

## Energy In: Recommended Food & Drink Amounts for Children



### How Many Calories Do Children Need?

No child should be on a calorie-restricted diet, unless recommended by the doctor. However, parents need to be aware of their children's calorie needs so that they can help their children maintain [energy balance](#).

**Step 1:** The chart below can give you a general idea of how many calories your child needs per day based on his or her age range, gender, and physical activity level. [Walking to school](#) is an example of being moderately active. Playing a game of [basketball](#) is an example of being vigorously active.

Daily calorie needs based on age, gender, and activity level

Age (Years)	Gender	Sedentary (Not Active)	Moderately Active	Active
2-3	Male or female	1,000	1,000	1,000
4-8	Male	1,200 – 1,400	1,400 – 1,600	1,600 – 2,000
	Female	1,200 – 1,400	1,400 – 1,600	1,400 – 1,800
9-13	Male	1,600 – 2,000	1,800 – 2,200	2,000 – 2,600
	Female	1,400 – 1,600	1,600 – 2,000	1,800 – 2,200
14-18	Male	2,000 – 2,400	2,400 – 2,800	2,800 – 3,200
	Female	1,800	2,000	2,400
19-30	Male	2,400 – 2,600	2,600 – 2,800	3,000
	Female	1,800 – 2,000	2,000 – 2,200	2,400
31-50	Male	2,200 – 2,400	2,400 – 2,600	2,800 – 3,000
	Female	1,800	2,000	2,200
51 and older	Male	2,000 – 2,200	2,200 – 2,400	2,400 – 2,800
	Female	1,600	1,800	2,000 – 2,200

Adapted from US Department of Agriculture and US Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Washington, DC US Government Printing Office 2010.  
<http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2010.asp>. Accessed March 18, 2014

**Step 2:** After you find out how many calories your child needs, use the chart below to help you plan how much food from each [food group](#) to serve each day.

### Daily amounts of each food group based on calorie needs

Food Group <sup>a</sup>	1,000 Calories	1,200 Calories	1,400 Calories	1,600 Calories	1,800 Calories	2,000 Calories
Fruits	1 cup	1 cup	1 ½ cups	1 ½ cups	1 ½ cups	2 cups
Vegetables	1 cup	1 ½ cups	1 ½ cups	2 cups	2 ½ cups	2 ½ cups
Grains	3 ounces	4 ounces	5 ounces	5 ounces	6 ounces	6 ounces
Protein foods	2 ounces	3 ounces	4 ounces	5 ounces	5 ounces	5 ½ ounces
Dairy	2 cups	2 ½ cups	2 ½ cups	3 cups	3 cups	3 cups

Food Group <sup>a</sup>	2,200 Calories	2,400 Calories	2,600 Calories	2,800 Calories	3,000 Calories	3,200 Calories
Fruits	2 cups	2 cups	2 cups	2 ½ cups	2 ½ cups	2 ½ cups
Vegetables	3 cups	3 cups	3 ½ cups	3 ½ cups	4 cups	4 cups
Grains	7 ounces	8 ounces	9 ounces	10 ounces	10 ounces	10 ounces
Protein foods	6 ounces	6 ½ ounces	6 ½ ounces	7 ounces	7 ounces	7 ounces
Dairy	3 cups	3 cups	3 cups	3 cups	3 cups	3 cups

<sup>a</sup> Food group equivalents: 1 cup of fruit equals 1 cup of raw or cooked fruit, ½ cup of dried fruit, or 1 cup of 100% fruit juice; 1 cup of vegetables equals 1 cup of raw or cooked vegetables, 2 cups of leafy salad greens, or 1 cup of 100% vegetable juice; 1 ounce of grains equals 1 slice of bread, 1 ounce of ready-to-eat cereal, or ½ cup of cooked rice, pasta or cereal; 1 ounce of protein such as lean meat, poultry, or seafood equals 1 egg, 1 tablespoon of peanut butter, ¼ cup of cooked beans or peas, or ½ ounce of nuts or seeds; 1 cup of dairy such as milk, yogurt, or fortified soy beverage equals 1 ½ ounces of natural cheese or 2 ounces of processed cheese.

Adapted from US Department of Agriculture and US Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Washington, DC; US Government Printing Office 2010.  
<http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2010.asp>. Accessed March 10, 2014

Keep in mind that if your child consumes extra calories beyond what is needed the calories need to be burned off with extra physical activity. Extra calories can quickly add up depending on what your children eat or drink.

For example, if your child eats or drinks an extra 100 calories each day beyond his or her calorie needs and does not burn off the extra calories, that's an extra 700 calories each week, an extra 2,800 each month (4 weeks), or an extra 36,500 calories each year.

**Step 3:** Ask your child's doctor if you have any questions. Remember, these 2 charts are only a guide and each child's needs are different.

## How Much Food Do Children Need?

Remember that each child's energy needs are different. For instance, your child may need more energy during growth spurts or active participation in [sports](#). It's not necessary to eat the exact total amounts from

each group every day. Rather, intake should average out over a period of 1 to 2 weeks, to ensure healthy intake of calories along with essential nutrients.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends the following daily amounts for each food group based on different calorie needs. These are only guidelines. Another resource from the USDA and Agricultural Research Service is a [Kid Energy Needs Calculator](#).

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