

# Nutrition and supplements for school-aged children

In today's fast-paced, commercialized world it can be difficult to ensure your children eat well and exercise regularly.

Proper diet and nutritional supplements may benefit children of all ages by boosting immunity and optimizing health.

Optimum nutrition is essential to meet school-age children's (age 6 to 12) energy and nutrient needs for growth, development and activity. During this period, healthy eating also provides adequate nutrient stores needed for the growth demands that occur in adolescence. Healthy eating habits formed at a young age can also help reduce the risk for nutrition-related chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Consider these findings:

- Type 2 diabetes, once named adult-onset diabetes, is now occurring in children. The percentage of childhood diabetes cases in Canada that were type 2 in 1990 was 4%. Today it is 20%.
- Childhood obesity rates are skyrocketing to epidemic proportions: 35% of boys and 29% of girls are overweight in Canada and 17% of boys and 15% of girls in Canada are obese.

The diet for school-age children should include an appropriate balance of complex carbohydrates such as whole grains, fruits and vegetables; lean proteins, such as poultry and fish; and essential fats, such as olive oil.

### Vitamins and minerals

Many vitamins and minerals can be supplied by a healthy and varied diet. However, nowadays a good quality Multi-Vitamins is recommended for most children. Two minerals that may need to be closely monitored are calcium and iron.

**Calcium:** School-age children are going through a period of bone growth and development. Ensuring adequate calcium intake for optimum bone mass during these years will help decrease the risk for osteoporosis later in life. The recommended calcium intake at age nine increases from 800 mg/day to 1,300 mg/day. Good calcium sources include dairy products, fortified soymilk, canned salmon with bones, tofu, beans, spinach, bok choy and almonds.

**Iron:** School-age children should be assessed to see if they have iron-deficiency anemia. Those at risk for low iron stores are those who have low energy intake or who don't eat meat. Iron-deficiency anemia can result in poor



performance at school. Iron sources in the diet include:

- Dietary iron sources that are most absorbable include extra-lean red meat, liver, iron-fortified cereals, steamed mussels, poultry and sardines.
- Iron sources that are not as easily absorbed in the body include spinach, whole wheat bread, wheat germ, rolled oats and peas. Eating red meat or vitamin C with less absorbable sources of iron helps to increase their absorption in the body.

It is also important to include fiber in the diet. Insoluble fiber such as whole grains, wheat bran and the skin of fruits helps to regulate bowel function. Soluble fiber, such as psyllium, oats, legumes, fruits and vegetables, help to lower blood cholesterol levels and regulate blood sugar levels. Gradually increase the number of fiber-rich foods in your diet and drink at least six to eight glasses of water daily.

Here are some healthy eating tips for school-age children:

- Eat three meals per day plus two snacks. Several studies show kids who eat breakfast perform better at school and their overall nutritional intake is improved.
- All children have different activity levels and energy needs. Listen to your child's sense of hunger and satiety and trust them to let you know when they want to eat or not.
- Offer children a choice of nutritious foods to allow them to begin taking responsibility for their own intake.
- Parents or caregivers should model positive eating behaviors because kids like to do what their parents do. Be sure to eat a variety of healthy foods, try new foods and eat regular portion sizes. A child's peers and the media can also influence food preferences, but they tend to continuously change over the years.
- During growth spurts and periods of increased activity, children need more energy, feel hungrier and eat more. Be sure to make food available to them when they need it. Ensure healthy after-school snacks, such as fruit or crackers and cheese, are readily available.
- Involve children in meal planning, food shopping, preparation and cooking to peak their interest in different foods and healthy eating.
- Encourage your child to drink water, especially during hot weather and times of increased activity.
- To prevent dental caries, reduce your child's intake of sugar and fruit juices and decrease snacking before bedtime.

Children who are overweight or obese need to learn healthy eating habits and engage in regular physical activity to help them achieve a normal weight. Resist forcing children into restrictive dieting practices as this could negatively affect them psychologically and physically. We need to teach our kids healthy eating habits now to help them live long and healthy lives.

## FOLLOW THE LEADER

### Nominations are now being accepted for the Ontario Junior Citizen of the Year Awards

The strength of our community lies in solid citizens. Today's youth are tomorrow's leaders.

If you know a young person, aged 6 to 17, who is involved in worthwhile community service; a special person who is contributing while living with a limitation; a youth who has performed an act of heroism; or a 'good kid' who shows a commitment to making life better for others, doing more than is normally expected of someone their age – help us recognize their contribution – nominate them today!

**Nominations will be accepted until December 28, 2007**

Contact this newspaper or the Ontario Community Newspapers Association at [www.ocna.org](http://www.ocna.org) or 905.639.8720.

### ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE - NOMINATE SOMEONE TODAY!



**ONTARIO JUNIOR CITIZEN OF THE YEAR AWARDS**

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