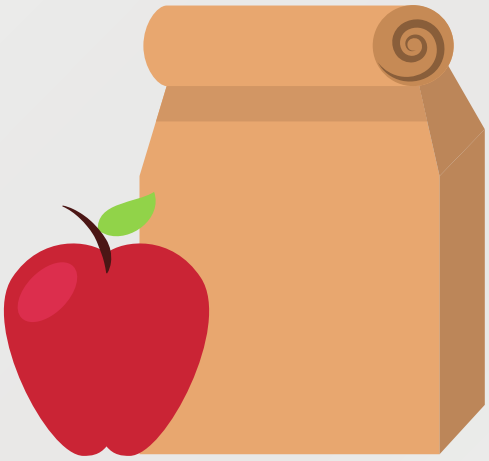
Kids like convenience! Slice and cut fruit and vegetables for easy snacking and cut homemade granola bars into bite-sized pieces. A 2015 study on children in afterschool programs identified that when given the option between sliced fruit, whole fruit & bananas, 37% of the children selected the sliced fruit, while 17% selected whole apples/oranges and 24% selected bananas.

Keep these same prepared, healthy and easy to grab snacks at home so they aren't pestering you looking for dinner to be ready! Make sure they know where they are, and keep the "treats" hidden away.If all these options are available, they will most certainly pick the less nutritious option.

In the same study mentioned above, researchers observed that when fruit (either sliced apples/oranges, whole apples/oranges, or a banana) was served in conjunction with sugar-sweetened snacks (like candy, jello, cookies or chocolate bars) or flavored-salty snacks (like chips, pretzels, fishy crackers, etc.), only 6% of the children selected fruit, while 58% selected the sugar-sweetened snacks and 38% selected flavored-salty snacks.

Lunch Ideas

- Leftovers of their favourite dinners - great way to get them to eat it
- Make your own lunchables - crackers, laughing cow cheese or dye-free cheese, pepperoni, lunch meat or jerky
- Use pitas instead of bread - I weirdly LOVED this as a kid because it was different
- Make tortilla wraps or bread wraps into "sushi"
- Salads with dressing on the side - do they have a favourite?
- Pancakes, cut sausage and a side of syrup (who doesn't want to be the kid eating pancakes for lunch). You could use a high protein mix or make your own.
- Pasta salads (can be DF, GF)
- Grilled cheese & Ham with veggies
- Homemade burgers on thin buns with condiments on the side & veggies
- Homemade mac n cheese with a side of protein
- Chicken or beef stir fry on rice - reminds them of chinese food!
- Homemade Naan & hummus or tzatziki (recipe on my IG/FB)
- Homemade chicken nuggets (GF, DF)
- Meatballs (GF, DF)
- Charcuterie style - sliced cheese or laughing cow cheese, crackers, rice crackers or bread thins, lunch meat or leftover meat, olives, chopped peppers



Lunch Tips

- Ask your kids what they want and get them to help plan! They know how much time they have in between classes, with socializing and playing.
- Have one day of "fun" lunch (like a Friday)
- Find homemade versions of their favorite restaurant or fast food meals
- Don't get upset if they don't eat everything. Children are much more in-tuned with hunger cues than we are, and are much less likely to speak up about sensitivities (especially if it causes them to not feel good or have gas at school). If they consistently don't eat something or you suspect they're under-eating their lunch, have an open conversation about why that might be.
- Unless your child is okay with it, avoid "smelly" lunches. If you wouldn't take a tuna or egg salad to your work break room, maybe they don't want to either.
- Find they're favourite meals and find a way to include them into lunches.
- Try not to push your favourites onto them. We all have different taste receptors and memories/feelings associated from different tastes and smells.
- Use bento boxes or fun lunch containers - this is kinda like wanting to have a cool backpack
- Try to include protein, carbohydrate and fats into the meal to keep them fueled, energized and focused for the afternoon. Be sure to include a good amount of essential fatty acids if they have a hard time concentrating, protein if they participate in sports or athletics.
- Don't be afraid to hide hidden health. Olive oil in a pasta salad, avocado or olive oil based dressing, a little coconut oil on their seed-butter and jam sandwich, veggies cooked or blended into pasta sauce, pizza sauces etc.
- If you're using lunch meat, pepperoni sticks, etc., try to get as minimally processed and with the least ingredients listed as possible. I like Maple Leaf's Country Naturals, high quality deli meat or home sliced meats from a roast, ham, turkey or chicken.

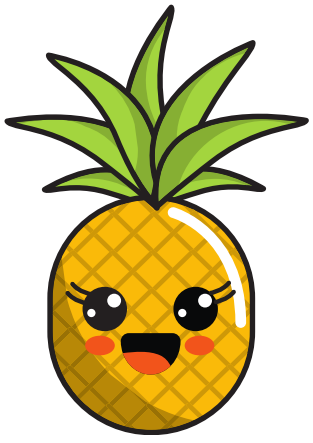
Meals at Home

Remember, what's more important in your child's diet and nutrition is the overall intake throughout your child's entire day versus one single meal (such as lunch). Be sure to include a wide variety each and every day full of these different food groups to ensure a well balanced diet to keep them growing strong physically and mentally, and so they'll have boundless energy to play and enjoy their childhood.

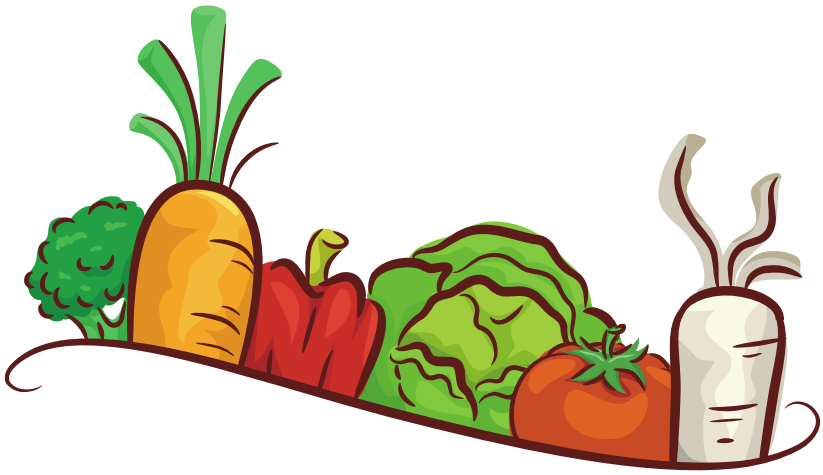
Every family is going to be a little different with how meals are facilitated at home. Some eat all together for breakfast and dinner, and some have to stagger meal times based on work, activities and conflicting schedules. Different family structures will change this a little as well. No matter what your family's rituals and routines are, creating a comfortable space and time to eat can be really helpful.

Even for ourselves as big kids, having a comfortable space to eat in is supportive to health, digestion, and our relationships with food. Eating while stressed, rushed, nervous or uncomfortable causes the digestive system to slooowww way down while the body is trying to calm you down. In these moments we often find ourselves not hungry at all, or famished and wanting to eat everything in sight and ignoring our natural hunger cues. Be mindful of this with children who say they don't want to eat or want to binge.

