

# The Family Life Cycle - The Very Young

## Summary

Individual food choices and nutritional needs within the framework of the Family Life Cycle model.

## Materials

- Any good comprehensive food and nutrition textbook.
- *Food for Today*  
by Kowtaluk, 2006.
- "*Childhood Obesity*" in *UT Health: Utah's Healthy Lifestyle Magazine*  
, April 2006.
- *Uncommon Therapy*  
by Jay Haley (1973).
- *The Changing Family Life Cycle: a Framework for Therapy*  
second edition, edited by Betty Carter and Monica McGoldrick (1989).
- *Kids In The Kitchen*  
by JoAnn Mortensen, Utah State University Extension Service.
- *Starting Healthy Eating Habits*  
by Oregon State University Extension Service.  
Healthy Snacks for Children & Cooking for Kids by Utah State Extension Service.

## Background for Teachers

Good family meal planning must respond to the different nutritional needs of individual members who are at different stages of the Family Life Cycle.

### **PRESCHOOL CHILDREN**

Candy, sweets, and soft drinks need to be limited in a preschool child's diet if needed nutrients are to be ingested so that more nutrient rich foods can be used to satisfy hunger.

After the age of one, a child's growth rate slows and with it, the appetite; but all essential nutrients are still needed in adequate amounts. In early childhood the size, rather than the age of the child, should determine the amounts of food eaten. Because children have small stomachs and short attention spans, they often do best with smaller, more frequent meals. Don't forget that everyone, even small children, need to begin everyday with a good breakfast.

Children develop tastes for certain foods at an early age, but a huge predictor of food preferences comes from what a child's parents choose to eat for both snacks and at mealtime. Pre-school aged children love finger foods, foods they can feed themselves, and foods that have interesting colors and textures. Because the eating habits and attitudes children learn are likely to last a lifetime, it is important to start healthy eating habits early.

Because there are so many different nutritious foods, it's easy to find other foods with the needed nutrients when a child doesn't like or won't eat certain foods. Forcing children to eat foods they don't like is never a good idea. With childhood obesity on the rise, it's especially important to establish healthy eating habits early in life. Children who are overweight are at greater risk of becoming overweight adults. Here are some suggestions adults find helpful in encouraging young children to eat a variety of healthy foods--especially new foods:

Group strategies work wonders. Let the child invite a friend or two to lunch. You'll be amazed how much they eat when their friends are digging in.

When introducing a new food, refer to it as grown-up food. Serve it to the child only if he or she requests it after seeing how much you enjoy it.

Serve young children's meals on their own small-sized dishes if they prefer. Give them tiny

servings so they can have the satisfaction of eating everything on the plate.

Serve finger foods often. A buffet or a make-your-own sandwich setup also makes a hit. Children feel very grown-up when allowed to choose from a variety of foods they'll eat.

Unorthodox meal situations are always children-pleasers whether it's lunch from a bucket in the tree house, a picnic in front of the fireplace, or a knapsack in the park. Incidentally, a giant beach towel is the perfect indoor picnic tablecloth.

Encourage the child's interest in food preparation--even if his/her help is a hindrance at first.

Children will usually eat the foods they have helped prepare. Another suggestion is to not limit children based on what they reject today. Encourage children as they grow up and remember to tell them that their food preferences may change. Leave an opening for them to like something they now don't.

Children usually prefer raw vegetables to cooked. Don't make a big issue of vegetable eating.

Just be sure children are exposed to a wide variety of foods. As they grow, they'll probably accept more of the foods, like vegetables, that adults in their family like.

Don't give up on vegetables all together. Young children still need the nutrients found in vegetables. Get creative. Serving soups and spaghetti with finely chopped vegetables is one way to incorporate vegetables into a diet for the young.

Planting a garden and letting the child help care for the vegetables can encourage the eating of different varieties. This is true even if it is a tomato plant in a bucket.

Avoid making dessert a reward for vegetable eating. This places undue emphasis on the sweet foods and makes the vegetable the villain forever.

Above all, try to keep meals from being pitched battles. Relax and let mealtime be a time for everyone to enjoy.

Finally, use snacks to improve food habits. Snacks can be the means by which vitamin C is added to the diet of the child who refused juice for breakfast, or snacks can be the protein for the child who is too tired or too excited at dinnertime to eat a serving of meat. Snacks also can be the means by which fast growing youngsters are offered urgently needed calories in the nutritious forms needed for growth. Furthermore, snacks may be the most successful way to introduce new foods to an individual.

