

Nutritional Guidelines for Children

A Guide for Parents of Younger and Older Children

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Excerpted from *Cooking for the Love of the World, Awakening to Our Spirituality Through Cooking* and *Cooking for and with Children, Preparing for the Life of the Future*, by Anne-Marie Fryer Wiboltt. Anne-Marie is a Waldorf class and kindergarten teacher, biodynamic farmer, author and nutritional counselor. She has taught nutritional cooking and counseled for 25 years in her homeland Denmark, Europe and the United States.

“May I please have some more of everything?” is a typical question asked in the Rosemary Kindergarten around our lunch table. Everyday we cook a simple, hot delicious meal for the 16 children in our class. Parents are delighted that their children receive beautiful, wholesome meals, bountiful in nutrition, served in a calm, joyous atmosphere. We have designed a weekly lunch and snack menu that varies slightly with the seasons of the year. It includes nourishing soups, a variety of whole grains, locally grown vegetables and seasonal fruit, beans, eggs from free range chickens, fermented foods, high quality oils and fresh local butter from grass-fed cows.

The nutritional aspects of child development and education are of greatest importance. A diet of wholesome, seasonal foods supports clear, open and positive thinking, a healthy inner life of feeling and strong motivation to fulfill our life’s tasks and purposes. During the years through high school the children grow and develop into young adults. The opportunities we give the children to be nourished in body and soul, lay the foundation for becoming healthy, self-motivated, confident, caring citizens in the world. The future health of humanity and the earth depends largely upon us.

Quality

We have many parents at school with different nutritional preferences and dietary ideal, which we value with the utmost respect. Despite the differences there is one wish most parents have in common for all the children and that is to receive a lunch cooked with the very the best quality ingredients within an affordable budget. This wish also holds for the children in the grade school, where our school offers a hot lunch, prepared with local, biodynamic or organically produced food, four days a week.

Life Forces of Food

What determines the quality of various foods is more than what meets the eyes. When we first look at a carrot we usually only notice the outer manifestations of matter. In reality what we see is the physical outcome of what has been created by invisible life forces. The carrot is in itself an activity that is constantly changing and metamorphosing,

*“The essential is invisible
to the eye”,
The Little Prince,
Antoine de Saint-Exupery*

In order to see the activity of a carrot plant and the creative life forces forming it, imagine a tiny seed sprouting and growing into a lovely vermilion red, sweet, crisp carrot with green tops. Observe first the root of the carrot growing downward vertically around its center. Compared with its leaves it is dense with matter. The carrot tops on the other hand are drawn upwards towards the periphery, spreading out horizontally. They are lighter and slender with an almost lacy look. Already we notice two opposite, yet complementary, forces at work that qualitatively are completely different. One is the downward spiraling centripetal force which is often referred to as gravity and the other is the upward spiraling centrifugal force known as levity. Whereas the force of gravity is connected with the earth so is the force of levity connected with the cosmos.

To really understand the essence of nutrition requires the courage to re-imagine the world and bring to our consciousness a view other than the purely material. The quality of our food, and especially life forces of the meal we eat, is of greatest importance in the light of healthy child development.

Organically Grown Food

Foods that are grown on farms where pesticides and herbicides have not been used for at least three years are referred to as organically grown foods. There are other requirements and regulations that follow specific guidelines (called NOP). It is a process at present overseen by the USDA and certified organizations. Organic foods are in high demand and now readily available in many big supermarkets. This demand has grown so much in the past decade that a real industry has developed around it. Many organic foods are today mass produced and grown in places where the cheapest labor can be found. Fortunately there are still a lot of local, small organic farmers who produce excellent quality foods.

Biodynamically Grown Food

The most outstanding quality of food that I am familiar with is called biodynamic. Biodynamic grapes have won nation wide popularity for their excellent taste and aroma, producing fabulous wines. The quality of biodynamic is concerned with not only the environment that the food is grown in but also with the qualitative processes in which the food is created. Cultures of the past, and perhaps some of our own grandparents, were aware that their crops received nourishment from the earth as well as the cosmos; the rhythmical cycles of the moon, sun and the stars. They worked the land according to their observations of these cycles and treated their animals, plants and soil in a way that reflected this relationship. Biodynamic gardeners and farmers of today keep building on this respectful relationship.

