

Everyday Nutrition Questions Answered

By Karen Crawford MS, RD, CSP

As a registered dietitian, nutrition related questions from friends and family is a common occurrence. Having been in the field of child nutrition for the past 11 years, I love the opportunity to debunk nutrition misinformation and share the facts. It is shocking to hear what some value as truth concerning nutrition and health. I've started jotting down the different questions that I get in casual conversations with those around me and would like to share them, plus the answers, below.

Should I choose “Fat Free” or “Sugar Free” snacks for my children?

Sugar free often means that the product contains artificial sweeteners but they still may contain fat and saturated fat. Fat free means zero calories from fat and no saturated fat. So depending on your child's needs, fat free may be the better option.

Is it ok to give my children the “kid friendly” cereals that they love?

Kid friendly cereals have a bad rap of added sugar and empty calories. However, they do entice children to eat breakfast and hopefully consume milk. You may consider mixing your child's favorite cereal with a more nutrient dense cereal for an added boost of whole grain and fiber. This strategy may also decrease the sugar consumption without nixing breakfast all together!

My toddler refuses to drink milk. What else is a good source of calcium for my little guy?

Low fat yogurt, cheese and pudding are all good sources of calcium for your little ones. You may also want to try adding a little strawberry or chocolate flavoring to the milk to increase consumption. The nutrition in milk certainly trumps the small amount of sugar you will be adding for increased acceptance by your kids.

What is a legume anyway?

Dry beans and peas are the mature forms of legumes such as kidney beans, pinto beans, lima beans, black-eyed peas, and lentils. These foods are excellent sources of plant protein, and also provide other nutrients such as iron and zinc. They are similar to meats, poultry, and fish in their contribution of these nutrients.

Juice is a fruit, so it's healthy, right?

100% fruit juice does contain certain vitamins and minerals that are good for us, however, the fiber content of the fresh fruit is lost and juice can pack a lot of unnecessary calories. The best choice- fresh fruit to eat and water or milk to drink.

Does my two year old still need whole milk?

The fat and saturated fat content of whole milk is not necessary after the age two. A normally developing healthy two year old may begin to drink low fat milk in place of whole milk.

What age should I start introducing solids to my infant?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends looking for developmental signs that your infant is ready for the introduction of solids. Your infant should be able to sit independently and grab for things to put in her mouth. Start with simple, basic foods such as rice cereal. You should add breast milk or warm formula to the cereal, mixing about 1 tablespoon of cereal with every 4 to 5 tablespoons of breast milk. Check with your child's pediatrician for more advice and advancement tips.

Are pickles considered a vegetable? And are they good for you?

Pickles are cucumbers that have been "pickled" in vinegar, making them a vegetable. Cucumbers are mostly water, but they still contain good nutrition. The flesh of a cucumber is a good source of vitamins A, C and folic Acid. The skin is rich in fiber and a variety of minerals. The pickling process does add a good bit of sodium to the food but they remain low in fat and calories.

Are soft drinks ok as a now and then?

The trouble with allowing your children to drink soft drinks on a regular basis is that they are most likely drinking less water and milk. The carbonation of soft drinks can also be very filling for their little stomachs, temporarily affecting their appetites. Make it a now and then and encourage water and milk more often.

I hope these questions and answerers were helpful. Enjoy!