### **SOME CHILDREN NEED SNACKS**

Some children have the capacity to go easily from one meal to the next without hunger. Others actually experience real hunger within two to three hours after eating, especially if they are growing rapidly. If no nutritious snack is offered, this hunger may eventually be satisfied by soft drinks, candy, or other non-nutritious food. Timing is important; a snack should be offered when children are hungry but not so close to mealtime that it spoils their appetites for the next meal.

### **PLANNING HELPS**

Planning means deciding which of the nutrients you want a particular snack to add to a diet, and when it is the most advantageous time to offer that snack. Planning also means considering your time and nerves. If fixing something special is going to leave you irritated and frustrated if it isn't eaten, why not plan simple foods which may be put away if not eaten. Merely having a snack spot in the refrigerator or a corner in the cupboard may be the answer.

### **SNACKS CAN SUPPLEMENT MEALS**

To add protein: Offer yogurt, hard-cooked eggs, chunks of tuna, pieces of cheese or slices of leftover roast that can be eaten with fingers. Stuff celery sticks with peanut butter, cheese spread, or with tuna and mayonnaise. Because of potential food allergies, some authorities recommend not introducing peanut butter to the diet until a child is 3 years old. You should especially be careful if your child has other food allergies or a family history of food allergies. For the same reason, some avoid introducing eggs until age 2. ( [www.keepkidshealthy.com](http://www.keepkidshealthy.com))

To add vitamin C: Strawberries, melons, tomatoes, and citrus fruits are the best sources; other

berries, nectarines, and raw pineapple are also good sources. Try cherry tomatoes with a dip. Cut melon and fresh pineapple into thin wedges that may be served as finger foods. Raw cabbage and green peppers also provide substantial vitamin C.

To add vitamin A: Dark green or bright yellow fruits and vegetables add vitamin A. Arrange carrot sticks, green pepper rings, chunks of lettuce, celery sticks, or cucumber slices on a plate. Serve with a dip. Try cottage cheese mixed with drained crushed pineapple, tuna and mayonnaise, or homemade French dressing.

Many children may particularly resist cooked vegetables at dinner. If youngsters eat raw vegetables at snack time, there may not be the need to serve cooked vegetables at dinner. One mother of young children puts out a plate of raw vegetables and dip while she's fixing dinner. If the kids are hungry, they snack on the vegetables and she's happy that they're getting the vegetables they need. Besides the raw vegetables already mentioned, you might also try raw green beans, turnips, sweet potatoes, white potatoes, broccoli, avocado, frozen peas, jicama, and spinach or other greens. Young children need to be exposed to a variety of vegetables, served in a variety of ways.

### Instructional Procedures

#### LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

##### OPTION #1

Complete a laboratory experience preparing and evaluating a variety of food products for toddlers and/or preschoolers. Discuss the food lab experiences. Let the students list all the reasons why their laboratory product is a good food choice for children. See the [NUTRITION FOR CHILDREN ASSIGNMENT](#) and [CHILDREN'S SNACK RECIPES](#).

##### OPTION #2

To show students a way to make food appealing to children have them sit on the floor in a semicircle and listen to the story, [MILK - DOG'S BEST FRIEND](#). Have the students color pictures, make a computer presentation, or make flannel board pictures to illustrate the story.

##### OPTION #3

Assign a unit of 4-6 students a food group. Require them to develop a plan to:

Introduce preschoolers to that food group and to acquaint them with the main nutrients it provides. Use information found in "for kids" link of [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov) to help nutrition concepts.

Have each unit "show and tell" their plan to the class. If possible, arrange with the Child Development teacher to have students teach the preschoolers in the preschool lab, OR arrange for students to visit a neighborhood day care or elementary school to make a presentation.

##### OPTION #4

Have each unit choose and prepare a recipe that would appeal to a small child and let the class sample portions of it.

##### OPTION #5

Have each unit research a different aspect of the "for kids" link found at [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov). There is information for families, teachers of children, and even a coloring page. Each unit can share with the class what they found and how the information can help introduce nutrition concepts to young children.

### Authors

[PEARL HART](#)

[Utah LessonPlans](#)