Biodynamic farmers experience their farms as individual, self-sustaining, living organisms that live and breathe with the earth in a sea of cosmic life forces. Everything is alive for the biodynamic farmer or gardener and maintains connection to the spiritual cosmic world. The farmer or gardener sees it as his or her responsibility to cultivate this connection. S/he prepares the soil in such a way that it enables plants to take up the cosmic influences necessary for their growth, using special biodynamic preparations.

Scientist, artist and philosopher, Rudolf Steiner, inspired the use of these biodynamic preparations, which are made and used with the understanding of how the earthly and cosmic forces interact throughout the year. He recognized that the cosmic forces stream into the earth through the living nature of the elements as well as the soil, and its minerals. These cosmic forces support the plants in their growth. The quality and life forces of the plant we eat highly influences the quality of our thinking, feeling and interaction with people and nature. Our thinking, feeling and way of interacting create the future condition of our society and the world. Rudolf Steiner was aware that a renewal of agriculture is today necessary in order to reestablish the relationship between the cosmos and humanity, for the world.

What distinguishes biodynamic farming from other healthy farming practices such as permaculture and organic farming is that biodynamic farmers consciously think and work in a practical way with these earthly and cosmic forces and rhythms. Sowing and harvesting are carefully done at the most favorable times in relationship to the sun, moon and planetary rhythms. In addition to working with the cosmic rhythms, applying biodynamic preparations and composted cow manure, these farmers also maintain healthy soil with cultivation crop rotations, incorporating plenty of organic matter and other holistic agricultural activities.

Biodynamic farming practices are also regulated by certified organizations. In many areas of the world scientific research is carried out to develop a better understanding of the quality of biodynamic foods. Ideas are implemented, observations made, comparative testing done and elaborate evaluations made in search of future agriculture practices in harmony with the living world filled with spirit.

Seasonal, Locally Harvested Foods

Whenever possible our school uses organic or biodynamic foods that are locally produced. Seasonal, locally grown foods harmonize with the environment we live in and resonate with the life forces and seasonal changes around us. Eating seasonally and locally is traditionally what people all over the world have practiced. It is only recently that we have been able to ship foods around the world at any time of the year. Cooking with seasonal foods encourages a healthy relationship with nature and life itself.

An Affordable Budget

We always strive to get the highest quality food in the kindergarten while at the same time keeping the cost affordable. We instinctively know that smaller amounts of nutritious food are much healthier than large amounts of ‘empty’ food with no life. We base our menu on whole foods, which are cheaper to produce than processed, refined foods. Although many organically or biodynamically grown foods are more expensive than conventional foods we do not mind paying a little more for higher quality food. We gladly place our money in the hands of farmers who care for the health of the earth and humanity. Buying locally ensures a minimum of shipping and packaging, since food does not have to be transported long distances across the country. We like to support a healthier local economy where the funds stay in the community. In the long run buying

high quality whole foods locally, seems to be more affordable and sustaining for everyone.

Healthy Relationship with the World

Eating a diet of wholesome foods encourages a wholesome relationship with the world we live in. This is perhaps the most important aspect of healthy nutrition for children. Whole foods ensure superior quality and at the same time nourish respect and appreciation for the mystery of life. Every single time I cut an apple around the middle so that a star appears, a sigh of wonder and awe permeates the whole kindergarten. Inwardly we marvel at the wisdom that created this magnificent fruit. Small gestures like this completely change our relationship with the world and create the deepest reverence for all life.