Distractions can mute hunger cues even more. TV, cell phones, video games and even school work can disconnect us and children from the signals telling us how much or how little we should eat. We're more likely to completely over eat or avoid meals entirely if we're distracted. It also takes the stomach 20 minutes to give your brain the "I'm full" signal. If you eat in less than that time, there's a good chance you could have overeaten to what your body's needs are.



Meals at Home



I'm not saying you should always make your kids sit at the table for every meal and ask to be excused from the table once all their food is done, just be mindful of eating patterns and habits.

On that note, I am also personally against the model of needing to clear everything on the plate. If we don't do this as adults I don't know why this is a need for children. Yes, there will be times you need to tell them to eat their broccoli, or they'll have a tantrum and throw peas on the floor, but teaching portions, levels of fullness and hunger cues is really important. Have an open conversation about why they don't want something and if there's something they'd like instead (like green beans vs. broccoli, etc.) you may identity a digestion concern or gut sensitivity.

I do however, practice the model of "eat your veggies first" with my adult clients and this can be useful for your children. For adults, I have them aim to include all portion sizes of water, protein, veggies, fruit, fats and complex carbs throughout the day, if they're still looking for something after all that, have that snack! Same goes with children and is a great eating practice.

Breakfast Ideas

- Mini pancake muffins
- Smoothies
- Oatmeal with fruit
- Boiled eggs - always fun to crack open, or "dippy" soft cooked eggs to dip toast into
- French toast casserole
- French toast sticks
- Whole wheat, gf or high protein pancakes
- Overnight oatmeal
- Overnight slow cooker steel cut oats (recipe on my IG)
- Egg cups
- Omelettes
- Breakfast wraps
- Breakfast burritos
- Breakfast quesadilla
- Kid-approved breakfast toast
- Organic whole wheat or GF toaster waffles (Vans or Nature's Path)
- Mini bagels, cream cheese, eggs & fruit

A note on cereals:
I know your kids want the sugary ones and there are better versions (Nature's Path, Barbara's, One Degree, Living Intentions, Love Grown) you can find all of them HERE, and there is nothing wrong with a little cereal. Where it causes concern is if the breakfast is only sugary cereal. Try to include protein and a source of essential fatty acids in there as well, and opt for one with less sugar and more complex carbs (whole grains, brown rice) and fiber to sustain them.

Dinner Ideas

- Homemade mac n cheese
- Lasagnas and casseroles - too many types to mention
- Shepherds pie
- Slow cooker or insta-pot meals - soooo many options. Cook books, Google and pinterest are your friends!
- Homemade chicken strips and fries (can be GF, DF)
- Chicken nuggets
- Homemade fries
- Homemade fish n chips (GF)
- Sloppy Joes
- Homemade burgers
- TACOS!!
- Homemade pizza
- Sheet Pan Meals - Meat, Veggies, Potatoes, done!
- One Pot dishes
- Teryaki bowls
- Pizza chicken
- Build your own pizza night
- Stir Frys
- Meatballs with spaghetti or rice (with secret veggies)

Allergies & Sensitivities

Do you remember being a child and getting to take your favourite PB&J sandwich to school? Unfortunately that is no longer the case for most children. Peanut allergies have increased and have become more severe in the past decade and this has forced many schools to eliminate peanuts, or all nuts. Technically speaking, peanuts are actually a legume, so it's a little silly that all nuts are banned because of something that's a cousin to a pea and has a very different chemical compound to those of true nuts, but that's another story.

When it comes to packing lunches and snacks for these restrictions, there are LOTS of options these days for nut-free needs, either by avoiding the need completely (fruit, veggies), or by offering alternatives like Sunbutter or Wow butter.

There are many scientific theories and studies on both allergies and sensitivities. Most commonly linked to digestive concerns and poor gut function, nutritional deficiencies and an excessive intake of toxic substances like pesticides, sulphites, colourants, additives and preservatives that can lead to gut inflammation.

Ensuring a diet high in nutrient dense foods, and working to encourage good digestion are suggested throughout infancy and through childhood to reduce the risks and severity of these allergies or sensitivities.

Removing the allergy or sensitivity is also NECESSARY to children's health. You wouldn't give your dog chocolate even though they want it, so please don't include a sensitivity food into your child's diet.

All found on well.ca
but many found in stores

Allergies & Sensitivities

Dairy Free

It is becoming increasingly common for both children and adults to develop dairy sensitivities. If you believe your child has a sensitivity, whether it's lactose intolerance or a general food sensitivity, I recommend taking it out of the diet for at LEAST a week or two to notice any improvements or changes. Luckly, there are many products and ways to avoid dairy in the diet.

Be sure to watch for ANY milk products or by-products, including “whey” listed anywhere on packaging. Instead, you may find it easier to aim for vegan when it comes to packaged products, nut or oat milk and dairy-free chocolates and treats. If your child is of the age where they are picking their own snacks or meals, make sure they know you’re trying dairy free and let them know it’s to help them feel better. Encourage them with the thousands of DF options available these days.

All found on well.ca
but many found in stores

Allergies & Sensitivities

Gluten Free

What determines if someone truly needs to be gluten-free is based on a clinical diagnosis of celiac disease. Today, gluten-free has been used as a diet trend and a lifestyle trend but more often than not, gluten doesn't need to be eliminated from the diet. What can make someone believe they are gluten free is a feeling of GI distress and feeling like there's a 'brick' in their stomach but this can come from many avenues other than celiac disease.

Poor gut and digestive health, a diet low in fiber (especially soluble fiber) , poor hydration, emotional stress and the foods that are accompanying that wheat product are also common contributors. For example, many people think they need gluten-free buns but don't consider the processed burgers, cheese or the loaded up pasta salad that may be the real underlying cause.

Gluten sensitivities can also be a mask for sensitivities for yeast, preservatives, and additives.

People often feel better after limiting processed foods (breads are processed), and focusing mainly on whole foods like oats, increasing fiber in the diet, and increasing water intake.

All found on well.ca
but many found in stores

The Curse of a Picky Eater

When I asked moms what they wanted me to cover in this guide, the #1 answer I got was picky eaters. Again, I don't have personal experience with children being picky eaters, but I know FAR too many adults that are picky eaters because they never grew out of it from their childhood.

Picky eating can come from many different avenues, and with a world full of processed, packaged, marketed foods that are made to be hyperpalatable (easy to overeat and get addicted to) foods, it can be even harder to steer them in the right direction.

Here are some of the common reasons for picky eaters:

- Parents are afraid to say no
- Family & friends are afraid to say no or are encouraging certain foods
- Underlying food sensitivities
- Underlying food allergies
- Digestion and gut concerns
- Picky parents
- Forceful parents
- Emotional reasons

Whatever the cause, the question is, what to do now?

