

Balanced Plate: Ages 3-5

Half the plate is colorful vegetables at every meal. Focus on fiber, color variety, and fermented foods to build a strong gut, immune system, and developing brain.

50% colorful veggies & fruit — Fiber + phytonutrients — biggest section

25% protein — Higher than adults — essential for rapid growth

15% carbs — Soft whole grains + starchy vegetables

10% healthy fats — Brain development — do not restrict fat at this age

Aim for all 5 colors every day — each provides different nutrients: Red (tomato, strawberry, beet) · Orange (carrot, squash, mango) · Yellow (corn, pineapple, pepper) · Green (spinach, peas, broccoli) · Blue/Purple (blueberry, cabbage, beet)

50% — VEGGIES, FRUIT & FIBER

Soft-cooked or raw finger-friendly: peas, carrots, cucumber, zucchini, spinach, bell peppers, tomatoes, sweet potato.

Fruit: berries, melon, banana — fiber, color, and micronutrients.

Aim for 2–3 colors per meal. Daily fiber: 14–19g.

Prebiotic picks: garlic, onion, peas, banana — feed beneficial gut bacteria.

25% — PROTEIN

Toddlers need ~1g per lb of body weight daily. Soft textures, bite-sized.

Eggs, ground chicken or turkey, flaked salmon or whitefish, soft lentils, Greek yogurt, cottage cheese.

Rotate protein types daily to capture all essential amino acids.

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15% — CARBS

Soft whole grains: oatmeal, soft pasta, quinoa.

Starchy veggies: sweet potato, peas, corn — gentle on digestion and naturally sweet.

Avoid refined grains and added sugar at this age.

10% — HEALTHY FATS

Do not restrict fat at this age — essential for brain myelination.

Avocado (mashed), olive oil in cooking, whole eggs, full-fat yogurt, nut/seed butters (if no allergy), salmon.

Omega-3s support early cognitive development.

GUT-BOOSTING FOODS

Include something from each category daily.

- **Fiber-rich** — Oats, peas, banana, soft lentils, sweet potato
- **Colorful plants** — Every color = different gut-nourishing phytonutrients
- **Fermented foods** — Plain full-fat yogurt (live cultures), kefir blended into smoothies

DAIRY

Dairy serves multiple roles: Full-fat Greek yogurt and kefir count as both protein and fermented gut-supporting foods. Look for live cultures on the label. Cottage cheese is a high-protein, calcium-rich option. For dairy-sensitive children, coconut yogurt with live cultures or fortified oat/pea milk are good alternatives.

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FUN FOODS

All foods fit — no "bad" foods at this age. Build the plate with nourishing foods first and allow occasional "sometimes foods" without shame or restriction. Repeated neutral exposure to whole foods — up to 10–15 times — is how food preferences form. Try to never use food as a reward or punishment.

FOODS TO LIMIT OR AVOID

- **Artificial colors & flavors** — Linked to hyperactivity, behavioral issues, and disruption of the gut microbiome
- **Added sugar** — Feeds harmful gut bacteria, disrupts blood sugar, displaces nutrient-dense foods
- **Refined & ultra-processed foods** — Low fiber and nutrient density, drive gut inflammation
- **Refined seed oils** — High omega-6 ratio promotes inflammation, choose olive oil or avocado oil