When working in the kitchen or nature enter this mood of wonder. Take your children to visit a farm or grow a few plants at home in the garden or in flower box. Herbs and quick growing lettuces do well in a sunny windowsill. Whenever I plant a seed in the ground I am in awe of the plant cycle that I experience; the transformation from seed to leaf to bud, blossom, fruit and back to seed. I am amazed that a sunflower seed blossoms within weeks into a sunflower, greeting the sun on its journey across the sky. Only a sunflower will grow from that seed, not a squash or anything else! What a miracle! My assistance in this process is humble. I nurture the plant with rich compost and make sure it has water. Then I watch the plant with the utmost interest and attention. When it is time to harvest, it is with the deepest respect and appreciation that I reach out in joy to pick the food.

Rhythm

We live in a world of constant changes. Day transforms into night and summer into winter. Every morning a new day is birthed and every evening it dies away for the night to be born. The moon becomes full, wanes and disappears for three days before it reappears anew. The seasons flow into each other, each giving way for the next. Blessed with these changes, no two days are alike.

As human beings we are intimately connected with these rhythms. Rhythm is strengthening and very essential for the development of a healthy life no matter what age we are. Young children thrive and feel safe when the world around them flows rhythmical and is predictable. Everyday at school we eat lunch and snack at the same time. We have the same 'meal rituals'; lighting a candle and singing a grace. A healthy rhythm of sound sleep, various nourishing activities and wholesome meals is a treasure for any child.

Nourishing Activities

Another important aspect of healthy nourishment for children is immersing them in nourishing activities. It is wonderful for children if they can participate in family and domestic activities like gardening, cooking and setting the table. In addition when children are responsible for age appropriate chores they develop a sense of purpose in the world. Oral story telling, painting, drawing, modeling, music making, imaginative play and other artistic activities nourish active inner creativity, healthy social skills, complete brain development and strong bodily coordination as well as self-motivation and

confidence. When children are allowed to play out of doors they exercise, climb, run, jump, walk and explore the changing world on their own accord. Besides enriching their whole being and laying the foundation for academic learning these activities also promote a strong appetite and sound digestion.

The Mood in which We Eat

The atmosphere within the meal is shared is part of healthy nutrition as well. When the mood is relaxed, warm and light-filled we can fully digest the meal. A calm, joyous feeling around the table encourages respect for one another and nature from which we receive our food. Children grow and develop healthily in a warm, safe and loving environment.

Warmth

Children of all ages blossom and flourish when they are warm. If they are cold they have to use their inner activity to stay warm instead of developing in body and soul. A loving warm environment, warm clothing as well as warming foods and cooking styles are fundamental for the growing and evolving child. Starting the day with a hot bowl of oatmeal drizzled with oil or butter is very different from a serving of cold cereal with milk and fruits.

Developing a Taste for Natural Foods

It is a gift for children if they can develop a taste for natural foods. It may take some time to change old habits. For some of the new children at our kindergarten many of the dishes we serve seem foreign in the beginning. After an active morning outside climbing trees, running in the field and digging in the ground the appetite is high. Almost everything tastes great when the children are really hungry. When children also are involved in some of the processes of growing and preparing food they are much more likely to appreciate the meal in front of them with joy. Most often they will try anything that they helped prepare. We always ask that the children eat a 'polite bite' so that they have a chance to cultivate a liking for new flavors and textures. The most supportive I think, to help children learn to like new foods, is when their friends or family around the table eat the meal with the greatest delight.

Simplicity

Children delight in simple, beautiful meals. Younger children most often prefer a little piece of broccoli, perhaps with a light dressing and a beautifully cut orange carrot flower, over an exotic vegetable pate. Of course older children, especially in the teenage years, desire a lot more zest and creativity in cooking as well as in their lives in general. A simple, beautifully prepared meal allows our senses to feast on a variety of colors, textures, flavors and aromas and is a significant aspect of nourishing foods.

Creating Balanced Meals

When I create a family meal I generally include a *nourishing soup, whole grains, protein rich foods, vegetables - especially leafy greens vegetables, high quality oils or fats as well as small amounts of fermented foods*. I cook simple, wholesome and beautiful dishes with a wide selection of foods using a variety of different cooking styles. Everyone at the table eats the same meal. For younger children I may set a little food aside before using any seasoning. Because children are growing and developing I make sure to serve rich, highly nutritious dishes with buoyancy and lightness. The amount I serve of grains, vegetables, animal foods, oils and fats, desserts etc. vary with everyone's needs, the activities of the day as well as the season. Everything is always changing. Life is dynamic.

