

Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP)



## GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

# Nutrition for Preschoolers (2–5 Years)

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### 10 FAQs on NUTRITION FOR PRESCHOOLERS (2–5 YEARS)

1. Our family is vegetarian. What extra food or vitamins we should give to our child?
2. What is organic food? Is it important to use organic foods for kids?
3. I feel my child's immunity is very low. He often suffers from cold and cough.
4. My child is a fussy eater. What can I do?
5. My child does not gain appropriate weight despite all foods tried. What health drink do you recommend?
6. My child does not eat if I do not give the mobile. Should I allow my child viewing mobile/TV while taking food?
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8. Is it okay to give juice regularly?
9. My child never finishes tiffin in nursery/daycare, what should I give my child so that he/she finishes it?
10. Is it necessary to give milk to my child?

**Under the Auspices of the IAP Action Plan 2020–2021**

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# Nutrition for Preschoolers (2–5 Years)



**Q1**

**Our family is vegetarian. What extra food or vitamins we should give to our child?**

Vegan diets (sourced only from plants) are deficient in calcium and vitamin B<sub>12</sub>. Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is mostly obtained from animal products, thus high percentage of vegetarians are vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficient, leading to anemia, fatigue, and neurological problems.

But, the deficiencies of calcium and vitamin B<sub>12</sub> can be compensated by providing the preschoolers enough dairy products such as cow's milk, yoghurt, cheese, etc. If the nonvegetarian food is acceptable for children in your family, then egg, meat, fish, chicken, etc. can also be given. In addition, adequate amounts of soybean, legumes, seeds, nuts, green leafy vegetables such as beans, cabbage, and spinach for calcium.

Fortified foods can also be given and in case of deficiency manifestations, required minerals and vitamin B<sub>12</sub> can be supplemented.

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Q2

**What is organic food? Is it important to use organic foods for kids?**



Organic food is grown without the use of synthetic chemicals such as human-made pesticides and fertilizers, hormones, and does not involve genetic modification techniques.

It is more important for a child to consume a wide variety of diet, including cereals, fruits and vegetables, whether organic or conventional. Organic food reduces exposure of children to pesticides but it is presently not known whether this translates into any direct benefit to the children. Moreover, the cost and availability of good quality organic unprocessed foods is a concern, and this should not be a deterrent to child's nutrition. It is more important for a child to consume a balanced and nutritious diet.

Q3

**I feel my child's immunity is very low. He often suffers from cold and cough.**



Most of the time (not all the time) basic cause of cold and cough in children is either viral infection or allergy.

To avoid this following suggestion would be helpful...

- Maintain strict rules of hygiene such as frequent hand wash.
- Good nutrition and square meals will help to increase. Plenty of fluids is the need of human body.
- Physical and mental exercise is important to prevent illnesses. Children should exercise by playing outdoor games or sports.
- Stress is one of the causes of lower immunity. Manage (hidden) stress of your child.
- Adequate rest and sleep will avoid lot of stress.
- Get all vaccines, especially flu vaccine
- Avoid stimulants and allergens.
- Consult your doctor if problem persists.



## Q4

### My child is a fussy eater. What can I do?

Parents often find it challenging to feed fussy eaters. Remember, this is a crucial period of child development. However, there is natural deceleration in weight gain during 2–5 years of age as compared to first 2 years, and hence, appetite is less.



Child develops more interest in surroundings, and hence concentrates less in eating. That is why this age is called as “terrible two”.

