Kids Cart Smart Food Choices
At Home, Shopping, and Eating Out
Ann A. Hertzler and Karen DeBord*

Objectives

- To recognize, name, and select a variety of foods from the Food Guide Pyramid daily.
- To identify foods by nutrient category.
- To select nutritious food in the grocery.
- To identify foods high in fat, sugar, and sodium.

Nutrients can be taught to young children in a variety of ways using the nutrient alphabet, symbols, pictures, and actual food. Make alphabet labels. Have children name symbols, classify nutrients, and recognize foods.

No one food contains all nutrients needed for growth and health. Food guides such as the Food Guide Pyramid translate the latest scientific standards into food choices. Current guidelines are to eat a variety of foods from the five groups and use fats/oils/sweets sparingly.

**Food Guide Pyramid**

*Key Fat (naturally occurring) & *Sugars (added) 
These symbols show fats, oils, and added sugars in food

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fats, Oils, &amp; Sweets</th>
<th>Use Sparingly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milk, Yogurt, &amp; Cheese Group</td>
<td>2-3 Servings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetable Group</td>
<td>3-5 Servings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B I</td>
<td>A Ca B</td>
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**Nutrient Symbols**

| Vitamin A | A |
| Vitamin B | B |
| Vitamin C | C |
| Iron | I |
| Calcium | Ca |
| Protein | P |
| Fat | F |
| Sweets | S |

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Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Food Identification
(Grocery—TV—Eating Out)

3 years. Naming and Identifying Game.

▲ Name foods by color, shape, texture, and taste.

Colors
red: beets
yellow: corn
green: spinach
white: potato

Textures
rough: orange
soft: mashed potatoes
smooth: banana
hard: nuts, carrot

Shapes
square: bread
pear: pear
round: apple, orange
long: greenbeans

Taste
sweet: sugar
sour: lemon
bitter: tea
salty: salt

3-5 years. Classify basic foods by their color, shape, and texture (feel).

▲ Foods can be grouped in many ways. Try grouping food models, cutouts, or real foods with the children: by food groups, nutrients, food for guests, for holidays, for baby, or for sickness.
▲ Count 5 fruits and vegetables you ate today.

3-6 years. Comprehension game: guess foods by color, shapes, and feel.

▲ What food is white inside and brown outside?
▲ What fruit is round and red?
▲ I see something on your plate that is green. What is it? What else do you see that is green?
▲ Name green foods.
▲ What food group does the food belong in? or What foods are in the milk group?
▲ Make a mystery box: ask children to feel inside. What is the shape? How does it feel? What is the food?

4-6 years. Classify foods by nutrients.

Classify foods and nutrients that work with protein to build and keep the body healthy, that build bones and teeth (calcium); blood (iron); skin/eyes, (Vitamin A/B carotene and Vitamin C). (See Virginia Cooperative Extension Publication 348-371, Iron Check List and Calcium Check List).

Protein
Foods containing protein are found in 3 of the 5 Food Guide Pyramid groups.
▲ Name 1 protein food you eat each day.

Calcium
Everyone (children, parents, grandparents) needs 2 calcium foods every day.
▲ What foods are high in calcium?
  milk cheese
  yogurt ice cream
▲ What calcium foods do you eat daily at meals? at snacks?
▲ Count 5 calcium foods you ate today.
▲ Review the day’s menu for calcium foods.

Iron
Everyone needs iron foods each day.
▲ What iron foods do you eat each day?
  vegetables breads
  cereals meats
▲ Count how many iron foods you eat daily. -weekly.

Vitamin A/Beta carotene & Vitamin C
Beta carotene, a form of vitamin A, is found in dark green (spinach, broccoli, collards; mustard, turnip, or beet greens) and orange fruits and vegetables (carrots, cantaloupe, apricots, sweet potatoes). Vitamin C foods are citrus, cabbage, greens, melons, tomatoes, and berries.
▲ Can you name vitamin A/C foods you eat each day?
▲ Plan a food tasting, cutting, and peeling activity using specific nutrients.