My favorite foods don't need much adornment, just ingredients that are at the peak of their flavor.
Carol Prager

Soups

Soups are a wonderful and satisfying entrance for the meal. I create light, refreshing and cooling soups for spring and summer or when the rest of the meal is substantial. Heartier, warming soups, emphasizing round and root vegetables are nourishing for the fall and winter days. I use rich soup stocks cooked on bones of beef, chicken, fish (including heads and tails) or sea vegetables like kombu and wakame. Some soups are a meal in itself served with fresh sourdough bread and butter or olive oil.

Whole Grains and Breads

Grains are very special seeds, indeed little golden gems, ripened in the abundance of light and warmth of several seasons. Hidden within the sheath of each grain is an ordered little cosmos of its own, totally independent of its mother plant, capable of producing thousands of new grains in years to come! There is nothing like the wholeness of grains.

These lovely grains, when prepared well, have a delicious, sweet flavor. Explore cooking with a wide variety of grains like wheat, rice, oats, millet, rye, barley and corn. For better digestion soak whole grains in water for at least 6 hours with an added dash of liquid from natural fermented foods, such as whey or vinegar. Processed dry cereals are processed in such a way that they are not healthy to eat. When baking bread, use sourdough and freshly milled flour. Yeasted and chemically leavened (baking powder and baking soda) breads are lighter and quicker to make occasionally but no comparison in quality and digestibility. Served as part of a meal and chewed well, whole grains are a very essential part of a child's diet.

Nourishing Oatmeal

Soak one cup of freshly ground oat flakes in 2 cups of water. Add a dash of vinegar and let it soak overnight at room temperature. Bring it slowly to a boil and let it simmer for at least 5 minutes. Stir occasionally. Add sea salt and let it rest in the pot covered until ready to eat, preferable 20 minutes. Serve as part of a whole nutritious meal.

Seasonal Vegetables and Fruits

When cooking a main meal, I make several side dishes of freshly cooked, seasonal vegetables. I pick a wide selection of roots, leafy greens, fruits and seeds in appropriate proportions, using a variety of cutting and cooking styles. Qualitatively all parts of the

plants are different. The root has its life in the moist soil. It hugs the earth and penetrates into its dark, cool, watery mineral rich realm. Leafy vegetables on the other hand have, compared to roots, a closer relationship to the cosmos. The cosmic forces lift the plant out of its earthly gravity into an expansive upward movement creating a wealth of lighter, less substantial beautiful leaves. A variety of seasonal green, round and root vegetables as well as colorful fruits, cooked in a variety of ways are essential in a healthy diet.

Animal Foods, Dairy and Beans

I serve at least one protein-rich dish at every meal. These include beans (lentils, chickpeas etc), bean products (tofu and tempeh), fresh or frozen fish (preferably wild or farm raised organically), free ranged poultry, eggs, meat from grass-pastured animals, or unprocessed, unhomogenized milk and cultured dairy product, like yogurt and raw cheese. I rarely cook with dairy products, except for butter, since the pasteurization completely changes the quality and makes them difficult to digest.

Fresh, unprocessed or cultured dairy, fish or animal foods have been part of many different cultures dietary heritage. To either exclude or include animal foods and dairy in the diet and to decide the appropriate proportion is a personal choice that must be seriously considered. If you choose to omit animal foods from your child's diet make sure to include high quality oils and unprocessed, cultured dairy along with dishes that include sturdy downward growing roots and strengthening cooking methods. When including animal foods in the diet choose meat from animals that have been free-ranged and pasture-fed (healthy fish need wild sea grasses as well). Soybeans are best only eaten in the form of miso, tempeh and occasionally tofu seasoned with soy sauce.

Oils, Seeds and Nuts

Before many plants wither and decay they develop mature seeds. Seeds embody the life of the next generation. They are the culmination of the beginning and the end. These small, rich and oily gems are highly concentrated and full of potential vitality.

