



Parents decide: **What food is served**
When food is served

Children decide: **Whether or not to eat**
How much to eat

5 Years Old

Obesity in childhood

Childhood obesity on the rise. Several studies here in Hawaii have found that more than 25% of children at age five are already overweight or obese. The most common reasons are combining too much screen time — including television, computers and video games — with too much junk food. The best solution is to reduce your entire family's intake of both. Discuss your child's weight with your pediatrician. The visit for your child's pre-kindergarten exam is a great opportunity to discuss this.

Little School Lunch Eaters

At five, many children are eating most of their food away from home. You may have less control over what he will be offered than you have had in the past.

Your child may be eating up to 10 meals per week at school. Check school menus. If your child will not eat what is on the menu (or you don't want him to!) send healthy alternatives such as:

Lean meats - Chicken, turkey, lean ham, low-fat lunchmeats, and tuna packed in water are excellent choices for protein-packed meals.

Use vegetables in a creative manner- Garnish a sandwich with spinach, bean sprouts, grated carrots or tomatoes instead of just lettuce.

Cut carrots, peppers or cucumber into bite-sized pieces and send them with a low fat dipping sauce.

Rice or pasta salads with chopped vegetables, pineapple, apple, chicken, fish, spinach, tomato, or cucumber.

Hard-boiled eggs or egg salad sandwiches are a good source of protein. Add fresh veggies to the egg salad.

Tortillas spread with cream cheese and filled with chicken, fish, rice, beans or cheese are good.

Lower fat Spam musubi



Baking an extra chicken at the beginning of the week (or buying a whole baked chicken from the store) will give you meat to use in lunches for the rest of the week. This is much healthier than using processed luncheon meats.

Peanut butter sandwich (1-2 tablespoons) with jelly, honey, raisins, sliced bananas, strawberries, grated carrots, or apple.

In general, you don't want to cater to your child's food whims. However, it is important that your child eats a meal at lunch time. Kids who don't like the food offered, or who are flustered by the hustle and bustle of the school cafeteria will sometimes skip eating and then may be at risk to start a habit of filling up on junk food after school is over. Late snacks then interfere with dinner, leaving your child with little in the way of good nutrition.

Beverages: Send a water bottle that can be refilled at school. Sports drinks aren't necessary for young children, even if they are involved in sports.

Remember little kids don't have a lot of finger strength so hold some "trial" runs at home. Can she get the lids off all of her plastic containers? Open the seal on a packaged item? Some children would rather not eat than have to ask for help.

Developing Good Habits

Restaurants are so plentiful here with so many food choices available to us that it is very common for families to eat out. Although this can be an easy break from having to cook, be aware that restaurant meals are usually much higher in calories than home cooked meals. We tend to eat larger portions, drink more sweetened drinks and eat all of the extras when at a restaurant.

Think about taking a picnic to the park or going to the beach for a barbecue instead of eating at a restaurant. That way, the focus can be on being active outdoors and enjoying each other's company rather than on consuming lots of food. Choose the food items that you'll take with you carefully and don't overdo it on the amounts.

Screen Time

Parents should monitor and limit the amount of time their children spend watching TV or videos and/or playing on a computer according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. Time spent before a screen usually means less time to play actively. The more hours spent in front of a screen, the higher the risk of obesity.

Activity

Unfortunately, you can't rely on most schools to provide enough active play time for children. It is common for physical education to last about 30 minutes, usually once a week. This time is often the first to be filled up with something else when testing pressures come around.

This means that you will still be responsible to make sure your child gets enough active play. Look for after school activities that involve outside play. Some children start to become involved in sports, dance, gymnastics, or martial arts at this age. See if these are available at your child's school or a program near by.

Ask your child specifically what he did at school that involved physical activity when you pick him up. If he had a day without much activity, take him to the park or go for a walk. You can both get some fresh air and exercise!