

Preschoolers 3-5 Years



Nourishing Growing Kids

The preschool years are a critical window for growth, development and establishing lifelong eating patterns. Milk and other nutrient-dense dairy foods can play a valuable role in helping young children meet key nutrient needs. In fact, leading health experts agree water and plain milk are the only recommended beverages for children 1 to 5 years of age. Plant-based alternatives are not recommended due to their wide variability in nutrient content, limited evidence of bioavailability and impact on diet quality and health outcomes. The exception would be unsweetened, fortified soy milk if a child is allergic to dairy milk or is in a family that has made specific dietary choices.¹



Dairy's Unique Contributions

Dairy foods like milk, yogurt and cheese are fundamental to good nutrition.

Milk, in particular, provides a powerful package of 13 essential nutrients.



Calcium, phosphorus and vitamin D help build and maintain strong bones and teeth.



The high-quality protein found in dairy foods helps build and repair muscles.



The package of B vitamins helps convert food to fuel.

Special Considerations



It is important for adults to role model healthy eating behaviors for children. One easy way to help kids build healthy habits is to serve nutrient-rich milk at meals and water in between for hydration.

Recommended Daily Dairy Servings²⁻⁴



2 - 2 ½ servings

See backside for what counts as a serving of dairy. There are a variety of ways to enjoy milk, cheese and yogurt to meet the recommended daily servings.





Try this Recipe



Fruit & Yogurt Ice Pops

Makes 6 servings

Ingredients:

- 3 cups frozen raspberries, blueberries and/or strawberries
- 3 cups yogurt

Instructions:

- Place ½ cup of fruit in paper cup.
- Place ½ cup yogurt into cups of fruit.
- Stir each cup with spoon or wooden stick and place in center of cup.
- Freeze until firm.

What Counts as a Serving of Dairy?

	Milk: 1 cup
	Lactose-free Milk: 1 cup
	Yogurt: ¾ cup
	Kefir: 1 cup
	American Cheese: 1 oz
	Shredded Cheese: ¼ cup
	Hard Cheese: 1 oz
	Ricotta Cheese: ¼ cup
	Cottage Cheese: ½ cup
	Fortified Dairy Alternatives: 1 cup

Serving sizes are based on the Daily Servings by Calorie Level supplement to the 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Reference Amounts Customarily Consumed as defined by the Food and Drug Administration.



Make Every Bite & Sip Count



Parents or caregivers and their littles can enjoy a bowl of oatmeal with milk or build their own fruit, whole grain cereal and yogurt parfaits together in the mornings. It's a nutritious start to the day and can help jump start healthy habits to last a lifetime.



Let preschoolers lend a hand with meal prep. This can help little ones have a say in mealtime, feel more comfortable trying new foods and make healthy eating fun. Make whole grain pita pizzas together by decorating them with tomato sauce, mozzarella cheese and colorful veggies or cool off after a day of play with fruit & yogurt ice pops.

Sources

1. Lott M, Callahan E, Welker Duffy E, et al. Healthy beverage consumption in early childhood: Recommendations from key national health and nutrition organizations. Healthy Eating Research. September 2019. Accessed at <https://healthyeatingresearch.org/research/consensus-statement-healthy-beverage-consumption-in-early-childhood-recommendations-from-key-national-health-and-nutrition-organizations/>
2. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025-2030: Daily Servings by Calorie Level. <https://cdn.realfood.gov/Daily%20Serving%20Sizes.pdf>
3. Child and Adult Care Food Program: Aligning Dietary Guidance for All, Institute of Medicine, The National Academies Press, 2011, <https://www.nationalacademies.org/read/12959/chapter/5#52>
4. Energy In: Recommended Food & Drink Amounts for Children, HealthyChildren.org, American Academy of Pediatrics, last updated Jan. 13, 2020. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Energy-In-Recommended-Food-Drink-Amounts-for-Children.aspx>



Milk, yogurt and cheese are nutrient-dense foods that can help nourish people throughout life. Dairy foods, including lactose-free varieties, are nutritious and accessible options that can help fill nutrient gaps and contribute to healthy eating patterns. To learn more about how dairy foods help people thrive across the lifespan, visit [USDairy.com](https://usdairy.com).