

Signs Your Child Might Need to See a Dietitian

Originally published on the Restoring Bodies Fitness & Nutrition Services blog. Available here: <https://restoringbodies.com/signs-your-child-might-need-to-see-a-dietitian/>

As parents, grandparents, and even as dinner guests in homes with children, we've heard those familiar words at mealtime: "I don't like it!" You may even remember saying those words yourself as a child. Most kids grow out of this phase, expanding their palates and developing a taste for healthier foods. However, some children struggle with eating habits that go beyond mere pickiness.

In this post, we'll discuss the importance of childhood nutrition, highlight signs that may indicate it's time for expert intervention, and offer tips to help you get the most out of your first meeting with a pediatric dietitian.

The Importance of Nutrition in Childhood Development

Nutrition is a cornerstone of a child's well-being and development. A diet rich in essential nutrients fuels healthy growth, boosts memory, supports cognitive function, and fosters emotional resilience. [1]

A diet poor in essential nutrients, on the other hand, can inhibit a child's growth and lead to serious health problems. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), malnutrition can lead to certain conditions [2], such as:

- **High blood pressure**
- **Heart disease**
- **Type 2 diabetes**
- **Iron deficiency**
- **Cavities**

Beyond these immediate health conditions, poor nutrition can affect a child's academic performance. Trouble concentrating and retaining information can cause a child to fall behind in school, potentially affecting their future and quality of life.

That's why it's so important for parents and caregivers to help children establish healthy eating habits early on.

Tips for Nutrition

Children's of Alabama recommends children aged 5-11 eat three scheduled meals a day, along with 2-3 snacks. They also encourage families to eat together to create a positive eating environment, where children can learn good table manners and build healthy habits that will benefit them well into adulthood. [3]

As children get older, they're exposed to new environments and people that can influence their food choices, making it harder to encourage healthy eating habits. But don't fret; it's all about strategy.

Registered dietitian Barabara Intermill points out:

"In other words, we adults still need to provide and guide but children have lots of other influencers on their food decisions. And that can be a challenge....

So we, as adults, get to craftily help fill in these nutritional gaps. I've learned, for example, that kiddos are ready for a snack at the end of a long school day. Take advantage of this after-school hunger with grapes, cut up apples, oranges or other fruit. It's an easy way for them to get their fruit requirement for the day without ruining appetites for dinner." [4]

When to Consider a Pediatric Dietitian: Signs to Watch For

Sometimes, despite your best efforts to provide your child with a balanced diet, motivating them to eat the right kinds of foods can be tough. Well-meaning family and friends may offer insights and tricks, but you may find their advice isn't working for you. If that's the case, it may be time to consult an expert.

Pediatric dietitians are specialists trained to assess and guide dietary needs in children. Here are some signs that may indicate it's time to consult with one about your child:

- **Poor Weight Gain or Weight Loss.** If your child is not gaining weight appropriately or is losing weight unexpectedly, it may be time to investigate further.
- **Picky Eating or Limited Food Acceptance.** A very limited diet can lead to nutrient deficiencies. If your child is consistently refusing certain food groups, a dietitian can provide you with strategies to introduce them to new foods.
- **Gastrointestinal Issues.** Frequent stomach aches, bloating, or irregular bowel movements may indicate dietary intolerances or allergies that need to be addressed.

- **Food Allergies and Intolerances.** If your child has been diagnosed with food allergies or intolerances, a dietitian can help design a diet that avoids those foods while ensuring your child still receives the essential nutrients they need.
- **Special Dietary Needs.** Children with conditions such as diabetes, celiac disease, or obesity have very unique needs. A dietitian can customize a dietary plan that meets those needs specifically.
- **Delayed Growth or Development.** If your child's growth is lagging compared to peers, a dietitian can help determine if nutritional gaps are contributing factors.
- **Athletic Performance Needs.** For active children or young athletes, a dietitian can provide guidance on optimal nutrition to help with performance and recovery.

Choosing a Dietitian

One thing to keep in mind is pediatric dietitians specialize in working with children of specific ages. For instance, some pediatric dietitians focus on infants or toddlers, while others specialize in school-aged children.

When choosing a pediatric dietitian for your child then, be sure to find out whether they have experience working with children in your child's specific age group.

How to Prepare for Your First Appointment with a Pediatric Dietitian

If you've never consulted with a pediatric dietitian before, you might feel a little nervous about what to expect. Preparing ahead of time not only can help alleviate any anxiety, but it can also ensure a more productive meeting, one where you feel heard and get all your questions answered.

Here are some questions you should be prepared to discuss during your child's initial assessment:

- *How often does your child eat?*
- *What foods do they avoid?*
- *Do they have any known food allergies?*
- *Are they interested in trying new foods?*
- *What are their favorite foods?*
- *Do you find yourself forcing them to eat?*
- *Do you have set meal times?*

It's also a good idea to bring any dietary logs you may have to help the dietitian better understand your child's nutritional background. This can give them a starting point from which to develop a personalized plan.

Conclusion

As a parent or caregiver, your priority is raising healthy children. Making sure they eat a balanced diet is foundational for their future. If you notice any of the signs mentioned above, don't hesitate to reach out to a pediatric dietitian. They can partner with you to support your child's growth and development. After all, your child's health is worth it.

Sources Consulted:

- [World Health Organization. Fact sheets - Malnutrition](#)