Here are some suggestions:

Make sure your children are hungry for dinner (or whatever meal you are serving)**.** For example, don't allow them to have any sweets or too much bread after school. If it is two or three hours before meal time, provide only fruits and vegetables if they are hungry.

Only keep food in your home that you want them to eat. "Sorry, we don't have any ice cream" is so much easier than, "You can't have any ice cream." - better yet, offer to make them banana ice cream instead. Just frozen banana blended up.

The Curse of a Picky Eater

Let them be involved in some aspect of food planning or preparation. With your careful oversight, let them cut up or peel some veggies, turn on the blender, oven or slow cooker, let them stir, or even just serve food onto plates. You can get them to help you pick a recipe from a cookbook, or ask them what their favorite foods are and try making it from scratch.

If you can sit down to eat together, do it. Make it a positive experience that will help them develop a good connection to meal time at a table, away from distractions.

Don't push kids to eat something if they really don't want to. I grew up with the slogan "try everything once, if you don't like it, don't eat it again." I'd say 9/10 I ended up liking it. I know it's hard to give in, but just try to make it a time they can look back on as a positive first experience. Remember trying brussels sprouts for the first time and hating them? Then being apprehensive when you tried them later? Exactly.

Your children are smart! Talk to them. Ask them to talk about why they don't want something. Sometimes children will have sensitivities or allergies but don't know how to explain that something doesn't make them feel good. With older children, sensitivities might make them gassy or bloated, which can make them self conscious at school or just not feel great at home.

Explain why you are making the changes you are making — that you love them and are concerned about their health and their bodies. You want them to grow up to be healthy and feel well. They may not like the decision, but talking to them can help.

Understand what's happening in their life - pickiness can come from emotional reasons that we may not be aware of. I remember kids getting picked on in school because of their lunch or snacks and I can almost guarantee they didn't go home asking for those foods.

Serve foods in their favourite dish, container or get creative with how you serve food.

How to get your kids involved

Cooking is hard on it's own let alone when there's kids in the kitchen looking for things to eat or trying to ask you questions about the world. Add the conversation of "I don't like that," "you've never even had it before," and you've got yourself a headache.

One of the biggest nutrition tips I can offer parents is to get your children involved in the cooking and planning. Yes I know you're not giving your 3 year old a knife, but when you feel comfortable and your kids are able to wield a kitchen tool (even a spoon, potato masher, peeler, or the buttons on a blender or mixer), please get them involved.

When I was little my sister and I helped in any way we could. Even tearing lettuce or washing vegetables. When we got a little older, we each had one night a week. We had to pick out a recipe and help mom cook it. This was loooong before I even knew Nutritionists existed but now it's one of my favourite things to recommend. What I like about this is it encourages children to find their own taste pallet and try new things, while teaching them how to cook.

Other people I know encouraged their children to make one meal a week completely on their own from a recipe (this was during the highschool Food's class age of course).

Have them help you prepare their lunches - in whichever capacity they're able to help.

Have them scroll through pinterest or a recipe book with you and have them tell you what looks good. Better yet, buy them their own cookbook and they'll take pride in cooking a recipe form it.

If they ask for a treat or are craving something, try making it at home! Make it a big deal and really hype it up. Set a day, get aprons or oven mitts and get them to help you pick out the ingredients. This can be anything from french fries, to brownie bites, oreos, ice cream, breadsticks and crackers! There's tons of "copycat" recipes online and millions of ways to make things from scratch. This also teaches them what goes into the food they eat.

Remember, your children look up to you for everything. Your mannerisms, food preferences and cooking skills may all be passed down to them.

Impulse Control & Emotional Connections to Food

Impulse control determines a lot in our life from deciding to put our hand up in class to getting that candy bar from the vending machine. Even as adults we often struggle with impulse control.

Impulse control and self control come from the prefrontal cortex of the brain, which isn't fully developed until a child reaches their 20s. Studies show it gradually improves between the age of 3-6, then stays fairly consistent until the early teen years. Then it's "all gas, no breaks" in the high school age, bringing challenges and hurdles of its own. Unfortunately, children simply don't have the skills, emotional development or impulse control to determine why they crave certain foods, why they want to disobey parents instructions to eat broccoli, or even why they can sit and eat an entire box of cookies when they've had a bad day at school. This is no place for shame or blame on you or your child, but it is an opportunity for understanding.

Emotional eating habits are often deeply seeded in unexpressed or repressed emotions, how we handle these is often associated with how our parents rewarded us, disciplined us, or picked us up when we were feeling down as children. If every time we had a bad day at school our parents took us to get ice cream, we're more likely to keep that same pattern as adults and use food to cheer us up when we're feeling down. If we came home with a bad report card and were told we weren't allowed ice cream because of it, or if we were told we could only have the ice cream if we brought home a good report card, we're more likely to believe we need to earn that ice cream through how good we are. On the flip side, if we had ice cream every night regardless of our day and our actions, it's less likely to be associated with emotions, but becomes more habitual and status quo like brushing your teeth. I'm not saying eating ice cream every night is a good idea (although I don't recommend it), this could be switched out to any food like pizza or pop. Watch your patterns and your children's patterns with food and the emotional connection that link the two, even watch your own parents or caregivers and compare them to your own. You might be interested to see the similarities.

Emotional connections to food can also come from having too much of something as a child. I think we all know someone who had too much stew, canned beans or boiled brussels sprouts and they now have an aversion. This is why rotating foods and aiming for variety, along with having conversations with your children about food, can be so beneficial.

Let's talk nutrients

The nutrients we find in foods are made up of two categories; macronutrients and micronutrients.

Macronutrients are the big guys - protein, carbohydrates and fats. These make up the energy our bodies need to function. Calories are made of these macronutrients, meaning they are the fuel to the body's gas tank. They are each needed in certain amounts in the diet based on health, preference and digestive ability.

Micronutrients are vitamins and minerals. They don't contain calories, therefore they do not provide calories or energy to the body, but they are essential for metabolic function, organ support, hormonal support, growth support, and to overall health.

All food should take these macro and micro nutrients into consideration.

Protein

Protein provides structure and support for the cells. It is needed for cognitive function, metabolism, hormone regulation and mental health. It is a crucial building block in the body, serving as a major component in muscles, organs and skin. It assists in proper wound healing and helps the body maintain fluid and acid-base balance. As children move through multiple phases of growth and development, protein aids their bodies in repairing cells and making new ones. All of these functions are incredibly important for a child's constantly changing and growing body.

Proteins are made up of building blocks known as amino acids. There are three types of amino acids: essential, nonessential and conditional. The essential group is made up of nine amino acids which your body cannot produce and they must be obtained through the diet. Nonessential amino acids are still necessary for your health, but your body has the ability to produce these on its own. While conditional proteins are those usually only required if you're ill or stressed.

Proteins can be further divided into two subtypes: complete and incomplete. Complete proteins contain all nine of the essential amino acids in addition to some of the nonessential amino acids. While incomplete proteins lack one or more of the essential amino acids. In total, there are 22 amino acids that the body needs in order to function at its best, eating a balanced diet is usually enough to consume all the protein and amino acids the body needs.

