

# Healthy Growth – When Weight Gets Ahead of Height

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Childhood is an important time for growth and development. Healthy growth is different for each child, and children have a variety of body shapes and sizes.

It's important to support children to follow a growth pattern that is natural for them.

**This handout is for children aged 2 years and older whose growth pattern shows that their weight is ahead of their height.**

## When weight gets ahead of height

Weight is considered ahead of height when weight is increasing faster than height on the child's growth chart. This can be due to:

- some children being naturally bigger (genetics)
- a sudden increase in weight (weight spurt) before a change in height
- health conditions, injuries, or a side effect of some medications
- eating patterns and amounts or types of foods
- changes to mental health, sleep, or activity

Your child's healthcare provider may discuss slowing the rate of weight gain while making sure your child is still growing taller. This may happen slowly over time while building a healthy lifestyle your child enjoys.

Children should not be put on a strict diet or exercise program.

## Words and actions matter

Children whose weight is ahead of height can face bias and stigma from others, even from some adults in their life.

**Bias** is treating someone unfairly because of beliefs or feelings.

**Stigma** means unfair labels and wrong ideas that people have about others.

For children, bias and stigma related to their size may be experienced as teasing, bullying, or being left out. These experiences can have an impact on a child's emotional, social, and physical health.

Help create a positive environment and support a healthy relationship with food.

- Think about the conversations you have within your family. Try not to make comments about anyone's body size or shape.
- Focus on overall health instead of body size or shape.
- Help your child and others understand weight does not define a person's ability, value, or character.
- Food is for nutrition and enjoyment. Avoid using food to bribe, punish, or reward.
- Use the actual names of foods and avoid calling them "good" or "bad", "healthy" or "unhealthy". Using labels may lead to your child feeling judged or worried about eating some foods.



# How do eating patterns affect growth?

Some eating habits, if part of a regular eating pattern, can impact growth and may lead to your child's weight getting ahead of height. Some examples of these eating habits are:

- Eating high-calorie, low-nutrient foods often
- Eating low amounts of vegetables and fruit
- Drinking sugar sweetened beverages and fruit juice
- Choosing larger portion sizes often
- Not having regular meal and snack times
- Skipping breakfast
- Frequent meals or snacks prepared away from home (restaurants, delivery)

If you have concerns about your child's eating habits and patterns, talk to your healthcare provider.

## Tips to support growth

To support growth, offer meals and snacks at regular times, and provide a variety of nutritious foods from Canada's food guide. Support your child with active living and healthy sleep habits.

### Regular meals and snack times

Use Canada's food guide plate to plan meals and snacks. Offer  $\frac{1}{2}$  the plate as vegetables and fruits,  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the plate as whole grains, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the plate as protein foods.

- Offer 3 meals and 2–3 snacks each day.
- Plan to eat every few hours so your child does not get too hungry in between meal and snack times.
- Provide a variety of food choices.
- Serve the same foods to the whole family.
- Offer water throughout the day to meet fluid needs and to quench thirst.
- Offer food in textures that match your child's ability to chew and swallow.
- Pack meals, snacks, and drinks to bring with you rather than buying them while you are out.

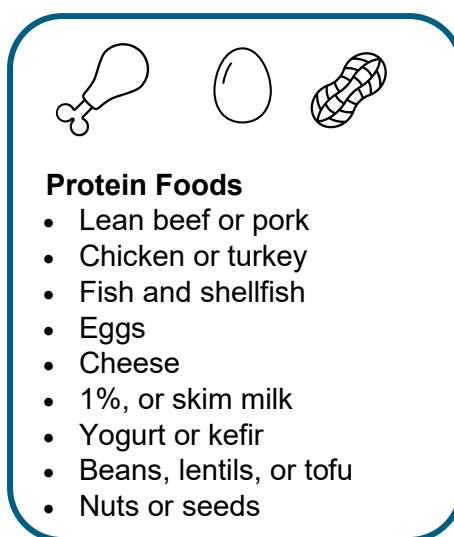
### Provide nutritious foods

Vegetables and fruits, whole grains, and protein foods all provide important nutrients for growing bodies. Include these food choices in your child's meals and snacks to help support their growth. Choose foods with less added fat, sugar, or salt.



