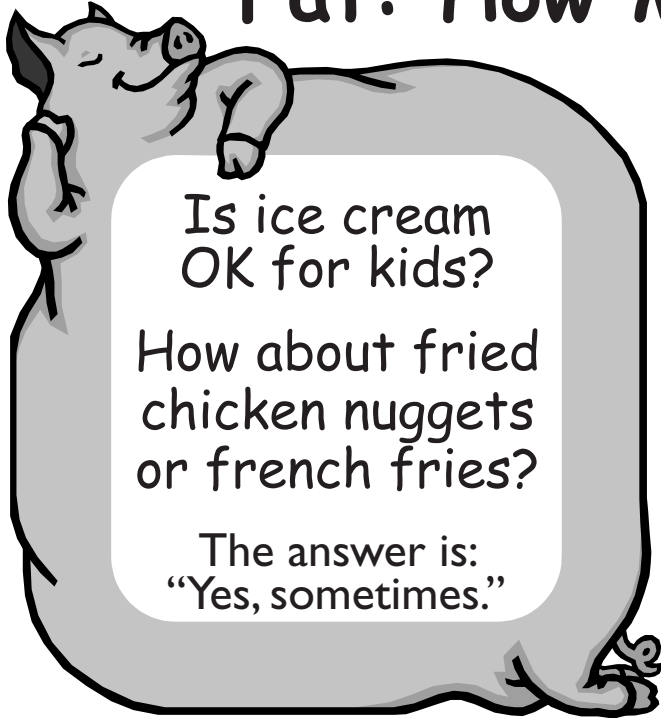




# Healthy Kids

LSU AgCenter Nutrition Programs Newsletter

## Fat: How Much do You Need?



Is ice cream OK for kids?

How about fried chicken nuggets or french fries?

The answer is: "Yes, sometimes."

Kids need some fat from foods to be healthy and:

- for energy to play and to learn
- to grow properly
- to absorb vitamins from food
- to add flavor to foods

For children 4 – 18 years of age, it is recommended that 25 percent to 35 percent of total calories come from fat. How many calories do you need each day? It depends on your age, sex and physical activity level.

Too much fat may make you gain weight and increase your risk for chronic diseases like diabetes or heart disease. Most food energy should come from grains (such as bread, pasta and rice), vegetables, fruits, low-fat dairy foods, beans, lean meat and poultry, fish, eggs or nuts.

Healthy fats are found in fish, nuts and vegetable oils. Fats in meat, cheese, butter and some baked products are called saturated fats. How do you know which fat is saturated? Saturated fat is solid at room temperature. It can increase your risk for disease, so try to eat less of it. Less than 10 percent of total calories each day should come from saturated fats.

*Here are some tips to help you choose foods with less fat, especially saturated fats:*

- Choose turkey hot dogs instead of beef hot dogs.
- Choose baked or grilled chicken, instead of fried. Ask your parents to grill or broil meat.
- When ordering french fries, get a small order; never supersize!
- Try different types of nuts (peanuts, pecans) for a healthy snack.
- Ask your parents to cook fish like salmon, tuna or even catfish or tilapia every week. They are delicious and give you the healthy fats and calcium you need.

# Parents' Corner

Eating less saturated fat is good family advice. Fat intake should not be limited in children under 2 years of age. Limiting fat at this age can have harmful effects on brain and nervous system development. Once your child turns 2, eating low-fat foods is healthful. At that age, children can be introduced to low-fat milk (1 ½ percent to 2 percent milk). At about age 5, they can be introduced to skim milk.

If family meals and snacks have less fat, your child will learn to eat that way, too. Choose to limit foods with saturated fat. Eating a lot of saturated fat increases the chance of heart disease and diabetes later in life.

Saturated fats are solid at room temperature. Butter, stick margarine and fat in meat are examples. Eating lots of any fat, saturated or not, can add up to too many calories. Weight gain may lead to diabetes at an early age. Choose mostly lean and low-fat foods to help your child and yourself keep a healthy weight. It's OK to eat foods with more fat sometimes. Enjoy a small bowl of ice cream or small order of fries occasionally. Then choose foods with less saturated fat for the next meal or the next day.

Be flexible!

**Activity:** Check one or two things to try this week. Add your own ideas.

- Use the Nutrition Facts label to choose foods, especially those with less saturated fat.
- Limit foods high in saturated fat (bacon, sausage, other high-fat processed meats).
- Keep low-fat snacks on hand: raw vegetables, fruit, pretzels and bagels.
- Make grain products, vegetables and fruits part of family meals and snacks.
- Buy mostly fat-free or low-fat milk or yogurt and low-fat cheese.
- Use vegetable oils. Limit solid fats such as butter, hard margarine and lard.
- Use less fat when you cook.
- Cut fat from meat, and take skin off chicken.
- Broil, roast, microwave or stir-fry. Frying adds fat.
- Limit creamy sauces and salad dressings.
- Offer small amounts of higher-fat foods, such as fries and cheese.
- Serve mostly fruit for dessert.

**Your ideas:**

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Resource: *Nibbles for Health, Nutrition Newsletters for Parents of Young Children (#23), USDA, FNS*

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