

## Lesson 1.6: Serve kid-sized portions

**Background (Read before you teach):** Parents often worry that their children are not eating enough food throughout the day (Olvera, George, & Kaiser, 2011). Since young children eat small amounts of food but at more frequent intervals, adults may not see how it all adds up in a day's time. However, healthy infants and young children are able to stop eating when they are full. Since their calorie needs are much smaller than adult needs, it is very important that parents provide healthy foods and beverages from the [MyPlate](#) (USDA, 2016a) food groups. These healthy foods, that are high in vitamins and minerals but relatively low in calories, are also called "nutrient-dense".

A bag of chips or a candy bar may not seem like a lot of food but these foods are often high in calories and low in nutrients. Parents may be surprised to find out how much sugar (and calories) are in sodas and other sugary beverages. By responding to their children's requests for high-fat and high sugar snacks, parents face two problems (Olvera et al., 2011). First, their children may fill-up on these energy-dense foods and then refuse to eat the healthier foods offered at dinner. Second, when parents insist that the child "cleans the plate", he or she may learn to overeat. It is important not to override a child's internal cues related to hunger or fullness.

Unfortunately, many teens and adults lose the ability to stop eating when they are full. To make the problem worse, the [portion sizes of foods](#) (National Institute of Health, 2016) in grocery stores and at fast food restaurants have increased over the past few decades. To shift to a healthier eating style, people need to cut back on foods or beverages high in saturated fat, added sugar and sodium. This means both choosing smaller portions of those items and more importantly, replacing them with healthier foods and beverages (USDA and DHHS, 2016).

The [Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020](#)<sup>4</sup> considers [calorie](#) (energy) and [nutrient](#) needs in developing [daily food group recommendations](#) (USDA and DHHS, 2016). The [MyPlate](#) (USDA, 2016a) website provides useful tips for parents on the amount of food and beverages that their children need. [Meal and snack patterns](#) (USDA, 2015) with healthy food choices are available on the site. Adults can also find tips on [how to eat less](#) (USDA, 2016c) while still enjoying favorite foods.

**Teaching Tips:** The MyPlate activity can be done as a whole class discussion, rather than small group activity. Instead of preparing group sets of materials, a large poster board can be used. In this way, the instructor assembles first the healthy green wedges, with participant input. Next, participants remove (or cover over) the healthy choices with red wedges to see how too many snack foods replace healthier foods. The discussion question on how to handle food requests just before dinner could also be done as a role playing activity. If parents express concern about food waste when children do not clean their plates, brainstorm ways to save extra food or leftovers to use later.

**Target Audience:** Mexican-origin families with children, 3-8 years

**Key Message:** Serve small portions of healthy foods to young children.

**Objectives:** By the end of the lesson, participants will be able to:

- Explain why it is important to allow young children to eat according to their own appetite (in other words, why parents should not force them to finish their plate);
- Explain how unhealthy foods may replace the foods that children need to grow and stay healthy; and
- Identify what parents can do to encourage a good appetite at mealtimes.

**Materials:**

- Paper plates;
- Red and green poster paper cut into pie-shaped wedges;
- MyPlate poster; and
- Supplies and recipes for food demonstration (suggested Apple Coleslaw)

**Handouts:** Recipes

**Set-up:** Display MyPlate poster. For each group of 2-3 participants, cut out 2 sets of pie-shaped wedges that will fit within a paper plate. One set of wedges should be green (with healthy food group choices, with each wedge roughly one-third of the pie). Food and beverages for the healthy items are based on our recipes used in the classes: Honey Granola, Veggie Dip, Southwest Taco, Popcorn Snack, Tasty Turkey Chili, Fruity Parfait, and Pumpkin *Atole*. The other set of wedges should be red (unhealthy food choices with one wedge being two-thirds of the pie and the other two wedges, about one-sixth of the pie each). Either write-in the names of the foods or paste pictures of the foods on the wedges.