Healthy oils and fats are very important in a child's diet. Most plant oils go rancid quickly after being pressed. Therefore I choose only unrefined, cold pressed extra virgin olive, freshly pressed light or dark sesame oil, freshly ground peanut butter, freshly churned butter and high quality animal fats. I complement one meal a day with a small amount of cod liver oil as well as fish oil, seasoned with lemon essential oil. I often sprinkle freshly ground flax seeds, roasted sesame seeds, sunflower seeds or various freshly shelled nuts on grains, salads and desserts.

Flaxseed Condiment

Blend one tablespoon of each flaxseeds and pumpkin seeds with a dash of sea salt in a little coffee grinder. Enjoy this condiment with the meal.

Seasonings

When cooking for children I season the meals lightly using mainly herbs. In my garden I grow a variety of herbs like rosemary and thyme. All winter I pick many of the same herbs fresh from plants growing in pots on my enclosed sun-bathed porch. Other natural seasonings that I use regularly are naturally fermented apple cider, rice or balsamic

vinegars, fresh cold pressed olive oil, dark roasted sesame oil, cultured butter, fresh ground nut butters, zesty mustards, sun dried unrefined sea salt, and traditionally fermented and aged tamari and tamari soy sauce (shoyo), miso, umeboshi plums and umeboshi vinegars. I add small amounts of sea vegetables, like kombu as a bean tenderizer and natural flavor enhancer. The ways in which I prepare vegetables and grains bring out their natural sweetness. The whole meal is therefore naturally sweet. The other major flavors, salty, pungent, sour and bitter, are present without dominating the delicate flavors naturally found in whole foods.

Cultured and Fermented Foods

Serving small amounts of fermented, cultured or raw food with each meal is pivotal in creating a well-balanced nutritious meal. They especially increase the appetite, stimulate the digestion and make any simple meal festive and satisfying. When we began serving sauerkraut in the kindergarten we didn't

anticipate how much the children liked it or rather naturally craved it. Even the pickiest eaters would ask for more. People of all cultures enjoy fermented and cultured foods. The Greeks pickle olives, Germans turn cabbages into appetizing sauerkraut and the Japanese transform green, immature

Home Made Yogurt

Heat 4 cups whole milk to about 110 F then transfer it to a glass bowl. Whisk in ½ c of plain unpasteurized yogurt or 5g-yogurt starter. Cover the bowl with a cloth and let it sit in a warm place (110 degrees) for 6 - 12 hours. When the yogurt has thickened, cool it in the refrigerator for another 6 hours.

plums into the tasty medicinal umeboshi plums. Grains and beans are cultured in the Far East creating the now well-known nutritious miso and tamari soy sauce. In Indonesia many families culture soybeans to create tempeh. All over the world people ferment grains or fruit into wine, beer or vinegars. From Scandinavia and Russia came the tasty drinks kvass and kombucha, which kept young and old healthy, and satisfied the need for fresh foods throughout the long winters. Nearly everyone in our society is familiar with cultured yogurt, butter, kefir and cheese.

Desserts

Most of the time I create a balanced meal that is complete and satisfying without a dessert. A balanced meal in itself is naturally sweet, colorful, and flavorful and includes a variety of textures, cooking styles and cutting techniques. Adding fermented foods to the meal bring all the dishes to a unified whole, and aids in digestion.

Although a balanced meal is complete and satisfying by itself it is important from time to time to make healthy, rich and nourishing treats and beverages for children. Sweeteners are very concentrated (forty quarts of maple sap make one quart of syrup) so I use them in small amounts. My favorite natural sweeteners are maple syrup, sorghum, barley malt, rice syrup, raw or cooked fruit and fruit juices or concentrate. I use raw, unpasteurized honey in dressings and dishes that do not need to be heated.

The Life of the Future

Supporting children in creating a healthy relationship with nutritious foods is one of the most important relationships a child can make. It is the foundation from which they build the rest of their lives.