

Family Education Sheet

High-Calorie Eating

Sometimes children may need more calories than usual to help maintain their weight or to help them gain weight. This family education sheet offers a list of tips and foods that can help increase your child's calorie intake throughout the day.

Tips for feeding your child

- Offer your child meals and snacks every 2–3 hours.** Aim for 3 meals and 2–3 snacks a day at planned times. It will help with your child's appetite and interest at meal and snack time if you limit your child's "grazing" or constant snacking on food or caloric drinks (like milk) in between meals and snacks.
- Keep an eye on when and how much your child eats. There might be a time of day when your child's appetite is best.** Plan to regularly offer higher-calorie foods around this time of day.
- Treat snacks like mini-meals.** Always include a protein and fat. Examples are cheese with crackers, yogurt with berries or peanut butter with apple slices.
- Offer your child high-calorie drinks,** like whole milk, drinkable whole milk yogurt, shakes, smoothies or high-calorie dairy alternatives, like fortified soy milk or pea protein milk. Be sure to offer these drinks **toward the end of the meal** to avoid filling your child's stomach and replacing food.

High-calorie food examples

Powdered whole milk 40calories/Tbsp

Stir into mashed potatoes, soups, eggs, ground meats, cooked cereals, puddings, yogurt, shakes, smoothies, creamy sauces, canned soups and other foods with milk.

Granola 30 calories/Tbsp

Add to cereals, yogurt and ice cream. Combine with mixed nuts. Makes a great snack for school!

Hummus 30 calories/Tbsp

Spread on crackers, wraps or sandwiches, or use as a dip with chips, pretzels and vegetables.

Shredded coconut 30 calories/Tbsp

Top hot or cold cereals and granola. Add to trail mix. Bake into granola bars, quick breads and muffins.

Sour cream 30 calories/Tbsp

Add to potatoes, beans, squash and carrots. Use to make a dip or dressing. Add to sauces/gravies and casseroles.



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Butter, margarine, oil, ghee 45 calories/tsp

Add to soups, gravies/sauces, mashed potatoes, cooked cereals, vegetables, rice and pasta. Spread on crackers, breads, muffins and sandwiches.

Cream cheese 50 calories/Tbsp

Spread on toast, crackers, bagels, breads, muffins and fruits. Try it on a sandwich with jelly or peanut butter. Add to mashed potatoes and macaroni and cheese.

Heavy cream 50 calories/Tbsp

Add to hot chocolate, cooked cereals, mashed potatoes, desserts, eggs, cream soups, milk (in a cup to drink or in a bowl of cereal), shakes and smoothies.

Cooked meats/poultry/ fish 50–75 calories/ounce

Add cooked or diced meats, poultry, shrimp or fish to salads, soups, casseroles, cooked noodles and sauces.

Canned coconut milk/cream 55 - 90 calories/ounce

Add to soups, curries, sauces and cooked cereals. Blend into shakes and smoothies. Blend with fruit and pour into popsicle molds for a frozen treat.

Nuts/seeds 50–100 calories/Tbsp

Add to hot or cold cereals, stir-fried meats and vegetables, stuffing, baked goods, salads, granola, ice cream or just eat plain as a snack.

Note: Not recommended for children under age 3.

Avocado 80 calories for 1/4 avocado

Add sliced to sandwiches, quesadillas, tacos and wraps. Mash and spread on toast, crackers or sandwiches.

Tahini 90 calories/Tbsp

Add to salad dressings, marinades and dips. Blend into shakes and smoothies. Bake into quick breads and muffins.

Cheese 100 calories/ounce

Melt cheese on vegetables, casseroles, fish, meats, eggs, pasta and rice. Add slices of cheese to crackers, breads and sandwiches. Mix into mashed potatoes and add extra when making macaroni and cheese.

Nut and seed butters 100 calories/Tbsp

Spread on toast, bread, crackers, cookies, vegetables like carrots or celery or fruits such as apples or bananas. Add to yogurt, ice cream, cooked cereals, shakes and smoothies. Try sunflower seed butter or soy nut butter as a peanut and tree nut alternative.

Mayonnaise 100 calories/Tbsp

Mix into salad dressings and dips. Use on sandwiches, wraps, hamburgers and chicken sandwiches.

Instant breakfast powder 130 calories/packet

Add to milk, shakes and smoothies. Bake into quick breads and muffins. Mix into puddings and yogurts.

Snack ideas

- English muffin or bagel with mashed avocado, hummus, melted cheese, cream cheese or nut/seed butter
- Chicken, tuna or egg salad made with full-fat mayonnaise and/or sour cream
- Nachos made with whole grain tortilla chips, ground beef or beans, topped with cheese, sour cream and avocado
- Oatmeal made with whole milk and cream, topped with shredded coconut, nuts, seeds or nut/seed butters
- Whole milk yogurt topped with nuts, seeds and/or granola
- Granola bar spread with nut/seed butter or whole milk yogurt
- Banana or apple dipped in whole milk yogurt or spread with nut/seed butter. Combine nut/seed butter, whole milk yogurt and honey to make a dip for fruit and vegetables.
- Milkshakes or smoothies made with blended ice cream, whole milk, heavy cream, coconut cream, instant breakfast powder, nut/seed butter or commercial oral supplements
- Blend coconut cream or heavy cream and frozen fruit. Pour into a popsicle mold and let freeze for a frozen treat.
- Muffins and quick breads like banana bread topped with butter, cream cheese or nut/seed butter
- Whole milk ice cream topped with nuts or nut/seed butters and shredded coconut
- Crackers with cheese, nut/seed butters, mashed avocado or hummus
- Scrambled eggs mixed with heavy cream and cheese, cooked in butter, margarine, ghee or oil

Contact us

- If you'd like to schedule an appointment with a registered dietitian, call the Center for Nutrition at 617-355-4677 or email at nutritiondept@childrens.harvard.edu.
- Please speak with your registered dietitian or a member of your child's care team if you have any other questions or concerns.

Note: This Family Education Sheet is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses and treatment, talk with your doctor and/or dietitian.