It is important that your child is consuming a diet which provides all nine essential amino acids and you can achieve this in a number of ways. The easiest method is to choose animal protein as a primary protein source for at least one meal per day such as meat, eggs and dairy which are considered complete proteins, containing all nine essential amino acids. Some plant foods, such as hemp seeds, soy and quinoa are considered complete proteins, but most plant proteins are incomplete proteins, including nuts, beans, rice and whole grains. This is not to say these foods aren't beneficial on their own, but you can achieve the effect of a complete protein by eating two incomplete proteins together, or over the course of a day. Meals like peanut butter and whole grain bread or beans and rice are excellent examples of complementary foods that when combined create a complete protein.

How much Protein?

So, how much protein do children actually need to consume? Turns out, it depends mostly on the age and weight of your child with recommendations being described as grams per pound of body weight. A healthy toddler between the ages of one and three years old need a minimum of 0.55 grams of protein per pound of body weight. That means a toddler weighing 25 pounds would need a minimum of 13.75 grams of protein per day.

As a child ages, protein needs per pound decrease. Children between ages four and six need minimum 0.5 grams of protein per pound of body weight. So, for example, a 5-year-old weighing 50 pounds requires a minimum of 25 grams of protein. While children who are seven to fourteen years old only require a minimum of 0.45 grams of protein per body weight. Meaning a 13-year-old weighing 100 pounds is in need a minimum of 45 grams of protein daily.

In a balanced diet, for children ages 1-3, protein can make up 5-20% of total calories, and for children 4-18 years old, protein can account for 10-30% of total calories.

This amount can increase a little for children who are active in sports or recreational activities. (see Tips for Athletic Children).

Fats & Essential Fatty Acids

Fat is an important part of a healthy diet. Children need it to grow up healthy, and strong.

Fat is needed to build cell membranes, the vital exterior of each cell, and the sheaths surrounding nerves. It is essential for blood clotting, for an appropriate inflammatory response, they also help to transport some vitamins into our bodies.

One component of fat is fatty acids. The body can produce all the fatty acids it needs except for two; linoleic acid (LA), an omega-6 fatty acid, and alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), an omega-3 fatty acid. These fatty acids are considered essential and need to be obtained through the diet.

The essential Omega 3 fatty acids contribute to the health of the brain, nervous system and eyes. They also decrease abnormal heart rhythms and inflammatory reactions, may be involved in preventing diabetes and certain types of cancers. Omega 3 fatty acid deficiency may also be involved in attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Not only that, but fats are also an awesome way for kids to get energy, without the crash that comes from sugar and too much sweets.

Be sure to include rich in Omega 3 fatty acids in your child's diet from foods like fish, nuts (if and when able), seeds, olive oil, olives, avocados, while monitoring their intake in saturated and trans fats. High amounts of these less-ideal fat choices can be unhealthy as they contribute to heart disease, inflammation, hormonal imbalances and unhealthy weight gain.

How Much Fat?

When we look at percentages of total intake, I recommend about 30-40% fat for 1 to 3 year olds, and 25-35% for ages 4 and up. Young girls experiencing PMS may want to aim for closer to 40-45% of the diet to help with hormonal transitions.

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are the body's primary and favorite fuel source.

Despite what media and advertising has been saying recently, carbohydrates (carbs) are actually very important to health.

Carbs are needed for energy, cognitive function, digestion (fiber), and for the health of hormones and brain function. Carbs are also vital for optimal thyroid and hormone function. For example, insulin and carbohydrates stimulate the conversation of T4 thyroid hormone to active T3 thyroid hormone. Thyroid health is necessary for metabolism, mood and energy.

Remember that carbs aren't just bread, pasta and sweets. Fruits and vegetables also fall under the carb category.

Where carbs can get us in trouble is when there are too many processed carbs (cakes, cookies, breads) and not enough fibrous carbs (fruit, veggies, whole grains). Having high amounts of carbohydrates on their own (without a protein or fat) can also lead to concerns with blood sugar spikes/falls, further food cravings and fluctuations in mood and concentration.

There are two kinds of carbohydrates; simple and complex. Simple carbohydrates are single sugar molecules and they are found in milk, fruit and refined sugar.

It is best to get simple carbohydrates from milk and fruit because with these foods you also get fiber and a host of other great nutrients. With refined sugar, which you find in candy, table sugar and other junk foods, there is not much else present but the sugar, which is not healthy.

Complex carbohydrates are also called starches and they are found in grain products, such as bread, crackers, pasta, and rice. As with simple carbohydrates, there are healthy options and not so healthy options.

Carbohydrates

Whole grain products are complex carbs and are always recommended in the diet as nutrients are not stripped in processing, like they are in white flour products. During the processing the whole grain is stripped of its bran and germ layers, which contains fiber, many B vitamins and iron. Examples of whole grains are whole oats, whole wheat, and brown rice.

Choosing the whole grain options will help your child feel fuller longer and the slower absorption caused by the fiber will help to prevent too much sugar from entering the body too quickly.

A high level of blood sugar is not healthy for the body and can lead to diabetes if it occurs often over a long period of time.

How much carbs?

Children's bodies and metabolism are WAY different than ours as adults. So even though low carb and ketogenic diets are really popular right now, we have to shift our thinking about what is healthy when we talk about little kids. (I'm not saying low carb/keto is healthy, but I'm not going on that rant now.)

When you look at your little one's plate, or what they eat in a day, it's totally normal for it to look kind of opposite of how your plate may look. Your meal of grilled salmon and veggies is likely not going to be as satisfying to your kid as it is to you. I'll say it again... that is totally normal!

Carbs should make up 45-65% of your little one's diet. So if you feel like they want all carbs all the time, and rarely want protein...they are probably right on target.

Children burn through energy quickly. Adults sometimes say they feel sluggish or tired after eating a carb heavy meal. Have you ever noticed that children? Probably not. I would bet that their energy seems to multiply after eating a plate full of carbs. No foods are totally off limits, but I recommend limiting added and refined sugars. Sweets and treats are fun, but they shouldn't be the first priority.

Essential Vitamins & Minerals

Vitamin A

Vitamin A is important for vision, bone growth, reproduction and regulating the immune system. Good sources include sweet potatoes, pumpkin, carrots, spinach, turnip greens, mustard greens, kale, collard greens, winter squash, cantaloupe, red peppers, and cabbage.

B Vitamins

There are eight B vitamins and they are essential for cell metabolism, supporting the immune and nervous system, hormone functions, and skin & muscle tone. Good sources include meat, poultry, dairy products, fruits and vegetables.

