



# Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

CENTER ON THE FAMILY ♥ UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I

## Encouraging Healthy Eating Habits

Healthy eating habits begin early, and teaching your child to eat nutritiously will help his growth, development, and overall health throughout his life. Healthy eating habits and good food choices will not only help your child grow physically, but will also affect his energy level, mood, thinking, and ability to focus—all of which play a vital role in his capacity to learn.

Getting your child to maintain healthy eating habits can be a challenge. The following are simple everyday things you can do to help put your child and family on the path to a healthy future:

- ♥ Start your child's day with a nutritious breakfast so he will have energy to start his morning activities.
- ♥ Have a wide variety of healthy foods available in your home.
- ♥ Eat healthy, homemade meals together as a family.



This newsletter will provide you with simple actions you can take to instill healthy eating habits in your child. By encouraging good eating habits now, you can make a huge impact on his healthy lifestyle in the future.



### In This Newsletter:

To support you in fostering your child's healthy development and school readiness, this newsletter includes:

- ♥ Age-specific information and suggestions about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler
- ♥ Featured activities for each age group,
- ♥ **How this Helps:** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Community Resources:** for more information, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read to your child.

# Infants

Breast milk provides all the necessary nutrients your young infant needs to thrive. Feeding your baby breast milk is strongly encouraged as it can reduce your infant's risk of infections, illnesses, allergies, asthma and even obesity. As your infant gets older and you start to consider when to introduce solid foods to him, keep in mind that all babies are unique, and you should always check with your child's health care provider for the when and how to start. Here are some general feeding guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics, and activities to engage in with your infant during feeding.

- ♥ Birth to 4 months of age: newborns rely solely on breast milk for nutrition. Infant formula is an acceptable alternative for babies whose mothers are not able or decide not to breastfeed. Cuddle your baby and talk or sing to him while feeding him.
- ♥ By 4 to 6 months of age: most infants start eating iron fortified infant cereal, although they continue to get most of their calories, protein, vitamins, and minerals from breast milk or infant formula. As you feed him, talk to him about what he is eating.



- ♥ By 6 to 8 months of age: many infants are ready to begin eating pureed or mashed fruits and vegetables. Gradually introduce a single-item food over a period of several days and watch carefully for any allergic reactions such as diarrhea, vomiting or unusual rashes, before introducing the next food-item. Engage your baby in a conversation, talking about the different taste and texture of the food he is eating.

*(Continued on page 6)*

## Activity for Infants: *Table Talk*

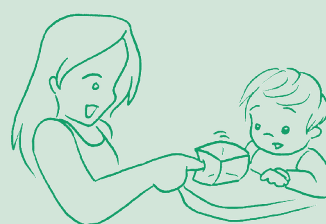
Materials: None

What to Do:

1. Make mealtime a time for learning by including your child in mealtime conversations.
2. When he is ready to eat solid foods, talk about how different foods look, feel, smell, and taste. For example, "Your poi is purple." "Doesn't your papaya taste sweet?" "The rice is really soft."
3. Count things, even though he doesn't understand numbers yet. For example, "How many pieces of soft tofu are in your bowl? Let's count and see." If you speak more than one language, count in a different language.

**⚠ Safety Alert:** Follow the recommendations of your health care provider about introducing solid foods to your baby.

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)*



# Toddlers

As your child is introduced to a variety of solid foods, you may notice that he has definite likes and dislikes of the foods he eats. He may express this by refusing to eat certain foods and persistently asking for certain others. Although it would appear to be easiest to give in to your toddler's food wants, it's important to make sure that he eats balanced, healthy and nutritious meals and snacks. Your toddler is looking at you as his role model. When he sees you enjoying the same food you offer to him, he will most likely eat it and enjoy it too. To encourage your toddler's healthy eating:

- ♥ Plan for regular snacks between meals; young children use up lots of energy, but also have small stomachs (approximately the size of their fists).
- ♥ Involve your child in making healthy choices; for example, offer him some yogurt as an afternoon snack, and a choice of fruit to add to it.
- ♥ Offer water, milk or 100 % fruit juice instead of sweetened drinks and sodas.

Here are some fun, educational activities you can do with your child while shopping together:

- ♥ Play "I Spy." Have your child guess what you see. For example, you may say "I spy with my little eye, something that is red and crunchy. What do you think I see?"
- ♥ If there's a scale, weigh some of the fruits and vegetables, making a game of it. Ask your child "Which one do you think is heavier – the papaya or the banana?" Let's find out!"



## Activity for Toddlers: *Let's Go Shopping*

What You Need:

- Empty, clean food boxes and containers
- Grocery bags (paper and cloth recommended)

What to Do:

1. Help your child collect empty, clean food containers such as cereal boxes, juice cartons, yogurt containers, and egg cartons. (Do not use glass.)
2. Help him set up, organize and display all of the items in his pretend grocery store.
3. Provide him with some paper or cloth grocery bags for his store.
4. Take turns being the cashier and the customer.



**⚠ Safety Alert:** Be careful with plastic bags. Warn your child not to place a plastic bag over his face or head. Doing so can cause suffocation.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)



# Preschoolers

The World Health Organization states that 22 million children in the world under the age of five are overweight. Your preschooler may not be overweight, but this is a good time to continue to promote healthy eating habits so that he will maintain a healthy weight as he gets older. Your child's health care provider can tell you if your child is on target with his weight as well as overall growth.

Here are some ways to encourage healthy eating habits with your preschooler:

- ♥ Eat meals or snacks sitting down, and with the TV turned off.
- ♥ Encourage your child to eat slowly; a child's brain takes time to process information telling him that his stomach is full.
- ♥ Provide opportunities for your child to make healthy food choices, and praise him when he does.

