Overweight and obesity in children have become the most prevalent nutritional problems in the United States. Since 1980, the rates have doubled for children and tripled for teenagers. More than 15% of all children 6 – 19 years of age are overweight. More than 23% of African American and Mexican American teens are overweight.

To get children interested in food and meals, involve your child in the kitchen, meal planning and grocery shopping. Having children involved in meal preparation will increase the likelihood of their trying new foods. They will be interested in trying food they have helped prepare. To cut down on constant snacking (grazing), eat meals around the kitchen or dining room table at set times.

When preparing family meals, think about cutting down on fat and sugar and increasing fruits, vegetables and fiber. Here are some suggestions for substitutions in meal planning and preparation:

### Substitutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of</th>
<th>Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Butter, margarine, cream cheese</td>
<td>Lite butter, margarine or cream cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayonnaise</td>
<td>Lowfat or fat-free mayonnaise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frying</td>
<td>Baking, sautéing, grilling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole milk</td>
<td>Skim or lowfat milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese</td>
<td>Lowfat and reduced-fat cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cookies</td>
<td>Animal crackers, vanilla wafers, graham crackers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice cream</td>
<td>Fruit bars, lowfat frozen yogurt, sugar-free Popsicles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White bread</td>
<td>Whole-grain bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soda, punch, fruit drinks, sport drinks</td>
<td>Water and 100% fruit juice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugared cereal</td>
<td>Whole-grain cereal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candy bars, chocolate</td>
<td>Dried fruit, fruit cocktail, cinnamon apple sauce</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Using the Food Guide Pyramid to feed your child

The Food Guide Pyramid way of eating can also be used to plan children’s meals. A child-sized serving is one-fourth to one-third of an adult serving size. Teenagers need full adult servings.

#### The pyramid food groups are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Servings</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bread, Cereal, Rice and Pasta Group</td>
<td>6 servings</td>
<td>2 to 3 tablespoons of pasta, rice, macaroni, ¼ to ½ slice of bread, 1 to 2 graham crackers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetable Group</td>
<td>3 servings</td>
<td>2 to 3 tablespoons of peas, corn, green beans, mashed potatoes, ½ cup of lettuce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit Group</td>
<td>2 servings</td>
<td>¼ cup blueberries or raspberries, ½ cup 100% citrus juice (orange), ½ medium orange, 4-6 medium strawberries, 1 medium tangerine, ½ cup watermelon pieces, ½ medium apple, banana, peach, pear or nectarine, 6-8 grapes, ½ cup cut-up fresh, canned or cooked fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk Group</td>
<td>2 servings</td>
<td>¼ to 1/3 nonfat or lowfat milk, yogurt, pudding made with milk, ½ to 1/3 oz of cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat Group</td>
<td>2 servings</td>
<td>½ to ¾ oz of meat, chicken, fish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another measure for serving food is to serve a tablespoon for each year of child’s life.

### Snack time

Snacks are important part of a child’s diet. It is important to understand that young children need more frequent meals than adults, and they need snacks between meals to support growth and development. A mid-morning and a mid-afternoon snack can increase child’s intake of dairy, fruits and vegetables.

When the snacks are planned, the child will most likely have a healthier snack. Also, having snacks will cut down on the feeling of hunger and less likelihood of overeating at mealtimes by going for second helpings.
Here are some ideas for healthy snacks:

milk
lowfat fruited yogurt
string cheese
instant pudding made with nonfat milk
frozen fruit bars
fresh fruit (peeled and cut up)
fruit juice
individual servings of applesauce or canned fruit
raisins
dried pineapple rings
cut-up vegetables with lowfat salad dressing
baby carrots
graham crackers
pretzels
dry cereal
vanilla wafers
animal crackers
soft pretzels
chicken taco
half of a grilled cheese sandwich
Breakfast:

Cereal and milk with fruit on the side make a nutritious and filling breakfast. It is fast, nutritious and easy to prepare. Just make sure the cereal is made from whole grains and does not have a lot of added sugar and salt. You can do that by checking the list of ingredients carefully. The FIRST ingredient on the label should be a whole grain.

Cereals Made from Whole Grains
Cheerios
Wheat Chex
Grape Nuts
Healthy Choice Toasted Brown Sugar Squares
Just Right with Fruit & Nuts
Kashi
Raisin Squares Mini-Wheats
Bite-Size Frosted Mini-Wheats
Frosted Mini-Wheats
Muesli
Golden Wheat Nutri-Grain
Almond-Raisin Nutri-Grain
Almond Oatmeal Crisp
Apple Cinnamon Oatmeal Crisp
Raisin Oatmeal Crisp
Oatmeal Squares
Puffed Wheat
Shredded Wheat
Shredded Wheat & Bran
Frosted Shredded Wheat
Spoon Size Shredded Wheat
Crispy 'n' Raisins Wheaties

All Bran or High Bran Cereals
100% Bran
Bran Buds All Bran
Extra Fiber All-Bran
Original All-Bran
Bran Flakes
Multi-Bran Chex
Complete Wheat Bran Flakes
Complete Oat Bran Flakes
Fiber One
Oat Bran
Oat Bran Flakes
Oat Bran Flakes with Raisins
Organic Bran with Raisins
Raisin Bran
Raisin Bran Flakes
Whole Grain Wheat Raisin Bran
Raisin Bran Total

References:

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2. Experimental Obesity
3. Functional Foods
4. Health and Performance Enhancement
5. Nutrition and Chronic Diseases

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