

When Your Child's Weight Measures Low

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

Over time, measures of growth can be recorded on a growth chart to show a child's growth pattern. It's important to support a child to follow a growth pattern that is right for them. This handout gives you tips to support healthy growth for children ages one and up.

When weight measures low

There are many reasons a child's weight may measure low. Some reasons are:

- some children are naturally small
- height spurts
- illness
- not getting enough nutrition to grow well

If you are concerned about your child's growth, be sure to talk to a doctor, public health nurse, or dietitian.

Start with healthy mealtimes

When a parent is concerned about their child's growth, mealtimes can become stressful. Stress can make it harder for children to eat, enjoy mealtimes, and get the nutrition they need.

A parent's role is to choose *what* foods to offer, *when*, and *where*. Parents should provide healthy foods and offer regular meals and snacks.

A child's role is to decide *how much* to eat and *whether* or not to eat at each meal.

Sometimes your child may refuse meals or snacks. Don't pressure a child to eat at meals. Don't bribe, beg, or "make" your child eat certain kinds or amounts of food. Pressuring a child to eat can make them eat less.

Families should enjoy healthy eating together. Your child shouldn't be singled out from the rest of the family. Try the tips below to create happy and healthy mealtimes.



- **Be a role model.**
Children are quick to learn what foods parents do and don't like. If you eat healthy and try new foods, your child will be more likely to do the same.
- **Make mealtimes about food and family.**
Eat at the table together. Your child will focus on eating with fewer distractions. Turn off the TV, cell phone, computer, video game, and put toys away.
- **Offer 3 meals and 2 – 3 snacks each day.**
Regular meals and snacks will help your child eat enough food to grow well and be healthy. Letting your child eat or drink between planned meals and snacks can make your child less hungry when it is time for meals.
- **Start by offering small portions. Offer more if your child is still hungry.**
Keep in mind that children have small stomachs. They may not eat a lot at one time.

- **Offer healthy foods.**

Foods from the four food groups in *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* will help your child to get the nutrition he or she needs. Don't limit food choices to just the ones your child usually eats.

Stay relaxed when you offer your child new foods. You may need to offer new foods many times before your child will learn to like them.

- **Avoid letting your child fill up on fluids.**

Drinking too many fluids like milk and juice may make a child less hungry for meals and snacks. Serve no more than 3 cups (750 mL) of milk each day. **Limit juice to ½ cup (125 mL) each day.**

- **Limit less healthy foods.**

Foods like sugary drinks, candies, potato chips, and donuts don't help children grow well.

- **Involve your child.**

Your child may help with gardening, grocery shopping, and making family meals. This helps them be interested in what they eat. It also teaches them about new foods.



Getting enough calories

Children need healthy, higher calorie foods to grow well. Some children need more than others. The amount of food a child eats will also change as they grow. When a child's weight measures low, it's very important to make sure you offer enough healthy, higher calorie foods.

Healthy, higher calorie foods

Below are ideas for healthy foods from each food group in *Canada's Food Guide*. See **Safety alert** on page 3 for foods marked with an asterisk (*).

Vegetables and fruit

- cooked vegetables with cheese
- avocado as a sandwich spread, in smoothies, or as a dip
- pieces of fruit or raw vegetables* with dip made from plain yogurt (2.5% milk fat (MF) or higher)
- dried fruit, like apples, pineapples, or apricots*

Grain Products

Offer whole grain products for the suggestions below:

- muffins, loaves, bannock, or biscuits.
- pancakes, waffles, or French toast with fruit or peanut/nut butter*
- pasta with cheese or sauce
- bagel, naan or roti, with cheese, hummus or peanut/nut butter*
- hot or cold cereals with milk
- rice with bean curd or tofu, and vegetables

Milk and Alternatives

- plain yogurt (2.5% MF or higher) mixed with your own fruit
- cheese with fruit or whole grain crackers
- whole or evaporated milk in cream soups, mashed potatoes or smoothies
- mango lassi made with mango, whole milk (3.25% MF), and plain yogurt (2.5% MF or higher)
- paneer and green peas

Children under 2 years old should be drinking breast milk or whole milk (3.25% MF). Don't give fortified soy beverages and lower fat milks (2%, 1%, skim) until after 2 years of age. If you have questions about the best milk choice for your child, ask your doctor, public health nurse, or dietitian.

