

## Nutrients Children Need

By Meera Ekkanath Klein

When your child stops breast feeding and eating jarred baby foods, make sure your growing toddler is getting enough milk, fresh fruits and vegetables. The most common nutrients are readily available in foods kids love to snack on. Here are the four most common nutrients and how to include them in your child's daily diet.

**CALCIUM:** A growing child needs 800 mg./day. Calcium helps strengthen growing bones and teeth.

### FOODS:

- 1cup calcium-fortified orange juice. If your child does not like to drink the juice, freeze juice into popsicles.
- Cheese: String cheese, or three 1-inch squares of cheese or two tablespoons of shredded cheese.
- ½ cup plain yogurt. Instead of the overly sweetened yogurt, try adding a few spoonfuls of maple syrup to the plain yogurt. Add sliced banana or strawberries. By offering these alternatives, you are teaching your child to appreciate the simple flavors of fresh fruit.
- Broccoli or other green vegetables: Try lightly steaming broccoli spears. I use the microwave oven for about one minute on high. I serve the spears or trees as we call them with a ranch dressing. Instead of commercial dressing, use this simple recipe. Mix equal parts of plain yogurt and mayonnaise with a dash of salt, mild vinegar or lemon juice. As your child's taste buds develop, add pinches of dried herbs, Italian blends, garlic, salt or lemon pepper.

**IRON:** 10mg./day

Iron prevents anemia and helps red blood vessels deliver oxygen to the body. Vitamin C helps iron absorption.

### FOODS:

- Scrambled egg with whole-wheat toast.
- Mashed or baked potatoes.
- Beans. My kids love beans especially garbanzo beans. Young toddlers love beans as a finger food.
- Iron fortified cereals such as Cream of Wheat, with a touch of brown sugar, butter and cinnamon.

- Cocoa. Do you know a kid who doesn't love a cup of cocoa? Read labels and buy varieties which contain the most percentage of iron.
- Dark, green vegetables. Again broccoli is kid-friendly. Try well-cooked spinach with a cheesy sauce. It's never too early to introduce your kids to vegetables.
- Various meats. Hamburgers are popular with kids. Mine don't eat meat, but they are the exception, not the rule.

**ZINC:** 10 mg./day

Zinc promotes cell reproduction and helps wounds to heal.

### FOODS:

- Eggs: Scrambled, hard-boiled. A mother I know decorates hard-boiled eggs with stickers and children love them in their school lunches.
- Baked beans.
- Cereals. Try topping cereals with a spoonful of Honey wheat germ. Wheat germ is a good source of zinc. (Avoid sugary cereals if at all possible.)
- Red meats, including turkey.
- Plain yogurt, see under Calcium on how to make plain yogurt kid-friendly.

**VITAMIN A:** 500mcg./day

Promotes healthy hair, skin, eyes, teeth, nails and gums.

### FOODS:

- Broccoli: Obviously a super food.
- Baby carrots or grated carrots. Serve with or without a dip.
- Whole milk
- Fruits
- Red meats

**VITAMIN C:** 45 mg./day

Helps heal cuts and scrapes; may prevent colds

**FOODS:**

- Citrus fruits, such as oranges, tangerines or grapefruits. Tangerines are especially kid-friendly.
- Strawberries or other berries. Kids love berries, fresh and sliced. Or try them in a smoothie. Blend strawberries in orange juice or milk.
- Tomatoes: Most kids love tomato sauce. Cherry tomatoes are a fun treat but be careful of choking.
- Potatoes: An alternative to the oily French Fries, try oven-baked fries. Scrub 3 large baking potatoes and slice into French fry-sized pieces. Put them in a bowl and toss with 1 to 2 tablespoons vegetable oil and ½ tsp. salt. Spread them on greased cookie sheets and bake them in a 400-degree oven for about 35 minutes or until done to your taste. Yummy with or without ketchup!

Remember children are not little adults and have special nutritional requirements. So don't serve kids a bowl of adult cereal like Total. Most nutrients are not harmful in large quantities but some are. Why take a chance with your kids? ***Please consult your pediatrician if you have concerns or questions.***

*Resources:*

*Parenting Magazine*

*The New Laurel's Kitchen Cookbook*

*Meera Ekkanath Klein grew up in India and has a BA in Communication Studies and an MA in Journalism. She has worked for a variety of newspapers and is currently working on a novel about India. Ms. Klein is a stay-at-home mom and a freelance writer in Davis.*