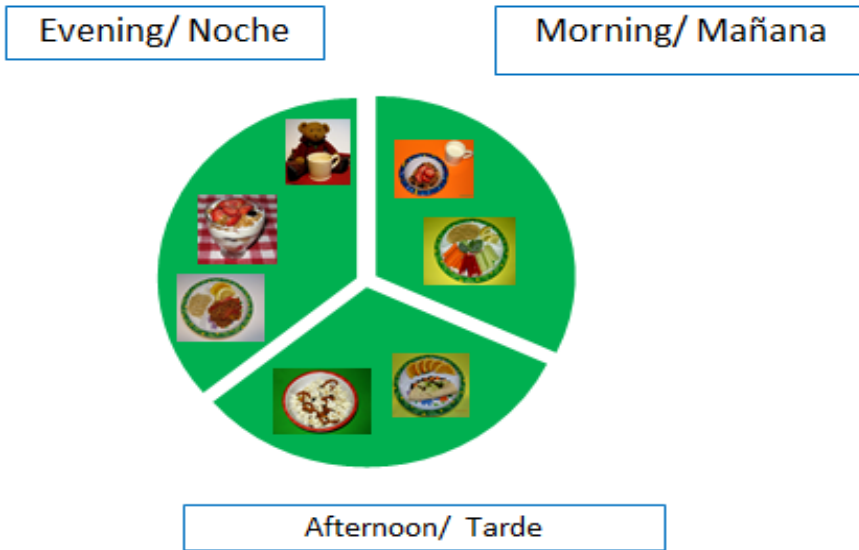


Figure 1. Example of daily food consumption 1.

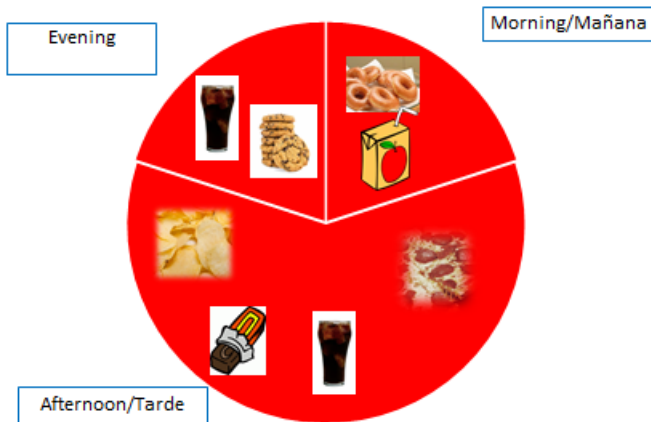


Figure 2. Example of daily food consumption 2.

**Opening (Anchor):** (10 min) Welcome! Review what was covered last time and ask if participants have made changes, based on their goals. Congratulate and encourage them to keep on making changes.

Today, we will be talking about how much food a child needs to eat and find out why parents should serve their young children small portions of healthy foods. These healthy foods should replace less healthy choices.

At a previous lesson, we discussed that:

A parent's job is to serve a variety of healthy foods at regular meal and snack times during the day.

A child's job is to decide how much to eat of those foods.

- **Ask:** How do you feel when your child does not eat all of the food you served? What makes it hard for parents to allow children to decide how much to eat?

**Lesson (Add):** (15 min) Discuss the following points:

- **Ask:** Why is it important to allow children to decide how much to eat? (Some answers may be: not to waste food, to avoid overfeeding children, teaching children to know when they are full.)
- Most young children (under the age of 4 years) will stop eating when they are full. In contrast, many adults have lost this natural ability to eat the right amount. Think about a time when you kept on eating a food just because it tasted good or you were lonely or bored, even though you weren't hungry. Eating in the absence of hunger is one reason why many adults are overweight.
- Some parents worry about how much their children eat and try too hard to make them finish all the food on their plates. This can result in training children to ignore their natural ability to stop eating when they are full.
- It is also not good to allow children to eat whatever they want all day long. Children need to have a regular structure or schedule of 3 meals and about 2-3 snacks daily. A child who snacks or drinks juice all day long because he or she is bored will not be hungry at dinnertime. Children also need to be physically active so that they really do have an appetite at mealtimes.
- What can a parent do to bring children to dinner, ready to eat? Let's say that a mother is making dinner which will be ready in about 30-45 minutes. Her children are watching TV. During a commercial, they run to the kitchen to ask for a box of juice and bag of chips. **Ask:** What should the mother do or say? (Pair-up participants and give them 2 minutes to discuss). Invite them to share. Some possible ideas include:
  - Offer water infused with flavor of a few slices of orange or other fruit if desired;

- Offer raw vegetables (carrot or cucumber sticks) that she has ready in the refrigerator. Do not allow snacks and drinks (other than water), within 1- 2 hours of meals;
- If they refuse water or vegetables, tell them dinner will be ready soon and she wants them to wait for the foods they will enjoy together; or
- If possible, get kids engaged in active play or other activity before meals. For example, turn on music and have them dance, ask them to help set the table or do other chores to get the meal ready.

