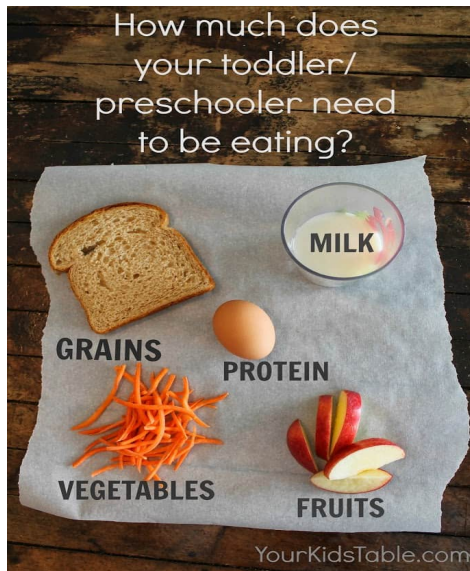


Lunchbox Laments



If you are anything like me back in the day, it made me crazy to make lunches for my children day after day, only to see most of it still in the lunchbox when they got home! That is, until I ran across an article in "Parents" magazine about portion-control for children. Nutritionists stated that a serving size for preschoolers is about *half* the size of the palm of your hand. That was a game-changer for me—smaller lunches, less waste!

Now, as a teacher of young children for 20+ years, it makes me crazy to see how much food is wasted, uneaten and/or thrown in the trash. Lunchboxes so full that it could feed not only one child, but several of their closest friends too! Speaking of friends, most children are socializing so much during lunch, they don't have time to eat all that food in 20-25 minutes anyway. Also, children don't value eating the way that adults do. It's just one more chore they have to do before they can go play.

It is tempting to overpack a lunchbox with, for example, a whole sandwich, yogurt, fruit cup, a whole apple or orange, celery sticks with peanut butter or ranch dressing, goldfish crackers, granola bar, cookies, and juice (I'm not kidding). After all we want to make sure our picky eaters have enough choices that at least they will eat something. But, in my sweetest teacher voice, I say please don't! As the pediatrician said, they will never starve themselves. If they are hungry, they will eat.

There is quite a lot of information out there about portion sizes, but I am a visual learner, so reading about ounces of this and that, didn't really help me. However, when nutritionists suggested that a *meal* for a 2- to 4-year-old should be about the size of your hand--that is something I can work with! Another way to think about portion size: As adults we use a dinner plate, but a young child's portions should fit on a salad plate or smaller. With childhood obesity rampant in the U.S., it makes sense to keep those portions small. I am not a fan of Lunchables, but at least the portions are appropriate.

An example of a recommended lunch might contain a slice of bread, a small yogurt cup, 3-4 slices of fruit, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of beans or other protein. It doesn't sound like much, but it is plenty for a preschooler. Bento-style lunchboxes are a great way to keep those portions under control and are fun and easy for a child to use.

Whatever the style of lunchbox your child uses, keep in mind that visual of portion sizes and the palm of your hand. Making sure your child eats healthy is very important, but so is portion size. Embrace the suggestion to keep portions small and know that you and your child will be happy and healthy!