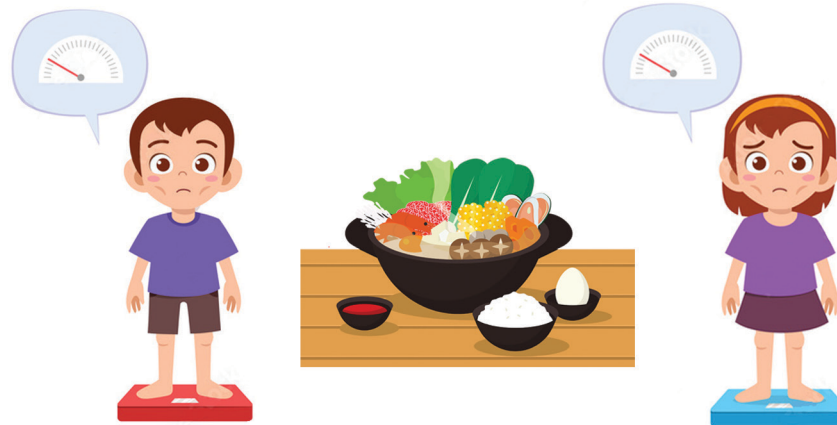
#### Some Simple Solutions

- Set a goal to introduce one or two new food items per week. Start with simple preparation (say “rice”) then add *Dal*, after few days, *ghee*, then add vegetable so that child will take some time to develop taste.
- Involve your child in selecting foods from vegetable market/grocery shop. Involve them in food preparation.
- Make process of eating cheerful through interesting ways of food preparation. Cut fruits and vegetables into different shapes. Prepare recipes which contain vegetables.
- Use a big plate and small serving of food; your kids might be overwhelmed by large portions of foods that are unfamiliar or not their favorite. Second, you will waste less food.
- Kids also have their likes and dislikes. Respect their likings to a limited extent. But, never discuss your dislikes in front of them. They will develop same habit.
- Encourage them to eat but never force. This may create short-term or long-term physical or psychological problems.
- Lead by example. Your children will want to try new vegetables and fruits, if they see others at the table eating them.
- Do not seek appetizer medicines for your child, as they are often not beneficial, and may have side effects.



**Q5**

**My child does not gain appropriate weight despite all foods tried. What health drink do you recommend?**



“Health drinks” are claimed to be beneficial for health of the child. These could be fruit juice based drinks, or supplements to be added to milk. They may provide hydration and some calories, but also add a lot of unhealthy sugar to the child’s diet.

When you perceive that the child is not gaining weight as per your expectations, you should first consult your pediatrician for a thorough medical check-up to exclude digestion, absorption problem or any systemic disease. In case, he is free from these, then focus on whether the quantity of food taken is providing adequate energy and nutrition appropriate for age. Some children are small eaters or fussy eaters. For them, diet, frequency, taste, and varieties along with responsive feeding practices should be tried. Moreover, it is possible that child is growing well but not matching your expectations. Your pediatrician should be able to counsel you regarding this after checking his/her measurements.

Liquid or health drinks cannot be substituted for regular diet of the child, and are not usually recommended for children to promote weight gain.



Q6

**My child does not eat if I do not give the mobile.  
Should I allow my child viewing mobile/TV  
while taking food?**



It is very important for the parents to differentiate between mealtime and screen time whether on mobile or television. When children eat sitting in front of any screen, they may not understand about what they have eaten, or they may also not know about portion control of food. They may either eat less or continue eating even though full.

A routine should be set for the child and meals should be fed on time. In the absence of any schedule the parent may give snacks too frequently and the child may not feel hungry at the mealtime and parent may feed the child by occupying him/her with a screen and force feed. The family should make a habit of keeping away mobile, tablets, or switch off the TV while eating meals. The child should be counseled and explained continuously about harmful effects of screen on eyes and on eating meals. A child may eat slowly and take time to finish his/her meals so allow them to take time and eat. The parents should not try to fasten the process of feeding by making them watch TV or a mobile.



Q7

How frequently can junk food be given to my child?



