



Ask the Nutritionist

Sandy Sarni, MS, RD,
MIIA's Integrative Nutrition Coordinator

Dear Sandy,

I am concerned that my school age child isn't getting proper nutrition and I am worried about her growth. She was a good eater as a toddler but now she seems disinterested in food and it's a battle to get her to eat. Do you have any suggestions?

Thank you,

Evelyn

Dear Evelyn,

Thank you for your question. Many parents experience these up and downs when feeding their children. Before and during a period of rapid growth, children have good appetites. When growth slows or plateaus, appetite drops off significantly. Appetite fluctuations are considered a problem only when low or high intakes occur for extended periods. Normal weight children have built-in feeding mechanisms that regulate intake to match needs. It is important not to pressure or bribe a child to eat. Pressuring a child to eat more or less than desired tells the child not to trust his or her own hunger and satiety signals and can lead to a lifetime battle with weight problems.

Continue to offer children well-balanced, nutritious meals and snacks. Children have small stomachs and offering 6 or so small meals might work better than limiting them to 3 meals each day. Breakfast and snacks are especially important to keep blood sugar levels high enough to support the activity of their rapidly growing brains and nervous systems. Children tend to reject new foods that are unfamiliar but the upside of a varied diet is worth the effort. If a child refuses to try a new food, the one-bite rule might work; children should take at least 1 bite or taste of the foods presented to them. It might take as many as 15-20 exposures to a new food before the child accepts it.

The amount of food a child should eat depends on age, children like adults need several servings from each of the major food groups daily. However, the size of each serving and the number of servings is different. For more information and guidelines for a healthy diet, see this [article from the Mayo Clinic](#). Also, [myplate.gov](https://www.myplate.gov) is a useful website that includes planning tools, games, quizzes and other resources to encourage healthy eating for children. Go to: <https://www.myplate.gov/life-stages/kids> for more information.

If you have questions about nutrition for kids or specific concerns about your child's diet, talk to your child's doctor or a registered dietitian.