

When your child does not eat meat

Many children find meat challenging to eat. Some children may not like the taste. Others may find meat too dry and hard to chew.



Meat and meat alternatives are important!

They are a source of protein, iron and other nutrients. Protein helps build and repair body tissues and iron helps make healthy blood.

If your child is vegetarian or does not like to eat meat (e.g., beef, pork, goat), chicken, turkey or fish, offer alternatives such as eggs, peanut butter, tofu, beans, lentils, nuts, seeds and soy-based meat substitutes. These foods have similar nutrients and will help your child meet their nutritional needs.

Adults sometimes think children aren't eating enough meat and alternatives even if they are. Children don't need large amounts of meat.

Canada's Food Guide recommends children aged two to eight years old have one Food Guide Serving of Meat and Alternatives each day.

One Food Guide Serving is equal to:

- ½ cup (75 g) cooked fish, shellfish, poultry or lean meat
- 2 eggs
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) peanut butter
- ¾ cup (150 g) tofu
- ¾ cup (175 mL) cooked legumes (beans, peas, lentils, edamame)
- ¼ cup (60 mL) nuts and seeds







Good to know

Since children's stomachs are small, it's best to divide one Food Guide Serving into smaller servings throughout the day.

Tips on preparing meats so they are easier to eat

- Serve tender, juicy meats because they are easier to chew
- Cut meat into ½ to 1 centimetre (¼ inch) bite-sized pieces
- Simmer meats in broth for added flavour and moisture
- Chop, grind or purée meat or poultry, and add to soups, casseroles, chili and sauces
- Spread puréed meat on toast or crackers
- Make mini meat patties out of lean ground meat and serve in a bun
- Roll up small pieces of meat in a soft tortilla or stuff into a pita
- Offer meat with a dip such as ketchup, mustard, plum sauce or ranch dressing

Ideas for serving eggs, fish, legumes, tofu and nut butter

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| <p>Eggs</p>  | <p>Scrambled eggs Serve with ketchup, or roll up scrambled eggs in a soft tortilla.</p> | <p>Fried egg sandwich Place a fried egg and a slice of cheese in a hamburger bun or English muffin.</p> | <p>French toast Soak sliced bread in milk and egg. Fry until golden brown. Cut into pieces or long strips. Serve with applesauce or yogurt to dip.</p> | <p>Hard cooked egg Serve warm or cold. Slice a hard cooked egg and put slices on crackers.</p> | <p>Egg salad (chopped hard cooked egg and small amount of mayonnaise) Spread egg salad on top of bread, bagel, English muffin, pita or tortilla.</p> |
| <p>Fish (When using canned tuna, choose light canned tuna instead of white canned tuna)</p>  | <p>Fish melt Mix a can of salmon or tuna with a small amount of mayonnaise and grated cheese. Spread on top of an open-face bagel, English muffin or toast. Broil in the oven for 1-2 minutes.</p> | <p>Fish burger Mix a can of salmon or tuna with a small amount of mayonnaise. Spread on a hamburger bun. Top with lettuce, a slice of tomato and/or cheese.</p> | <p>Fish fingers Dip pieces of white fish (e.g., sole, halibut, tilapia) in milk and then roll in breadcrumbs, corn flake crumbs or crushed crackers (seasonings can be added for additional flavour if desired). Place on a baking sheet and bake in the oven at 450°F for about 10-12 minutes. Serve with ketchup or plum sauce to dip.</p> | <p>Fish cakes Mix together 1 can of salmon (drained), ¾ cup mashed potato and one egg yolk. With your hands, form mixture into 8 flat cakes. Using 1 tbsp of flour, sprinkle each cake with flour and then brush with one egg white (that has been beaten). Roll cakes in breadcrumbs and place on greased baking sheet. Bake at 375°F for about 15 minutes or until golden brown. Serve with ketchup or ranch dressing to dip.</p> | |
| <p>Legumes (e.g., kidney, white, black or navy beans, chickpeas, lentils, edamame)</p>  | <p>Tomato or cheese legume sauce Blend or purée cooked or canned legumes. Add them to tomato or cheese sauces. Use these sauces on noodles and cooked vegetables or as a dip for breads.</p> | <p>Hummus Serve hummus as a dip for pita or vegetables or spread inside a sandwich.</p> | <p>Add cooked or canned kidney beans, black beans or lentils to homemade or store-bought chili, stews, soup, casseroles or pasta dishes.</p> | <p>Edamame (young, green soybeans) Add 1 cup of edamame to ½ cup of boiling water. Cover and simmer for 4 minutes. Drain, sprinkle with Parmesan cheese and serve immediately.</p>  <p>Add shelled edamame to stir fries, soups, casseroles and salads.</p> <p>Note: Edamame can be purchased shelled or unshelled in the frozen foods section of the grocery store. Depending on your child's age, they may enjoy squeezing the cooked beans from the pods into their mouth with their fingers.</p> | |
| <p>Tofu</p>  | <p>Add crumbled firm tofu to soup, pasta sauce, stir fries, stews, casseroles, chili or lasagne.</p> | <p>Tofu smoothie In a blender, mix soft tofu with milk or fortified soy beverage, and fresh or frozen fruit. Blend until smooth to make a fruity shake.</p> | <p>Tofu scrambled eggs Melt a small amount of margarine or oil in a frying pan. Add firm tofu and mash. Sauté until lightly browned. Add beaten eggs and scramble while cooking.</p> | <p>Breaded tofu cubes Combine ¼ cup breadcrumbs, and salt and pepper to taste on a plate. In a bowl mix 2 tbsp milk and 1 egg. Dip cubed pieces of firm tofu in milk mixture and then roll in bread crumbs. Place on greased baking sheet and bake at 400°F for 20-30 minutes. Turn once halfway through cooking. Serve with ketchup or plum sauce to dip.</p> | |
| <p>Nut Butter (e.g., peanut butter)</p>  | <p>Banana dog Spread nut butter (e.g., peanut butter, almond butter) on a hot dog bun and top with a banana.</p> | | <p>Ants on a log Spread nut butter on celery sticks and top with raisins.</p> | <p>Banana bites Spread nut butter on a tortilla and roll up a banana into the tortilla. Cut the roll into slices.</p> | |