

# Healthy Growth - When Weight Measures Low

Childhood is an important time for growth and development. Healthy growth is different for each child.

Your healthcare provider may suggest tips from this handout to help your child return to a growth pattern that is healthy for them. This handout is for children ages 6 months and up.

## When weight measures low

Weight may be considered low when it falls below expected growth measurements on growth charts. This could be due to:

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

## Tips to support growth

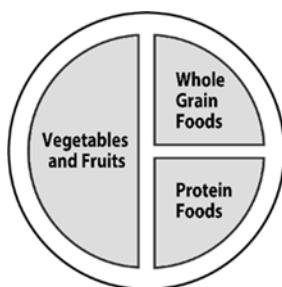
Try these tips to help your child get enough nutrition.

### Regular meals and snacks

For your baby's first 6 months, breastmilk (or formula) gives them the nutrition they need. Breastfeeding is recommended up to 2 years and beyond.

Use foods from Canada's Food Guide to help your child get the nutrition they need.

Offer a combination of protein foods, vegetables and fruits, and whole grain foods at meals and snacks.



**Offer meals and snacks at regular times throughout the day.**

- By 1 year of age, offer 3 meals and 2–3 snacks each day. This helps your child eat enough food to grow well.
- Eating between planned meals and snacks can make your child less hungry when it is time for meals. It may also cause your child to get less nutrition.
- Prepare and offer textures that match your child's ability to chew and swallow.
- Provide a variety of food choices, not just the foods your child usually eats.
- You may need to offer new foods many times before your child will learn to like them.
- The amount of food a child eats will change from day to day.
- If you have concerns about your child's eating patterns and behaviours, talk to a healthcare provider.

**Start by offering small portions. Offer more if your child is still hungry.**

- Children have small stomachs. They may not eat a lot at one time. This is why having regular meals and snacks is important.
- Drinking too much fluid, like milk and juice, may make your child less hungry for meals and snacks.
  - As your baby eats more solid foods, around 9–12 months old, they will drink less breastmilk or formula.
  - Choose 3.25% or 2%\* milk to drink.
  - Limit milk to around 2 cups (500 mL) per day by 1 year of age.
  - Offer milk or water with meals and snacks.
  - Only offer water in between meals and snacks.

**\*For kids under 2:** 2%, 1%, skim milk, and plant-based beverages (like soy or almond) don't have enough nutrition to support their growth. However, it can be used for cooking or baking.

## Provide nutritious foods

Protein, fat, iron, and calcium are important nutrients that help support healthy growth in children. Include foods with these nutrients in your child's meals and snacks to help support their growth.

### Protein

Helps build and maintain muscles and keep the immune system working.

Choose eggs, meat, fish, poultry, dairy foods, beans and lentils, tofu, nuts, and seeds.

### Fat

Helps provide energy and nutrients for the brain and building blocks for hormones and vitamins.

Fat is found in animal foods like meat, poultry, fish, and dairy foods. Plant foods like olive, avocado and canola oils, nuts, and seeds also contain fats.

### Iron

Helps carry nutrients through the body. Has a role in brain and body growth.

Foods with iron are meat, fish, poultry, eggs, beans and lentils, baby cereal with iron, enriched hot or cold cereals, and dark green vegetables.

### Calcium

Helps build bones, and teeth along with Vitamin D.

Choose dairy foods, fortified plant-based beverages, lentils, beans, nuts, and fish with bones.

## How to build nutritious meals and snacks

Try these foods or food ideas to help your child get the key nutrients above for healthy growth. The meal and snack examples below show **protein foods** and **foods with fats** in bold.



### Protein foods

**Eggs:** add extra **eggs** to pancake or waffle batter. Serve with **Greek yogurt** and fruit.

**Yogurt** (2.5% M.F (milk fat) or higher): with fruit and granola.

**Hummus or bean dip:** with vegetables or crackers.

**Chicken thighs or canned salmon:** with **cheesy** rice.



### Whole grain foods

Whole grain breads: with **cheese or nut butter**.

Oatmeal or cereals: with **cream or canned coconut milk and ground seeds**.

Rice, pasta, or quinoa: with **non-hydrogenated margarine, butter, oil, cheese, avocado, or ground meat**.



### Vegetables and fruit

Vegetables: prepared with **cheese, cream cheese (dairy or plant-based), oil, non-hydrogenated margarine, or butter**.

Sliced fruits: with **nut or seed butter, or Greek yogurt**.

Potatoes: topped with **added cream, cheese, avocado, beans, or chili**.

## Meal and snack ideas

Use the ideas below to provide protein foods, whole grains, and vegetables and fruits.

Provide foods that match your child's ability to chew and swallow. For children with a milk allergy, offer plant-based alternatives.



### **Nut or soy butter dip and dippers**

Mix nut or seed butter with Greek yogurt, fortified plant-based yogurt, or pureed soft tofu. Add maple syrup or lime for flavor. Serve with fresh fruit, vegetables, dollar-sized whole grain pancakes, waffle pieces, or French toast strips.

### **Fruity smoothie bowl**

Mix fresh or frozen fruit and plain yogurt (2.5% M.F or higher) in a small bowl. Top with granola, infant cereal, nuts, or seeds. Chill and serve.

### **Snack style lunch**

Pack hummus, edamame beans, eggs, cheese, nuts, or seeds. Add whole grain flatbread or crackers, and some fruits and vegetables.



### **Pasta**

Serve whole grain pasta with pureed pea or tomato sauce. Top with peas, meat, or cheese.

### **Open face sandwich**

Mix canned light tuna or salmon with mashed avocado or mayonnaise. Add diced celery or cucumbers for some crunch. Top with melted cheese or seeds.

### **Roll up**

Pair cooked eggs or refried beans with vegetables. Add cheese, dairy-free cream cheese, or hummus. Roll in a tortilla, roti, chapati, or pita.

## Supplements

Give your child the vitamin and mineral supplements and medications your health care provider has recommended. All children in Alberta need a 400 IU vitamin D supplement each day.

Speak to a dietitian or doctor before starting your child on nutrition supplement drinks, or any other supplements.

## 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:
  - Adding Protein and Calories to Your Child's Diet
  - Feeding Toddlers and Young Children
- Visit [peas.albertahealthservices.ca](http://peas.albertahealthservices.ca). Search for:
  - Helping your Child Accept More Foods
  - Introducing New Food to Your Child
- Canada's food gGuide: [healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide](http://healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide)
- **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"