Vitamin C

Vitamin C is needed for a strong immune system and it promotes healthy gums, teeth, bones and cartilage. Good sources include bell peppers, kiwi, strawberries, sweet potatoes, kale, cantaloupe, broccoli, pineapple, Brussels sprouts, oranges, mangoes, tomato juice and cauliflower

Calcium

Calcium is essential to build and maintain strong bones and teeth throughout life and is needed for muscles to work properly. Good sources include dairy products, fortified juices and soy products, green leafy vegetables, and seaweed.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is necessary for calcium absorption and is essential for bone growth and bone health. It is also involved in the immune system and reduces inflammation. Canadians are more likely to be deficient in this vitamin due to insufficient sun exposure. Good sources include fatty fish such as salmon, tuna, mackerel, fish liver oils and fortified dairy and juice products.

Vitamin E

Vitamin E is the most important antioxidant in the fatty part of our cells and as such it is important in protecting our bodies, supporting the immune system and supporting healthy skin and hair. Vitamin E is made by plants only. Good sources include wheat germ oil, whole grains, olive oil, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, almonds, chard, spinach and kale.

Essential Vitamins & Minerals

Iron

Iron is needed to carry oxygen in our bodies and it is also important for a strong immune system. Good sources of iron are spinach, lentils, chickpeas, beans, and red meat. Children between 1 and 3 years are at a high risk for iron deficiency.

Magnesium

Magnesium is essential for strong bones, and proper muscle and nerve cell function. It is involved in so many things that it affects every system in our body. Good sources include green leafy vegetables like chard, kale, arugula and spinach, broccoli, squash, sunflower seeds and sesame seeds.

Potassium

Potassium is important for muscles and nerves to work properly and for regulating blood pressure. It also plays a role in preventing diabetes and heart disease later in life. Good sources include many fruits and vegetables, among them bananas, dates, spinach, crimini mushrooms, fennel, kale, mustard greens, Brussel sprouts, broccoli, winter squash, blackstrap molasses, eggplant, cantaloupe, and tomatoes.

Vitamin K

Vitamin K is needed for blood clotting. Good sources include green leafy vegetables, especially broccoli, cabbage and turnip greens, and legumes.

Zinc

Zinc is necessary for healing wounds, proper growth, immunity and reproduction. It has also been found to be effective in reducing cold symptoms. Good sources include red meat, especially beef and lamb, oysters, yogurt, crimini mushrooms and spinach.

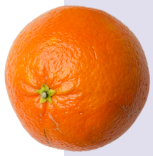
Common Deficiencies

The Dietary Guidelines for North Americans found that children's diets are lacking in magnesium, vitamin E, calcium, potassium and fiber. A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, healthy oils, and foods rich in protein products will provide all that your child needs to get enough of these important nutrients.

Digestion & Gut Concerns

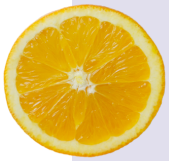
Gut and digestion issues in both adults and children can lead to many health concerns if left untreated. Unfortunately, with diets that are high in processed foods and low in fiber and nutrients, these issues are becoming more and more common.

If you suspect any digestive concerns within your children, it is important to identify the underlying concern and seek the appropriate support to remedy or reduce it before it gets worse, causes pain or leads to concerns.

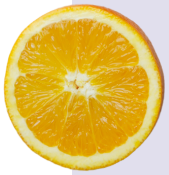


It may not be a major food group like we commonly associate GI concerns with (like wheat, dairy, bread), but actually an underlying and additional ingredient that is added to products like preservatives, additives, artificial sweeteners, sulphites, colourants, etc. More on this later. But until you know the cause of the concern, it is hard to treat and remove from the diet.

Our gut and digestive system are incredible. They're responsible for our immune system, how we absorb nutrients and energy, and even play a role in our mood and mental health, yet we often don't treat our gut as well as we should.



"Gut instinct" used to be something we said when referring to making a decision but recent studies have shown this to be more than just a saying. Our gut is now thought of as our "second brain" because of how much it controls.



Many things can influence gut health, including: antibiotic use, auto-immune or immune concerns, nutritional deficiencies, allergies, C-section births and the gut health of mom during pregnancy.

The best way to improve and promote good gut health is to incorporate nutrient rich foods such as fruit, vegetables, fiber-rich complex carbohydrates, while monitoring processed foods that are low in nutrients. Including foods that are fermented, such as pickles and pickled vegetables, sauerkraut, sourdough, and fermented yogurts, cheeses and milks can also be extremely beneficial

Digestion & Gut Concerns

Prebiotic ('pre-' meaning before) foods are high in special types of fiber that support digestive health. They promote the increase of friendly bacteria in the gut, help with various digestive problems and even boost the immune system. These are naturally found in many foods, including ones that contain fatty acids. Consider adding foods like garlic, dandelion greens, onions, leeks, asparagus, bananas, barley, oats, apples, flax seeds and chia seeds.

Supplemental Probiotics ('pro-' meaning to enhance or heighten) may also be considered to support your children's gut health. Probiotics help replenish your body's "good bacteria." That helps with digestion, immune system function and may even help treat or prevent certain diseases. They can be especially helpful for diarrhea, constipation, irritable bowel syndrome and inflammatory bowel disease. In addition, probiotics can help children who are taking antibiotics. Not all probiotics are effective while taking antibiotics, so talk to your child's pediatrician or pharmacist about which probiotic is best for your child.

A word of advice for probiotic use - the ones made for adults are different than those for children. Be sure to check for the appropriate ones for your child and their digestive concerns. Looking for one with "live" bacteria that are kept refrigerated are always best.

The company Genestra makes great child probiotics if you're looking for a recommended brand. As an RHN I have at-cost ordering privileges through my school association. If you're interested in ordering anything, let me know!

Packaged & Processed Foods

The great thing about packages and processed foods is their convenience, and their usually low price tag. I have no argument against their enticing ease, especially when they are marketed to draw in the attraction of buyers.

Unfortunately, these products not only come with convenience, but also extra ingredients, fillers, colours, and poor quality ingredients.

Candy & Treats vs. Fruit

Okay, we all know which one is the better option here, but when children beg or you want to give them a treat, how do you say no?
Once again, I'm not saying cut anything out completely, and this includes candy. What I am suggesting is to be mindful of these treats and the effects they could have on children.

Remember that study mentioned before? The results showed that where fruit (either sliced apples/oranges, whole apples/oranges, or a banana) was served in conjunction with sugar-sweetened snacks or flavored-salty snacks, only 6% of the children selected fruit, while 58% selected sugar-sweetened snacks and 38% selected flavored-salty snacks.

Another study compared artificially flavoured fruit vs. a real fruit and whether or not children could recognize the difference. The majority of children believed the artificial cherry flavour was the "real" cherry, while the real cherry was deemed the artificial one, and they thought it "didn't taste good" in comparison.

What does this mean? Children are now becoming hard wired to select less nutritious choices AND are starting to crave an artificial flavour over a real flavour. You can thank a 1870 chemist for this one, along with thousands of chemical engineers and professional "flavourists" who make big bucks making food hyperpalatable (meaning you can overeat it really, really easily).

Talk about a bad influence on our youth.

