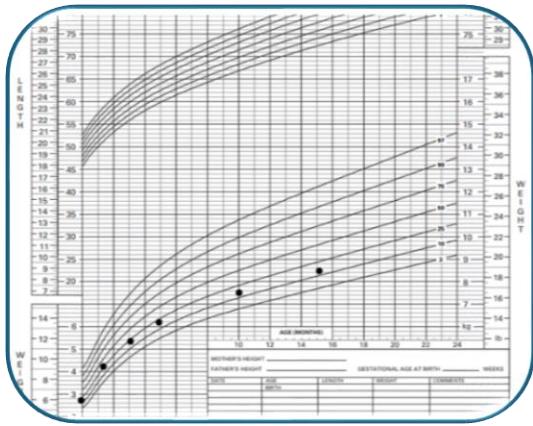


# Supporting Healthy Growth

Childhood is an important time for growth and development. Healthy growth is different for each child. This handout describes:

- growth charts and patterns
- the importance of tracking your child's growth
- tips to support healthy growth for your child

## Understanding growth charts



Starting from birth, your child's growth is measured at regular visits with their healthcare team.

Measures of growth can be tracked on a growth chart.

Growth charts are graphs used to show your child's pattern of growth. They can help show if growth is following a consistent pattern or signal if growth is moving in a direction of a possible concern with nutrition or health.

**Growth pattern over time is more important than one measurement.** Tracking your child's growth at each visit will show their growth pattern over time and can identify any changes.

Growth should be considered along with other factors to determine overall nutrition and health.

Growth charts track different measures for your child including:

- head circumference
- weight-for-age
- length-for-age or height-for-age
- weight-for-length
- Body Mass Index (BMI)-for-age

Weight-for-length and Body Mass Index (BMI)-for-age show how a child's weight is growing in proportion to their length.

## What is a healthy growth pattern?

Children grow in a variety of body shapes and sizes.

Your child will have a growth pattern that is natural for them. They may be taller or shorter, heavier or lighter than other children of the same age.

There is no place on the growth chart that shows the goal for all children. It's important to support your child to follow a growth pattern that's right for them.

## Growth trends and spurts

Children grow the fastest when they are babies. During the preschool and early school years, they grow more slowly.

Growth spurts are when a child grows faster in a short period of time. Growth spurts are common when babies are around 2–3 weeks, 6 weeks, and 3–4 months of age, and then again during puberty.

During growth spurts, children often eat more.

# How can I support healthy growth for my child?

Many things affect a child's growth, including their eating, physical activity, sleep routines, home environment, and family growth patterns. Illness and health conditions may also affect growth.

Support your child to follow a growth pattern that's right for them by following some of the tips below.

## Create positive mealtimes

A parent's role is to choose what foods to offer, when, and where.

- Provide a variety of nutritious foods and offer regular meals and snacks.
- For babies, follow their signs of hunger and fullness to feed breastmilk or formula on cue.

A child's role is to decide how much to eat and whether to eat the food offered.

- Sometimes your child may choose not to eat the foods offered.
- Allow your child to follow their hunger and fullness cues.

## Make mealtimes about food and family

- Aim to keep mealtimes a comfortable time to come together, eat, and share. Stress or pressure can make it hard for your child to eat, enjoy mealtimes, and get the nutrition they need.
- Involve your child. They can help with meal planning, grocery shopping, and making family meals. They can do tasks that match their ability. Let them help measure, stir, and serve foods.
- Allow your child to explore foods by touching, smelling, and tasting. This can help teach them about new foods and be interested in what they eat.
- Children can learn to try new foods and focus on their hunger and fullness cues better without distractions. Try turning off the TV, phones, and tablets.
- Offer all members of the family the same foods. Everyone can choose which foods they want to try from those offered.

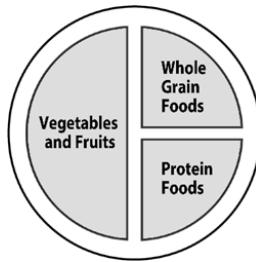


## Enjoy a variety of foods

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

Once children are eating solid foods, 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.



- By 1 year of age, offer 3 meals and 2–3 snacks each day. This helps your child get the nutrition they need to grow well and be healthy.
- Prepare and offer foods in textures that match your child's ability to chew and swallow.
- Start by offering small portions. Offer more if your child is still hungry. The amount of food your child eats will change from day to day.
- Offer water throughout the day. Offer vegetables and fruit instead of juice.
- Offer around 2 cups (500 mL) of milk each day.
- Provide a 400 IU vitamin D supplement. Speak to a dietitian or doctor before starting your child on other supplements.

## Be a positive role model

Think about how you talk about food, weight, and growth. Your words and actions can help your child feel good about themselves and develop healthy habits.

- Children may learn by copying their parents. Let your child see you enjoying a variety of foods.
- 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 children feeling judged or worried about eating some foods.
- Use words that talk about a food’s color, shape, smell, or flavour. Examples are words like “crunchy”, “spicy” or “round”. This helps teach about foods.
- Avoid making comments about what your child is eating or not eating. Don’t pressure your child to eat a certain amount. This may lead to struggles with mealtimes and eating.
- Try not to make comments about anyone’s body size or shape. Focus on overall health instead of body size or shape.

## Be active as a family

- Activity helps your child build strong bones and muscles and follow their natural growth pattern.
- Give children time to be active. Make physical activity a fun part of your family life.
- Encourage your child to play outdoors. Try ball games, running games, skating, skipping, or playing at the park. Be creative and make up your own games.
- Limit screen time such as video games, T.V., and tablets/smartphones, or other electronics.

Age	Recommended screen time
Under 2	no screen time
2 to 4	less than 1 hour each day
5 and older	less than 2 hours each day

## 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 every day.
- Screens in the bedroom are not recommended.

Age	Hours of sleep each day
2	11–14, including naps
3 and 4	10–13
5 to 13	9–11
14 to 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/NutritionHandouts](http://ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts).  
Search for: "Starting Solids Foods", "Growth"  
"Feeding Toddlers and Young Children"
- Canada's food guide:  
[healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide](http://healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide)
- [Enjoy Your Meal Experience Conversation Cards](#) ([albertahealthservices.ca](http://albertahealthservices.ca))
- **211 Alberta.** Provides 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"