Meat and Alternatives

- fish, poultry, bison/buffalo, lamb, pork, beef, or wild game
- chopped, hard-boiled eggs in salads or casseroles
- canned fish and crackers
- hamburgers with whole grain buns
- chicken, fish, or egg salad sandwiches
- beans and lentils in soup or casseroles
- hummus with naan, pita or raw veggies*
- tofu smoothies
- nuts and peanut/nut butters*



Healthy fats are important for children. Include 2 – 3 Tbsp (30 to 45 mL) of healthy fat each day. Examples are vegetable oils, soft non-hydrogenated margarines, mayonnaise, or salad dressings.

Quick cooking tips

- Add an extra egg to French toast, pancake batter or baked goods.
- Use peanut/nut butters* in stir-fries and baked goods.
- Wheat germ or ground flaxseed can be added to hot cereals and baked goods.
- Mix cottage cheese into casseroles and egg dishes like quiche or scrambled eggs.
- Add vegetable oil or soft non-hydrogenated margarine to cooked pasta, vegetables, and whole grain rice.

Snack ideas

Peanut butter dip and dippers

Blend ½ cup (125 mL) peanut butter* with 1 cup (250 mL) plain yogurt (2.5 % MF or higher). Serve with fresh fruit pieces.

Pancake power

Top dollar-sized whole grain, cold pancakes with applesauce and cinnamon.

Mini pizzas

Create a mini pizza by layering tomato sauce, vegetables and cheese on a whole grain English muffin or pita. Heat to melt cheese, and serve.

Banana bull's eye

Spread peanut butter* over a whole grain tortilla. Sprinkle with other ingredients such as coconut, dried fruit*, sunflower seeds*, sliced almonds*, or cereal.

Place a whole peeled banana at the end of the tortilla. Roll tortilla around the banana, making a tube shape. Slice into pieces and serve.

Tutti frutti parfait

Layer fresh or frozen fruit, granola*, and plain yogurt (2.5% MF or higher) in a small cup. Chill and serve.



Safety alert

Foods marked with an asterisk (*) may need to be given in a certain texture to match your child's ability to chew and swallow.

- Peanut/nut butter should be spread thinly on toast, bread, or crackers.
- Hard, raw vegetables can be cooked or grated.
- Round foods like grapes or cherries can be cut into quarters with seeds/pits removed.

To avoid choking, wait until a child is around 4 years old to give:

- dried fruits
- fish with bones
- popcorn
- snacks with toothpicks or skewers
- whole nuts and seeds

Less healthy foods like candies and gum are also choking risks and should be avoided.

Living well

- Enjoy physical activity with your child. Being active can make children hungrier for meals and snacks. It can also help to build strong bones and muscles. Make regular physical activity a fun part of your family life.



- Encourage children to play outdoors. Get the whole family involved. Try ball games, running games, skating, skipping, or playing at the park. Be creative and make up your own games.
- Give children time to be active. Limit screen time, like watching TV, and using computers or other electronics. Screen time is not recommended for children under 2 years of age.

For older children, limit screen time to:

- 2 – 4 years: less than 1 hour each day
 - 5 years and older: less than 2 hours each day
- Children need sleep and rest to grow well. Make sure your child gets enough. Children need about:
 - Age 1: 9 – 10 hours of sleep at night and a 1 – 2 hour nap once or twice a day
 - Age 3: 12 hours of sleep a night
 - Age 5 and older: 11 hours of sleep a night

Supplements

A 400 IU vitamin D supplement is the only supplement children in Alberta need each day.

Most children **don't** need a multivitamin or nutrition supplement drink for proper growth.

Speak to a dietitian or doctor before starting your child on any supplement.

For more information

Visit the websites below for healthy eating and active living resources:

- www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca
- www.raisingourhealthykids.com
- www.healthyeatingstartshere.ca
- Canada's Food Guide:
www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide

Contact your local health centre to learn about the other places to go for more help in your community.