- ♥ Have your child help you prepare healthy meals. This will encourage him to try the healthy foods that he helped to prepare.



## Activities for Preschoolers: *Healthy Food Collage*

### What You Need:

Old supermarket picture ads  
of vegetables and fruits  
Blank piece of paper

Blunt, child-size scissors  
White glue or glue stick



### What to Do:

1. Look at the supermarket advertisements in the newspaper together.
2. Together with your child, find and name the different vegetables and fruits that you see.
3. Help him cut out the fruit and vegetable pictures.
4. Have your child sort the pictures in different ways, for example; by color or shape; by vegetables or fruits; his likes and dislikes; or by foods that he has tried or not tried yet.
5. Have your child glue his pictures on the paper, making a collage of his favorite fruits and vegetables.
6. Encourage him to bring his collage on your next trip to the grocery store, and together, see if you can find some of the fruits and vegetables that are on his collage.
7. Have him share his special collage with family and friends!

**⚠ Safety Alert:** Adult size scissors are not safe for young preschoolers. Let your child practice cutting with blunt, child-size scissors instead.

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)*

## How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

### Physical Development

- ♥ Learn through his senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching
- ♥ Use and strengthen small muscles, fingers, hands, and toes

### Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Feel important and good about himself
- ♥ Learn to cooperate with others

### Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Build verbal skills, vocabulary, and use of descriptive language
- ♥ Increase his observation, listening and understanding skills, and attention span

### Cognitive Development

- ♥ Understand cause and effect, develop his curiosity about how things work



## Community Resources

**Hawai'i Foods** <http://hawaiifoods.hawaii.edu/>  
Provides nutrition information on locally grown foods as well as delicious local recipes complete with nutrition information.

**Nutrition Education for Wellness** <http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/NEW/index.html>  
Provides information, resources, and links on meal planning, food choices, food preparation, nutrition for families, and healthy and quick recipes.

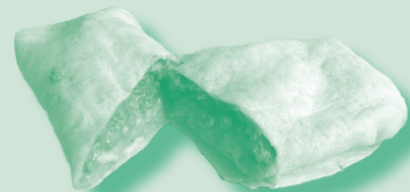
## Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons. As you do this recipe with your child, allow him to do as much as he is capable of. Ask questions throughout the process to encourage his thinking skills. Make sure to wash your hands and your child's hands before and after preparing any food.

### Turkey Avocado Burritos

#### Ingredients:

- |                      |                           |
|----------------------|---------------------------|
| 2 slices deli turkey | whole wheat tortilla      |
| 2 cheese slices      | 1½ medium avocado; seeded |



#### Instructions:

1. As you read the recipe to your child, have him count out the first three ingredients and put them aside.
2. Have your child scoop out the inside of the avocado with a spoon, and mash it with a fork.
3. As he is doing this, ask him "Why do you think we need to mash the avocado for our recipe? How is it different now that you mashed it? Do you think it will taste different?"
4. Have him spread 2 tablespoons of mashed avocado on one side of the tortilla with a spoon.
5. Next, have him place the turkey slices, then cheese slices on top of the avocado and tortilla.
6. Help your child fold the left and right sides of the tortilla toward the center, and roll the other ends of the tortilla up over the mixture to form a burrito. Use directional words such as "left", "right", "top" and "bottom", to describe how to roll the tortilla.
7. Cut the burrito in half and enjoy!

## Infants (continued from page 2)

- ♥ By 7 to 10 months of age: babies are generally ready to begin feeding themselves with finger foods, such as dry cereal or teething biscuits. Encourage your baby to explore eating and let him practice feeding himself. He may make a mess at first, but it is important for him to practice to develop muscle coordination and feeding skills.
- ♥ By 8 to 12 months of age: most infants are ready to eat soft, cooked table foods. Introduce one new food at a time to identify any foods

that your baby may be allergic to. Talk about the foods that your family likes to eat as you share your family meal together.

**⚠ Allergy Alert:** The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that you do not introduce your infant to cow's milk until after the age of one year old. Check with your health care provider about when to introduce foods such as honey, eggs, nuts and shellfish to your child.

## Suggested Books

Recommended by Read to Me International [www.readtomeintl.org](http://www.readtomeintl.org).  
For more books, visit the public library [www.librarieshawaii.org](http://www.librarieshawaii.org).



### Infants and Toddlers

#### ***Eating the Alphabet*** by Lois Ehlert

This colorfully-illustrated board book features every imaginable fruit and vegetable, including jicama and kohlrabi. Even more than identifying these foods, children can learn the alphabets, printed in large letters on each spread. Pictures look good enough to eat!

#### ***Little Miss Muffet*** by Tracey Moroney

This well-known nursery rhyme will hold your infant's attention as you read it aloud. In its simplicity with its rhythm and rhyme, this board book may well become baby's favorite—and an invitation to read many other nursery rhymes over and over again!

### Preschoolers

#### ***Kekoa and the Egg Mystery*** by Tia Monteaux Walls, illustrated by Holly Braffet

Kekoa wakes up to gather eggs from his family's chicken coop only to discover that all the eggs are missing. Who could have taken the eggs? Find out who the culprit is in this story about jumping to conclusions.

#### ***You Are What You Eat and Other Mealtime Hazards*** by Serge Bloch

A young boy who is careful about what he eats, receives food-based advice from family and friends. This is a great introduction to idioms and similes such as: "cool as a cucumber" and "drives her bananas."

Learning to Grow is a project of the Center on the Family at the University of Hawai‘i, College of Tropical Agriculture & Human Resources, with funding from the Hawai‘i Department of Human Services. [www.learningtogrowhawaii.org](http://www.learningtogrowhawaii.org)