Junk food is rich in sugar, salt, and fat and thereby rich in calories. It is low in protein, vitamins, and minerals. A child gets used to eating junk food when exposed to it either at home or outside. Sometimes parents use junk food as a reward for any achievement of a child or any celebration such as birthday, anniversary, etc. It is best to keep the child away from calorie-dense and low-nutrient junk food. Childhood is also the time for habit formation. Thus, junk food should not be given to the kids. Sometimes junk food is introduced due to convenience of cooking by parents and convenience in eating for children. The taste of junk food is delicious and well accepted by children and adults. Regular intake of junk food may lead to obesity or weight gain and other health problems. Alternative to junk food is to make healthy look-a-like of these foods such as pizza can be made on a base of plain paratha with capsicum, corn, olives, cottage cheese, and tomato puree. Frankie can be made by cooking green leafy vegetables, tomato, cabbage, cottage cheese, and filled on a chapati base and rolled like a Frankie.



Q8

Is it okay to give juice regularly?



- Fruit juices are not necessary for children. It is better to give whole fruit because juice does not provide any nutritional benefit. Most juices are sweet in nature which may cause dental caries, fructose found in fruits is equally bad for teeth. Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP) recommends that children of age 2–5 years should not be given >125 mL (half a cup) of fruit juice per day, and should be given preferably as fresh juice.
- Avoid giving juices if your child is having diarrhea as it may worsen.
- Avoid canned or packaged juice. Never give juices at bedtime as it may damage their teeth. For children who are obese, fruit juice can have adverse effect as it also provides calories and adds to weight gain. Fruit juice lacks fiber which is an essential part of diet so avoid in case of constipation.
- Some children may have gases or bloating after consuming fruit juice. It is not an essential part of balanced diet.
- Since juice is sweet in nature, giving it at an early age may give rise to preference for sweet things later in life. Sippers or feeding bottles should never be used to feed fruit juices or any other drinks to the child.



Q9

**My child never finishes tiffin in nursery/daycare, what should I give my child so that he/she finishes it?**

This is a usual complaint from parents. First, we need to find out why your child does not finish the food?

The following points should be kept in mind:

- Prepare a weekly menu for your child keeping his/her choices in mind.
- Be careful about both quality and quantity; some parents think that if extra food is given, the child will eat it under pressure of teacher/ caretaker, this is not a good idea.



Child may get irritated or frustrated with this pressure tactics, on the other hand, it should not be too less as child may remain hungry. Do not force your child to eat more or restrict amount, appetite varies day to day.



- Nonvegetarians can use fresh and healthy animal meat or poultry.
- Keep variety in food you keep in tiffin, pack familiar food but new one each day.
- Avoid giving fruit juices instead send a water bottle as it may affect appetite.
- Try to give homemade food rather than packaged food.

- Children of this age are often interested in playing more than eating so try to give the food which can be finished quickly although fast eating is not good sometimes you can be liberal.
- You may pack roti/paratha roll or cut fruits, vegetable stick salad, idli garnished with vegetables or kheer in a wide-mouthed bottle.
- Tiffin box should be attractive and made of steel or food-grade plastic.



## Q10

## Is it necessary to give milk to my child?



Most children of this age are likely to have stopped breastfeeding, but if the child and mother want to continue it beyond 2 years, they can do so. Though milk is not essential beyond 2 years of age, most Indian parents prefer to feed child with some amount of milk.

The types of milk available are freshly sourced milk from cow/buffalo, packeted whole milk, low fat milk (toned milk, double toned milk, skimmed milk), etc. Milk is considered as the choicest beverages for children, and it provides calories, protein, calcium, phosphorous, vitamin D, vitamin A, and vitamin B complex including vitamin B<sub>12</sub>.



Cow's milk and its derivatives such as yoghurt, cheese, buttermilk, etc. can be offered to preschoolers in proper proportion. At 2–3 years, a child should consume not >2 cups (16 oz) of milk and at 3–5 years, 2½ cups (20 oz). Overfeeding with milk can lead to anemia and force the baby not to take other food in balance proportion.

Whole milk is preferred below 2 years of age, while low fat milk is better for >2 years. It is ideal not to add any sugar or flavor to cow's milk.