Things to watch for

Sugar & Artificial Sweeteners

Sugar provides energy to our bodies in the form of calories, so, like most other creatures, we have evolved to enjoy it. Sugar comes in a variety of forms, such as glucose (a simple sugar that is an important energy source and is naturally occurring in many foods), sucrose, and fructose, but there are many more. Sugar increases activity in certain parts of our brains, which means that those parts become excited due to the incoming nutrition. A dopamine response is released when we consume sugar which creates a "feel good" and happy feeling. Sounds great right? The downside to this is that dopamine rushes make us crave even more dopamine rushes and this cycle continues. This is no different in a child's brain. Refined and processed sugars are added to many processed foods. Most of these foods also contain very few nutrients. Problem is, processed foods are engineered to be hyperpalatable. When we eat foods loaded with sugar and refined sweeteners, we get an extra-large dopamine rush. Eating it almost becomes "rewarding". Naturally, we want to eat more. And more. And more.

A craving for sweets and carbohydrates may be an indication of many things, including a lack of the amino acid tryptophan. Tryptophan is the amino acid famously known for the Thanksgiving feeling of sleepiness after eating lots of turkey. Tryptophan is needed to make serotonin, the mood-regulating neurotransmitter, so a lack of this amino acid (found in protein) can lead to low mood and anxiety, making us crave that mood boost and comfort of sugar and sweets.

Other causes of sugar cravings are low serotonin levels from medication use, poor sleep or brain imbalances, nutritional deficiencies, gut concerns, hormone changes (testosterone in boys, estrogen in girls), hormone fluctuations (PMS in girls), emotional stress, and a general need for increased energy/calories.

As we all know, sugar also comes with the dreaded "sugar crash". This is due to the combination for the blood sugar spike and fall (sugar is fast absorbing), and the serotonin peak. One way to reduce this spike/crash if there are sugars in the diet, is to not have sugar on it's own, but instead have it with a fat source or protein source. Even better still, use natural sugars like honey, maple syrup, molasses or fruit, which digest differently and come with added nutrients to slow the absorption time.

Things to watch for

Adding cravings for children can come from the social pressure of seeing what others eat, what they see on advertisement or social media, or a feeling of “needing something” but they aren’t sure what.

Artificial sweeteners were invented to taste like sugar but have almost no calories. The goal was to have a sweetener that we could eat more of without developing diseases or gaining too much weight. However, artificial sweeteners can have negative effects on the body and brain that sugars do not.

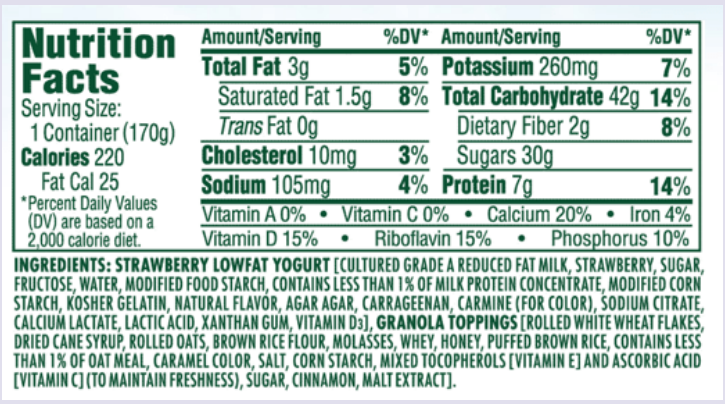
Our brains, stomach microbes (gut bacteria), and pancreases process artificial and real sugars differently, which can cause us to eat more and have a harder time digesting the real sugars that our bodies need. Artificial sweeteners should be consumed in moderation, because they “trick” our brains and bodies into thinking they are treats—which can sometimes have negative health consequences.

Advice for handling sugars and artificial sugars: Everything in moderation and use your best judgements about how much you wish to allow.

INGREDIENTS / INGRÉDIENTS :

STRAWBERRY FLAVOUR FRUIT CRISPS
BARRES CROQUANTES AUX FRUITS SAVEUR DE FRAISES

INGREDIENTS: WHEAT FLOUR, SUGAR, VEGETABLE GLYCERIN, FRUCTOSE, DEXTROSE, MALTODEXTRIN, VEGETABLE AND MODIFIED PALM OIL SHORTENING, PALM KERNEL AND/OR PALM OIL, MODIFIED CORN STARCH, APPLE POWDER, PALM OIL, MODIFIED MILK INGREDIENTS, STRAWBERRY PUREE CONCENTRATE, CORN STARCH, BAKING POWDER, SOY LECITHIN, SALT, ACETYLATED TARTARIC ACID ESTERS OF MONO- AND DIGLYCERIDES, COLOUR (CARROT JUICE CONCENTRATE), SODIUM CITRATE, NATURAL FLAVOUR, CELLULOSE GEL, CITRIC ACID, MALIC ACID, MONO- AND DIGLYCERIDES, CELLULOSE GUM, SODIUM ALGINATE.
CONTAINS WHEAT, MILK AND SOY INGREDIENTS.



Nutrition Facts
Serving Size: 1 Container (170g)
Calories 220
Fat Cal 25
*Percent Daily Values (DV) are based on a 2,000 calorie diet.

Amount/Serving	%DV*	Amount/Serving	%DV*
Total Fat 3g	5%	**Potassium** 260mg	7%
Saturated Fat 1.5g	8%	**Total Carbohydrate** 42g	14%
Trans Fat 0g		Dietary Fiber 2g	8%
Cholesterol 10mg	3%	Sugars 30g	
Sodium 105mg	4%	**Protein** 7g	14%

Vitamin A 0% • Vitamin C 0% • Calcium 20% • Iron 4%
Vitamin D 15% • Riboflavin 15% • Phosphorus 10%

INGREDIENTS: STRAWBERRY LOWFAT YOGURT [CULTURED GRADE A REDUCED FAT MILK, STRAWBERRY, SUGAR, FRUCTOSE, WATER, MODIFIED FOOD STARCH, CONTAINS LESS THAN 1% OF MILK PROTEIN CONCENTRATE, MODIFIED CORN STARCH, KOSHER GELATIN, NATURAL FLAVOR, AGAR AGAR, CARRAGEENAN, CARMINE (FOR COLOR), SODIUM CITRATE, CALCIUM LACTATE, LACTIC ACID, XANTHAN GUM, VITAMIN D_3], **GRANOLA TOPPINGS** [ROLLED WHITE WHEAT FLAKES, DRIED CANE SYRUP, ROLLED OATS, BROWN RICE FLOUR, MOLASSES, WHEY, HONEY, PUFFED BROWN RICE, CONTAINS LESS THAN 1% OF OAT MEAL, CARAMEL COLOR, SALT, CORN STARCH, MIXED TOCOPHEROLS [VITAMIN E] AND ASCORBIC ACID [VITAMIN C] (TO MAINTAIN FRESHNESS), SUGAR, CINNAMON, MALT EXTRACT].

