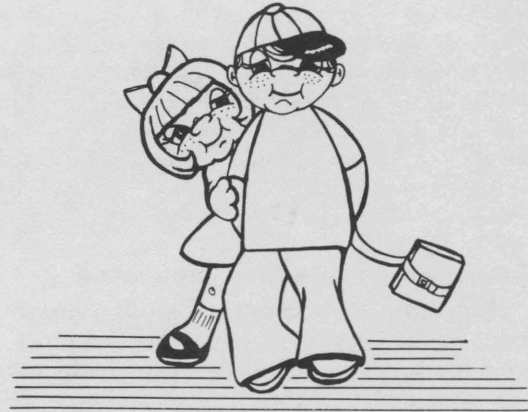


FACT SHEET

L-938

FEEDING THE SCHOOL-AGE CHILD

Sally S. Coble*



School years are nutritionally important for the child. The child is exposed to new food patterns when he begins eating meals away from home. Group acceptance becomes increasingly important, and food preferences may be influenced by the group to which a child belongs.

Outwardly, the child between 6 and 12 is growing slowly. However, the child should be storing adequate nutrients for the period of rapid growth during adolescence. A well-balanced and adequate diet is essential during the school years.

Uneven Growth

The child between 6 and 10 grows at a relatively slow, steady pace. Following this period, there is an accelerated growth spurt. For girls, growth usually becomes more rapid around 10 to 11; for boys, the growth spurt begins later, about 13 to 15.

An adequate diet is needed throughout the school years to provide building materials for growth and energy for vigorous physical activity. Nutrients, especially protein, are needed to help maintain resistance to infection. The child is in contact with increasingly more persons and chances of exposure to infection are greater. It is also important that the child develop adequate stores of nutrients for the growth and stresses of adolescence.

Nutrient needs are usually the same for boys and girls until the age of 9 years. Then, boys usually need more food than girls because boys generally are more active and have greater muscle development.

A Guide to Food Needs

During the school years, a child needs the same foods as adults but in different amounts. More of the

same foods eaten during the preschool years are needed to supply additional nutrients and calories for the growing child. The size of servings gradually increases during the elementary school years to meet the needs of growing bodies.

A good guide to follow in planning the child's meals as well as the family's meals is the Daily Food Guide. This guide is composed of four food groups:

Food Group	Foods Included	Value in Diet
MILK GROUP	milk cheese ice cream	Supplies calcium for strong bones and teeth.
MEAT GROUP	meat poultry fish eggs dry beans or peas	Supplies protein which helps build strong, healthy muscles, promotes growth, and helps resist infection.
FRUIT AND VEGETABLE GROUP	citrus fruits dark green and yellow vegetables others	Supplies vitamin C necessary for healthy tissues. Supplies vitamin A for maintaining healthy skin and good eyesight.
BREAD AND CEREAL GROUP	bread cereals noodles	Supplies energy. Enriched products supply iron which helps maintain healthy blood. They also supply the B-vitamins which function in maintaining a good digestive tract and help the body use energy from food.

The amounts of food recommended for school-age children are listed on the following page:

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Food	Age 6-9	Age 10-12
Milk	2-3 cups	3-4 cups
Eggs	1	1
Meat, fish, poultry	2-3 ounces	3-4 ounces
Potatoes	1 small	1 medium
Vegetables (green leafy or yellow)	¼ cup	½ cup
Other vegetable	¼ cup	½ cup
Fruit for vitamin C	1 medium	1 medium
Other fruit	1 medium	1 medium
Cereal	½ cup	¾ cup
Bread	3 slices	3 slices
Butter/margarine		
Additional foods to meet energy needs.		

School Lunch — A New Experience

Eating lunch away from home is a new development in the day's meal schedule. The lunch should continue to be an adequate meal whether the child eats it at home, carries it from home or buys it at school.

The National School Lunch Program reaches most public schools. This program helps provide nutritious meals for children. This lunch supplies approximately one-third of the day's nutritional needs. A Type A lunch must contain as a minimum:

- 1 cup whole milk
- 2 ounces protein food
- 1¾ cup serving fruits and/or vegetables
- 1 slice enriched bread
- 2 teaspoons butter/fortified margarine

At school, the child may come in contact with food patterns different from those accustomed to at home. The child also learns that certain foods are acceptable among his friends and others may not be acceptable. He may find different food patterns because of differences in cultural food habits. A child may refuse a food at home if it is not accepted among his peer

group. At the same time, the school-age child is more willing to try new foods within his group than he would try alone.

Breakfast — Never to be Skipped

Many school children are in a hurry and meals may become rushed or irregular. It is best if the child has a fairly routine schedule for meals.

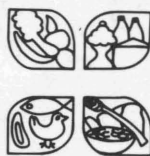
Breakfast, especially, is often skipped or, if eaten, it may be inadequate. However, breakfast is probably the most important meal of the day. Breakfast really means "breaking a fast" as the body has been without food for 12 hours or more. Studies have been conducted on the effect of breakfast on school-age children. These studies indicate that children who eat breakfast make sharper decisions, become less tired and work and play longer than children who omit breakfast. Children perform better in school if they eat a good breakfast.

A good breakfast furnishes about one-fourth of the day's intake of calories and nutrients. It should contain a source of vitamin C (citrus fruit), a protein food, milk and sufficient other food to supply energy. Thus, a glass of juice, egg, milk and toast would be a good breakfast for a school-age child. Or, cereal with fruit and milk could supply needed nutrients.

The Healthiest Age

School age is generally considered to be the healthiest time of life. School children have relatively few dislikes for food, except possibly for some vegetables which may not be eaten in sufficient amounts. School-age children usually have good appetites, especially after age 10 when they begin to grow more rapidly.

Parents should serve as examples of good eating habits, as school-age children still look to adults for guidance. Food habits that will last throughout life are being formed during these years.



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