Creative play—prop box—farmer
fruits, vegetables; tools (shovel, rake, hoe); hat, overalls; watering can; tractor (tricycle, wagon)
Food Shopping

3 years. Coin exchange.

▲ Give the child large tokens or large buttons to spend in a dramatic play grocery store; or make Food Group Bucks to denote food groups. Beginning developmental levels are trading 1 Food Group Buck or token or coin for 1 item; more advanced levels use elementary concepts of play money and making change (see Virginia Cooperative Extension Publication 348-077, Kids, Food, and Money).
▲ Who pays for food?
▲ Where do you get money to pay for food?

3-5 years. Matching cue cards.

▲ In the grocery store or in the dramatic play area, give children food pictures for cue card shopping lists. When the first item is chosen, give the child another cue (picture). Make magnet holders or refrigerator pockets in which to keep shopping “cue” cards.
▲ What food is this picture? Use your cue card to find this food in the grocery store.

3-5 years. Name foods in the grocery store (or grocery play area).

▲ Children can read labels for colors and shape of pictures, logos, and package shapes.
▲ What fresh foods do you see?
▲ Name the food in the package.
▲ How do you know what is in the package?

3-5 years. Name foods on TV.

▲ Tape clips of TV ads to view with children. (See Virginia Cooperative Extension Publication 348-008, Kids, Food, and Television).
▲ What foods are advertised on TV?
▲ What nutrients are in these foods?
▲ What foods do you see?

4-6 years. Classify TV messages.

▲ Use TV clips to talk about feelings provoked by ads.
▲ What do TV messages mean to you?
▲ What people are in the TV message?
▲ What are they doing?
▲ What messages or meanings are for taste? for health? for fun?

Rewards

4-6 years. Comprehension: what about rewards?

▲ Are rewards given for special behavior? for being the best?
▲ Should you be rewarded for helping in the kitchen? for cleaning your plate?
▲ What are some rewards which are given? money? toys? sweets (candy)? fats (cookies)?
▲ What other ways can you say “thank you” for a good job?
Testing for Fat, Sugar, and Salt

Everyone needs some fat every day. But too much fat adds extra calories for weight or for heart problems.

3 years. Name fats, sweets, and salty foods.

▲ Name fats you eat (spreads, salad dressings).
▲ Name sweets you eat (table sugar, jam/jelly, candy, etc.).
▲ Name salty foods you eat.

3-5 years. Classification: taste-test differences.

▲ Learn how to distinguish the flavor and feel of fat, sugar, and sodium. Taste-test and compare snack chips, crackers, and dip. Sodium in products disguises sugar so it is harder to detect sweet and salty taste.
▲ Use pictures or real foods to classify foods by fat, sugar, and salt taste.
▲ How can you tell if a food contains... sugar?
cereal with/without sugar
seasoning substitutes
cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg

sodium?
packaged, canned foods
seasoning substitute
lemon

fat?
skim/regular milk
low-high fat cheese
low-high fat hotdogs

4-6 years. Comprehension: the fat ring test.

▲ Can you see fat on paper?
on plate?
on pans?
▲ Put a drop of fat on a piece of brown paper bag or paper towel; put a drop of water next to it. Dry the towel near heat from a radiator or sunny window. The water drop disappears. The fat ring does not go away. Look for fat rings on plates or in pans.

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<tr>
<th>Water</th>
<th>Oil</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before</td>
<td>After</td>
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▲ Test foods in the pyramid and in different forms to discover which foods leave fat rings.
apple slice/salad rolls
egg white/yolk potato slice/chip/fries
mayonnaise cake crackers croissants
fried/baked food lemon juice unsweetened chocolate bread biscuit popcorn with/without butter sour cream
creamy cheese cheese with/without fat

Creative play—prop box—consumer specialist/food buyer

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<tr>
<th>telephone</th>
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<tr>
<td>foods to test or food models</td>
<td>pencils</td>
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<tr>
<td>nutrition pamphlets</td>
<td>forms</td>
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