



EAT RIGHT BE ACTIVE

*A Guide for Caregivers of
Preschoolers Ages 3 - 5*



NUTRITION RESOURCE CENTRE

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Introduction

We all want the best for our children. We want them to grow up healthy and feeling great. This booklet can help. It is full of everyday ideas that you as a busy parent or caregiver can put into action so your 3 - 5 year old can eat well and be active.

As you read this, think about what ideas or tips you can start using today. You are an important role model for your child. All the efforts you make, big and small, do add up to a healthier child.

Note: In this booklet, “preschooler” refers to children between 3 - 5 years old. Both “him” and “her” are used throughout to describe your preschooler. “Caregiver” refers to parents, other adults/family members and anyone else involved in your child’s care.

Is my child growing well?

Children grow and develop at different rates. Your child may be taller or shorter, lighter or heavier than other preschoolers the same age.

What is most important is the overall growth pattern, not the height or weight at any one time. Ask about the growth pattern of your child when you are visiting his health care provider. If you are concerned about your child’s eating habits, or growth and development, check out the nutrition screen tool called Nutri-eSTEP (www.nutritionscreen.ca) for more information.

Help your child feel good about their body by praising their strengths, abilities and unique personality, not their appearance. Also try not to criticize your own body or the way others look.

Growth depends on many factors

- Family - parents’ size and shape
- Age - children grow fastest as babies and teenagers
- General health - medical conditions, illnesses, medications
- Gender - boys and girls have different growth patterns
- Eating habits - what and how much your child eats
- Activity level - how active your child is, and for how long

Adapted from: *A Health Professional’s Guide for using the WHO Growth Charts for Canada*, Dietitians of Canada, 2014

GOOD TO
KNOW!

Eat right, be active quiz

What is considered “normal” eating and activity for a preschooler may surprise you.

Answer the following questions with a **Yes** or **No**.

1. Should preschoolers be active every day? Yes No

Preschool-aged children love to move and be active. Daily physical activity helps strengthen their heart, lungs, bones and muscles. It also gives them confidence and helps them learn social skills, as well as teaching them movement skills they will need for lifelong physical activity.

2. Is it up to children to decide whether to eat and how much to eat? Yes No

Parents and preschoolers have different jobs when it comes to eating. Your job is to decide what, when and where to offer food. Your child’s job is to decide if and how much to eat from the healthy choices you offer.

3. Is it true that preschoolers are not ready to participate in competitive sports? Yes No

Focus on having fun and practicing skills such as kicking or throwing, rather than competing through racing or keeping score. Preschoolers are not ready for “win/lose” type games and sports. That may make some children feel bad and lose interest in being physically active. Everyone wins when the focus is on building skills and having fun.

4. Is it normal for preschoolers to eat a lot one day and eat very little the next day? Yes No

It is normal for your preschooler's appetite to vary. Keep serving a variety of healthy foods without pressuring him to eat. Make one family meal, not separate meals, even if your child does not eat very much of the meal offered. Serving at least one familiar food at every meal or snack may improve acceptance.

5. Should parents and caregivers be active with their children? Yes No

You are an important role model for your child. You can participate in physical activity by playing games, throwing, catching and kicking a ball. Join parent-and-tot programs or dance to music. Make active choices every day. Together you can take the stairs, walk to the mailbox, take a family walk after dinner or plan active weekends.

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