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>
The MyPyramid 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. Teen-agers need full adult servings.

### The MyPyramid food groups are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Group</th>
<th>Ages 3-6 Years*</th>
<th>Ages 6-9 Years*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bread, Cereal, Rice and Pasta Group</td>
<td>3-7 servings 1/2 slice 1/4 cup 1/2 cup dry cereal</td>
<td>3/4 slice 1/3 cup 3/4 cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetable Group</td>
<td>2-6 servings 1/4 cup cooked vegetable 1/2 cup raw vegetable 1/4 cup vegetable juice</td>
<td>1/3 cup cooked vegetable 3/4 cup raw vegetable 1/3 cup vegetable juice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit Group</td>
<td>2-4 servings 1/4 cup fresh, frozen or canned 1/2 cup medium fruit 1/4 cup fruit juice 2 tbsp dried fruit</td>
<td>1/3 cup fresh, frozen or canned 3/4 cup medium fruit 1/3 cup fruit juice 3 tbsp dried fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk Group</td>
<td>4-6 servings 1/2 cup milk 3/4 oz. natural cheese 1 oz. lowfat or fat-free processed cheese</td>
<td>3/4 cup milk 1 oz. natural cheese 1 1/2 oz. lowfat or fat-free processed cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat Group</td>
<td>2-5 servings 1/2 oz. lean meat 1/2 egg 1 1/2 tsp peanut butter 2 tbsp dry beans 1/4 cup nuts or seeds</td>
<td>3/4 oz. lean meat 3/4 egg 2 tsp peanut butter 3 tbsp dry beans 5-6 tbsp nuts or seeds</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 a 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:

The Pennington Biomedical Research Center is a world-renowned nutrition research center.

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

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Division of Education
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