NO ARTIFICIAL FLAVOUR
NO ARTIFICIAL COLOUR

Nutrition Facts
Per 8 crackers (19 g)

Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 100	
Fat 6 g	9 %
Saturated 2.0 g + Trans 0 g	10 %
Cholesterol 0 mg	0 %
Sodium 80 mg	3 %
Carbohydrate 11 g	4 %
Fibre 0 g	0 %
Sugars 3 g	
Protein 1 g	

Vitamin A 0 % Vitamin C 0 %
Calcium 4 % Iron 4 %

INGREDIENTS: WHEAT FLOUR, MODIFIED PALM OIL, VEGETABLE OIL, MODIFIED MILK INGREDIENTS, SUGAR, CHEDDAR CHEESE, BAKING SODA, MONOCALCIUM PHOSPHATE, AMMONIUM BICARBONATE, SALT, SODIUM PHOSPHATE, YEAST EXTRACT, SOY LECITHIN, CORN STARCH, MALTODEXTRIN, PAPAIN, AMYLASE, PROTEASE, NATURAL FLAVOUR, TURMERIC EXTRACT, ANNATTO EXTRACT.
CONTAINS: WHEAT, MILK, SOY.

Things to watch for

Food Additives & Preservatives

Food additives are described by Health Canada as;
"any chemical substance that is added to food during preparation or storage and either becomes a part of the food or affects its characteristics for the purpose of achieving a particular technical effect. Substances that are used in food to maintain its nutritive quality, enhance its keeping quality, make it attractive or to aid in its processing, packaging or storage are all considered to be food additives."

For years there have been studies trying to prove or dis-prove theories behind the effects additives & preservatives have on the bodies, brains and moods of children. I'm not here to tell you what you should or should not believe, but I believe parents should always be informed what their children are consuming.

If you want to know more about preservatives, where you can find them or avoid them in food, and how they are regulated, you can see the list of permitted preservatives under Health Canada **HERE**

Things to watch for

Artificial Flavours

According to the Canada Food and Drug Act and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, an Artificial Flavour is a substance;

"prepared for [its] flavouring properties and derived in whole or in part from components obtained by chemical synthesis."

In other words, an artificial flavour is an ingredient that is completely manufactured by a chemist.

Approximately 2000 chemicals are used in a variety of combinations to produce specific flavours. Commonly used are butyl acetate, benzaldehyde, methyl salicylates, and benzyl alcohol. Flavours, even those termed "natural" have been known to cause allergies and hyperactivity in children. Symptoms from artificial flavours can be widespread in the body. Skin disorders, respiratory problems, blood abnormalities, gastrointestinal upsets and neurological disturbances have all been reported.

Things to watch for

Natural Flavours

Unfortunately, “Natural Flavours” aren’t better. They still start and end in a chemistry lab, but the starting point, the starting key ingredient, must be “natural”, meaning it is from meat, fish, poultry, fruits, vegetables, edible yeast, herbs, spices, bark, buds, roots, leaves or other plant material. Does it matter if you started with something from a plant or animal before a combination of flocculation, separation, degermination, or any number of other processes that are allowed to create the flavour compound? No. The point is that the food is no longer truly food and it isn’t truly “natural.”

For “organic foods,” the natural flavor must have been produced without synthetic solvents, carriers and artificial preservatives. The additives not allowed in natural flavor in organic foods include propylene glycol, polyglycerol esters of fatty acids, mono- and di-glycerides, benzoic acid, polysorbate 80, medium chain triglycerides, BHT, BHA, triacetin. All of which are allowed in “natural” foods and flavours

Things to watch for

Colouring Agents

Food dyes have been studied for years due to their possibly harmful and carcinogenic design. They are also potential allergens and the cause of hidden food sensitivities. Tartrazine and yellow dye #5 are two of the most researched in relation to adverse health effects. Tartrazine is a synthetic dye derived from coal tar and yellow dye #5 is nearly identical to that of aspirin. Soft drinks, candy and desserts are particularly high in these colourants, as are dyed cheddar cheeses, cake mixes, fruit juices, macaroni and cheese kits, puddings, jellies, cammed fruit and packaged cookies.

Sulphites

Sulfites come in many forms - sodium bisulfate, sodium or potassium metabisulfite sulfur dioxide, sodium sulfite, potassium sulfate and bisulfate are some of the most common.

Sulfites are used as preservatives and antioxidants. They keep food fresh from turning brown. Because allergy sufferers and asthmatics are particularly sensitive to them, some laws have been passed limiting their use.

However, sulfites are still allowed in many products such as; sprayed onto vegetables & fruit, citrus drinks and orange juices, potato products like chips and fries, dried fruit, fruit snacks and many frozen items. Hundreds of medications and low-quality supplements also contain sulfites.

Things to watch for

"Low Fat" Products

Depending what generation you were raised in you likely remember the phases of fat being feared, then praised, then somehow both at the same time?

So what's the skinny of low fat products?

You likely think about yogurt, cheese, milk and other dairy products, along with salad dressings and dips when you think of these products, but really anything that typically has fat can be modified and marketed as 'low fat'.

As mentioned above, fat is needed in the diet and it isn't 'bad' unless the wrong types are consumed in the wrong quantities. The issue with these low/no/reduced fat products is how they make the change to low fat and what they add in to make it still taste good.

Using yogurt as an example, the ones sold as a low-fat alternative are typically higher in sugar or artificial sweeteners, contain more preservatives to keep the product from going bad, and have added ingredients like fillers to make the texture similar to the product containing higher amounts of fat.

This isn't necessarily good or bad, it just depends how you look at it and what your personal food beliefs are between dietary fat being good or bad.
I typically recommend my clients aim for the higher fat greek or skyr yogurts and sweeten with fruit and/or natural sweeteners like honey or maple syrup.

Label	What it means
"free of fat", "fat-free", "no fat", "0% fat", "zero fat", "without fat", "contains no fat", "non-fat"	The food contains less than 0.5 g of fat per stated size, OR; less than 0.5 g of fat per serving, if the food is a prepackaged meal.
"low in fat", "low fat", "low source of fat", "little fat", "contains only (#) g of fat per serving", "contains less than (#) g of fat per serving"	The food contains 3 g or less of fat per serving size, OR; 3 g or less of fat per 100 g, OR; 30% or less of the energy/calories is from fat.
"reduced in fat", "reduced fat", "fat-reduced", "less fat", "lower fat", "lower in fat"	The food is processed, formulated, reformulated or otherwise modified so that it contains at least 25% less fat compared to the original, non-reformulated version of the same product, made by the same brand.

Things to watch for

Reading Food Labels

Alright so I gave you a LOT of information about what to look for and be aware of.

So how do you know if these are in your children's food?

When you look at a food label you'll notice more than just the calories and the amounts of carbs/fats/proteins you can find contained in that package.

Ingredients will ALWAYS be listed in order from highest content to lowest content. This is regulated by law. This means even though you don't not know the exact amount of a substance (sugar, sulphites, preservatives, etc.) there is in a product, you can base off the order what there's more or less of.