**Activity (Apply):** (25 min) While the assistant starts the food demonstration, the educator leads the activity.

- MyPlate Activity: Let's find out how much food a young child needs. Over an entire day, a mother might need to eat about 1600-2000 calories; her 3-5 year old child might need about 1200-1400 calories. Let's do an activity to see how that adds up.
  - Provide one paper plate (Pre-school size) to each pair of parents and tell them to write "1200" calories in the middle of each plate, which is about the amount of calories needed by a three-year old girl.
  - Give parents several pie-shaped pieces of green and red colored paper of varying sizes with the names of different foods
  - Tell the participants to place the papers on the plates, so that all of the plate will be covered. Make a healthy plate first, with green foods.

**Ask:** What do you think about the foods on this plate? Would these foods help your child eat a healthy diet, like the one shown in MyPlate? What portion sizes do you see for these foods? Would your child eat that much?

Now, ask the participants to place the unhealthy foods (red pieces) on top of the healthy plate.

**Ask:** If we let children "fill their plate with unhealthy foods", how much appetite will be left for the healthy foods? How does the "unhealthy plate" compare to a healthy one?

**Ask:** If we let children eat unhealthy foods as they please and then try to force them also to eat healthy foods at mealtimes, what will happen? (Some possible answers: children resist or children eat too many calories overall)

- Food demonstration, tasting and sharing. Pass around the containers, showing the participants any foods that might be new or unfamiliar (for example, low-fat products, whole grain alternatives). Explain step-by-step how the food is prepared. Serve samples for tasting. **Ask:** What are some ways that your children can help prepare this recipe? How can you use it at home? What do you like about the recipe? What would you change?

**Closing (Away):** (10 min) Pair-up and set specific goals

What did you learn? Why is this information important to you? Choose a goal to work on this month. Try to choose small changes that you can make within a week. For example:

- I will limit child snacking within an hour of the main meal
- I will encourage my child to taste a very small amount of a food
- I will involve my child in a chore to help get meals ready

Write your goal on the recipe handout. Ask a friend or family member to help support you in reaching your goal. Invite families to share their goals.

**References and Resources:**

National Institute of Health. (2016). *Portion size matters*.

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/downloads/tip-portion-size.pdf>

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USDA. (2015). *Meal and snack patterns*. Updated June 16, 2015. Accessed April 12, 2017

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/preschoolers-meal-and-snack-patterns>

United States Department of Agriculture. (2016a). MyPlate, MyWins: Make it Yours. Updated April 6, 2017. Accessed April 12, 2017

<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/myplate-mywins>

Spanish:

[https://choosemyplate-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/printablematerials/Mini-Poster\\_Spanish\\_508.pdf](https://choosemyplate-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/printablematerials/Mini-Poster_Spanish_508.pdf)

English:

[http://www.choosemyplate.gov/sites/default/files/audiences/mini\\_poster\\_English\\_final.pdf](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/sites/default/files/audiences/mini_poster_English_final.pdf)

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<http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/appendix-2/>

USDA and DHHS. (2016). *Appendix 7. Nutrient goals for age-sex groups based on the Dietary Reference Intakes and the Dietary Guidelines recommendations*. In : *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020*. <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/appendix-7/>

USDA. (2016). *Appendix 3. USDA food patterns: Healthy U.S. style eating pattern*. In: *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020*.  
<http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/appendix-3/>

USDA. 2016c. Enjoy your food but eat less

(Spanish) Accessed April 12, 2017

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/sites/default/files/tentips/DGTipsheet18EnjoyYourFood-sp.pdf>

(English)

[http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/sites/default/files/dietary\\_guidelines\\_for\\_americans/DGTipsheet18EnjoyYourFood.pdf](http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/sites/default/files/dietary_guidelines_for_americans/DGTipsheet18EnjoyYourFood.pdf)

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