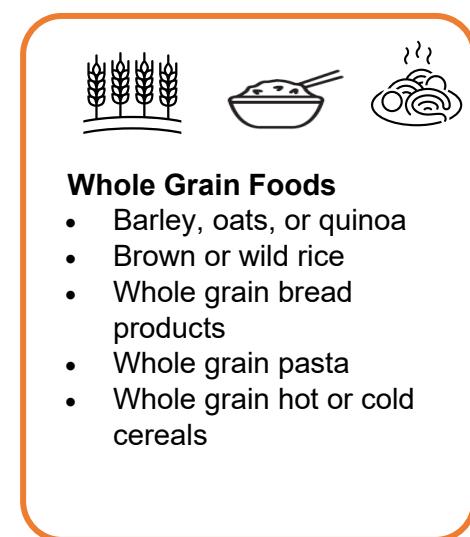
#### Vegetables and Fruit

- Fresh or frozen vegetables
- Fresh or frozen fruit
- Canned vegetables
- Canned fruit in juice



#### Protein Foods

- Lean beef or pork
- Chicken or turkey
- Fish and shellfish
- Eggs
- Cheese
- 1%, or skim milk
- Yogurt or kefir
- Beans, lentils, or tofu
- Nuts or seeds



#### Whole Grain Foods

- Barley, oats, or quinoa
- Brown or wild rice
- Whole grain bread products
- Whole grain pasta
- Whole grain hot or cold cereals

## Meal examples

Use the ideas below to provide vegetables and fruits, protein foods, and whole grains. Provide foods that match your child's ability to chew and swallow. For children with a milk allergy, offer plant-based alternatives.

<b>Fruity yogurt bowl</b> Mix fresh or frozen fruit and plain yogurt in a small bowl. Top or mix with nuts, nut butter, ground seeds, hemp hearts or cereal.	<b>Snack style lunch</b> Try hard-boiled eggs, bean dip, cheese, or nuts for protein. Add whole-grain flatbread or crackers and some cut-up fruit or vegetables.	<b>Roll-up</b> Combine cooked eggs, canned tuna, or salmon with vegetables, cheese, and roll in a tortilla, roti, chapati, or pita.
		
<b>Dippers</b> Use sliced vegetables or whole-grain pita triangles to dip in hummus, bean, or yogurt dip.	<b>Noodles</b> Cook whole-grain noodles or rice noodles and top with a sauce that includes vegetables and ground turkey, black beans, or lentils for some added protein.	<b>Mini pizzas</b> Take a toasted whole grain English muffin or pita and top with tomato sauce, cheese, and chopped vegetables.
		

## Be active as a family

- Find physical activities your family enjoys and can do together regularly.
  - Encourage children in active play.
  - Limit screen time such as video games, T.V., and tablets or smartphones.

## Choose healthy sleep habits

- Help your child get enough sleep to grow and play well.
- Try to have the same sleep and wake up times everyday.
- Screens in the bedroom are not recommended.

### Sleep Recommendations

Age (years)	Hours of sleep per day
2	11-14, including naps
3-4	10-13
5-13	9-11
14-17	8-10

## For more information



- Talk to your healthcare team.**
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on [ahs.ca/811](http://ahs.ca/811).
- Visit [ahs.ca/Nutrition](http://ahs.ca/Nutrition). Search for “supporting healthy growth”
- Canada’s Food Guide: [healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide](http://healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide). Search “recipes”
- 211 Alberta.** Includes information on food hampers, and free or low-cost meals.
  - Dial 211 or Text INFO to 211 or Visit, [www.ab.211.ca](http://www.ab.211.ca) and click “live chat”.
- 24-hour movement and sleep guidelines: Visit <https://csep.ca> search “guidelines”