For example, if something lists sugar before it lists fruit juice, you can assume there is more sugar used as an ingredient than there is actual fruit juice. This also goes with whole wheat products that list white flour first, and preservatives or additives (things you can't pronounce) listed before any whole foods.

Tips for Athletic Children

Kids that are in sports, workout, or have physically active hobbies like dance, skating or running, need to focus on eating the right amount and mix of foods to support that higher level of activity, but overall, eating for sports should be an extension of healthy eating for life.

Most athletes will naturally eat the right amount of food their bodies need. But if you're concerned that your child is getting too much or too little food, check in with your doctor or nutritionist.

Besides getting the right amount of calories, the importance of some nutrients are going to keep young athletes performing at their best:

Vitamins and minerals:
Kids need a variety of vitamins and minerals. Calcium and iron are two important minerals for athletes. Calcium helps build strong bones to resist breaking and stress fractures. Calcium-rich foods include dairy products like milk, yogurt, and cheese, as well as leafy green vegetables such as broccoli. Iron helps carry oxygen to all the different body parts that need it. Iron-rich foods include lean meat, chicken, tuna, salmon, eggs, dried fruits, leafy green vegetables, and fortified whole grains.

Protein:
Protein helps build and repair muscles, and most kids get plenty of it through a balanced diet. Protein-rich foods include fish, meat and poultry, dairy products, beans, nuts, and soy products. Research from the Journal of the American College of Nutrition found that a protein intake of 1.6-1.8 g/kg/day, will further enhance muscle development when combined with exercise or specific training. Additionally, there is little evidence that very high protein (greater than 2g/kg body weight per day) is beneficial. Supplementation with powders, drinks, or other aids are not required nor recommended, and it is possible to obtain sufficient protein through a balanced diet. Your young athlete may not be getting enough protein if they are having a hard time recovering from exercise, are constantly lethargic, or are always hungry and looking for carbohydrates.

Tips for Athletic Children

Carbohydrates:

Carbs provide energy for the body. For a young athlete they're an important source of fuel. There's no need for "carb loading" (eating a lot of carbs in advance of a big game), but without carbs in their diet, kids will be running on empty. When you're choosing carbs, look for whole-grain foods like whole-wheat pasta, brown rice, whole-grain bread and cereal, and plenty of fruits and vegetables. If they're training or exercising after work, be sure they have an easy to eat snack 1-2 hour before training and include carbohydrates in dinner. The amount each young athlete will need is determined by many variables including height, age, and the type of exercise they participate in. No need to track or monitor, but check in with your young athlete about their energy levels before, during and after exercise.

Fats:

Fats are necessary for many body functions and for the regulation of hormones. They are also exceptionally helpful when it comes to lowering inflammation levels. Although children's body's rely more on carbohydrates for energy than fats, I didn't want to leave fats out of this list because they're still very important. Including fats in your young athlete's diet will help them recover from training, sleep better, provide energy for long exercise or training sessions, and support the hormones that allow them to build and grow.

Tips for Athletic Children

Water intake:
It's important for young athletes to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration, which can affect strength, energy, and coordination. Even mild dehydration can affect athletic performance.

Thirst is not a reliable sign of hydration status, so experts recommend that kids drink water or other fluids before and every 15 to 20 minutes during physical activity. It's additionally important to drink after exercise to restore fluid lost through sweat.

Although many sports drinks are available, plain water is usually enough to keep kids hydrated. Sports drinks are designed to provide energy and replace electrolytes (sodium and potassium) that are lost in sweat. They can be a good choice for kids who participate in strenuous physical activity for more than 1 hour, because after exercising for 60 to 90 minutes, the body has used up its readily available sources of energy. Sports drinks are also a good alternative for kids who participate in sports but struggle to drink enough water.

Diluted juice is another option, but avoid sugary drinks and carbonated beverages that can upset the stomach. Water with lemon juice and a couple turns of a sea salt mill also works great.

The bottom line is that for most young athletes, water is the best choice for hydration. After the activity, carbohydrates and electrolytes can be replenished.

A Note on Childhood Weight

Did you know approximately 19% of children aged 2-19 in North America are obese, which has steadily increased over the past 30 years? Meanwhile, eating disorders are becoming more predominant than ever in youth and the starting age is getting terrifyingly younger.

There are so many variables in creating these horrific statistics, and with the world going virtual, we aren't sure how these may change. Obesity is being linked to poor nutrition choices, matched with inactivity. Eating disorders are being closely linked to social media, school bullying, and even habits that mimic that of the parents.

Providing healthy foods to our children, encouraging play time, keeping mindful of what the school systems are offering, and creating a fun and healthy environment around food and body image for these little ones is critical. Providing a space to form a healthy relationship with food and allowing children to understand food and nutrition is essential to their health as children, and as they grow into adults.

Unfortunately (and something that causes me great anger), children aren't taught nutrition in school. They don't know why fats don't make you fat and are actually needed for the brain, or how eating too much in general is what makes us gain weight (or build muscle for sport). They don't know why an apple is better than a candy that tastes like an apple. Instead, they're learning BEDMAS which I am 99% certain they will never use again.

It is important for both children, and us as adults, to understand nutrition and food. We need it to survive and thrive as humans, and there's really no getting around that. Yes, this is another responsibility on you as a parent, but it's also your responsibility as a human to understand how your body works. Children should have this same responsibility.

A Note on Childhood Weight

Dieting for Children

Again I will preface that this is my personal recommendation as a Registered Holistic Nutritionist based on my education, studies and personal experience. Every parent is allowed to and encouraged to parent how they wish.

I do not believe in dieting for children unless there is a medical indication that suggests it is necessary, in which case it should be monitored by a Pediatric Dietician, Dietician or a Registered Nutritionist.

I do not recommend diets such as keto, low carb, low fat, carnivore, vegan, IIFYM, CICO, or any other titled diet for most children.

Children are growing and learning every day. The effects these diets can have due to nutritional deficiencies, hormonal imbalances, digestive concerns, mental health concerns and on their physical and mental health can be detrimental both short term and long term.

KOOTENAY NUTRITION

Ready to Lunch!

Week of:

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

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Kelsey Beamish
R.H.N, P.T.S

Legal Stuff

As the reader of this PDF, you should understand that you are responsible for making your own health and nutrition decisions, and the health and nutrition decisions for your children.

This publication is intended for informational and educationa use only.

You should get physician's approval before starting any "diet," or major dietary changes.

Kelsey Beamish is a Registered Holistic Nutritionist, not a registered dietitian nor a licensed physician.

The material in this PDF represents suggestions based on what she and others have gained real and healthy results from.

These recommendations are not medical guidelines, and are for educational purposes only. You should consult yours or your children's physician prior to implementing changes, in the case of any medical condition or health concerns.

Kelsey Beamish and Kootenay Nutrition will not assume any liability or be held responsible for any form of injury, personal loss, or illness caused by the utilization of this material.

You may want to consult with a physician or registered dietitian before following any of the outlined suggestions.

As with any diet or exercise program, if at any time you or your child experiences discomfort, stop immediately and consult a physician.

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