

Excerpted from Pg. 105 of the [Dietary Guidelines for Texans](#).

Life Stage Guidance and Practical Considerations

Across every life stage, Texans benefit from food patterns built on whole or minimally processed foods: vegetables, fruits, high-quality proteins, healthy fats, beans, lentils, nuts, seeds, dairy or fortified alternatives, and intact or minimally processed whole grains. Water should be the default beverage. Added sugars, sugar-sweetened beverages, highly processed snack foods, artificial colors, and refined grain products should be limited, especially for children.

UPFs are factory-made products that often contain refined starches, added sugars, excess sodium, fat, flavorings, colors, emulsifiers, preservatives, and other additives, with little intact whole food. Examples include many packaged snack foods, sweetened cereals, candy, soda, sweetened drinks, fast foods, processed desserts, and many packaged meals.

Not all packaged foods are unhealthy. Frozen vegetables, plain yogurt, canned or jarred beans, canned or jarred fish, nut butters, and other simple packaged foods can support healthy eating when they have little or no added sugar and reasonable sodium.

Babies (0-12 months)

What to Feed

- Babies zero to six months: breastmilk or formula:
 - Breast milk is the best source of nutrition for most babies.
 - Breast milk is associated with better health and lower risk of some infections and illnesses. If you are able, solely breastfeed or offer breastmilk to your baby for the first 6 months.
 - Iron-fortified infant formula is a complete source of nutrition for your baby if you do not breastfeed.
- Babies six to 12 months: breastmilk or formula (main source of nutrition) plus solid foods:
 - At about six months of age, infants can start to have other foods.
 - Starting with iron-rich foods like meat purees or iron-fortified infant cereals helps your baby get enough iron.

- Pureed or soft vegetables and fruits can also be offered.
- Once your baby can hold food, you can offer long chunks of soft fruits and vegetables and let them see what they can eat.
- Avoid giving hard or chewy foods like candy, hot dogs, popcorn, apple pieces, nut butter, and bacon to babies and young children.

Feeding Tips:

- Avoid food and drinks with added sugar or salt.
- Avoid fruit juice, honey, and cow's milk for the first 12 months.

Young Children (ages 1-5)

What to Feed:

- Feed your young child three balanced meals a day and one to two snacks.
- Feed your young child vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and high-quality proteins.
- Include foods for bone health often.
 - Foods that support bone health include protein-rich foods, calcium-rich foods, vitamin D sources, magnesium-rich foods, vitamin K-rich vegetables, and vitamin C-rich fruits and vegetables.
 - Examples include plain yogurt, kefir, milk, cheese, calcium-fortified unsweetened plant milks, calcium-set tofu, sardines or salmon with bones, eggs, fish, poultry, meat, beans, lentils, nuts, seeds, leafy greens, broccoli, berries, citrus, and other whole foods.
- Young children do not need added salt and sugar. Sugar can lead to cavities or other health problems. Offer healthy food most of the time.

Feeding Tips

- Eat together as a family whenever you can.
- Encourage curiosity about new foods by talking about the colors, smells, and feel of new foods instead of likes/dislikes.
- Offer regular meals and snacks and provide healthy foods.
 - Offer food without comment. Let children decide how much and what to eat from their plate without pressure or praise.

- If your child does not like mixed foods, you can offer the parts of meals separately. For example, instead of a taco, you could offer the tortilla and each filling part separately.

School-Aged Children (ages six to12)

What to Eat:

- Offer your child healthy foods like whole vegetables, fruits, whole grains, eggs, meat poultry, and beans.
- Offer foods that provide nourishing fats, such as avocado, eggs, salmon, sardines, plain yogurt, cheese, olive oil, nut and seed butters in safe forms, and ground nuts or seeds. These foods support growth, brain development, hormone production, and absorption of vitamins A, D, E, and K.
- Include foods that support bone health like protein-rich foods, calcium-rich foods, vitamin D sources, magnesium-rich foods, vitamin K-rich vegetables, and vitamin C-rich fruits and vegetables.
 - Examples include plain yogurt, kefir, milk, cheese, calcium-fortified unsweetened plant milks, calcium-set tofu, sardines or salmon with bones, eggs, fish, poultry, meat, beans, lentils, nuts, seeds, leafy greens, broccoli, berries, citrus, and other whole foods.
- School-aged children often ask for the food their friends eat or that they see in ads. Talk about how different families eat different ways. Talk about why your family eats healthy foods most of the time.

Tips:

- Children who cook and shop with their families can learn math, reading, and cooking skills.
- Eat together as a family as much as you can.
- Keep mealtimes positive.

Teens (ages 13-18)

What to Eat:

- Teens' needs for nutrients increase as they grow.
- Offer your teen healthy foods like whole vegetables, fruits, whole grains, healthy proteins, and foods for bone health.

Tips:

- Invite teens to shop and cook with you side-by-side. This sets them up for success later. Let them pick a recipe, take charge of a meal, or lead a grocery trip. These moments build real-life skills for adulthood.

Adults

What to Eat:

- Eating a variety of healthy foods during young adulthood helps prevent diseases like diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and more.
- Early in adulthood, until age 25, adults are still increasing their bone mass. Eat food rich in protein, calcium, vitamin D, magnesium, and vitamin K is important during this time.

Pregnancy

What to Eat:

- During pregnancy, your need for iron, folate, and other nutrients increases.
- Eat a variety of foods in pregnancy, including foods rich in iron like meat, poultry, fish, beans, fruit, and foods rich in folate such as leafy greens, nuts, beans, peas, and grains.

Tips:

- Talk to your health care professional about taking a daily prenatal vitamin during pregnancy.
- Food safety is even more important during pregnancy. You and your baby are at higher risk for food borne illness during pregnancy. To stay safe, keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.
- Fish can be an important source of protein, iodine, selenium, and omega-3 fats. Choose lower-mercury fish and check Texas fish consumption advisories for locally caught fish. Choose low mercury fish, like salmon, snapper, and sardines.

Breastfeeding/Lactation

What to Eat:

- When you are breastfeeding, you have higher energy, protein, and other nutrient needs.
- Focus on minimally processed nutrient dense foods and drink plenty of water.
- Many women may need supplements of minerals or vitamins while breastfeeding. Talk to your healthcare provider for recommendations.
- Breast milk contains B12, but the amount depends on maternal B12 status. Exclusively breastfed infants of mothers who consume no animal products can become deficient if maternal B12 is low.

Older Adults

What to Eat:

- As you age, you may need fewer calories. Eating a nutrient rich diet but in smaller portions is important.
- Eating vegetables and fruits, especially leafy greens and berries, seafood, beans, peas, nuts, seeds, and olive oil can help keep aging brains healthy.
- Fiber is found in whole plant foods such as vegetables, fruits, beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds, and intact or minimally processed whole grains. Eating fiber-rich foods regularly supports digestion, heart health, blood sugar balance, and healthy aging.
- Include foods for bone health like dairy, tofu, leafy greens, beans, fatty fish with bones, and nuts and seeds.
- Vitamin B12 is found naturally in animal foods such as seafood, meat, poultry, eggs, milk, yogurt, and cheese. Fortified foods such as nutritional yeast and unsweetened fortified plant milks can provide B12 for people who eat little or no animal foods.
 - Older adults, people with digestive or absorption problems, people taking metformin or acid-blocking medications, pregnant or breastfeeding people on vegetarian or vegan diets, and infants of vegan mothers may need B12 supplements.
- Include protein-rich foods at each meal to help maintain muscle, strength, immune function, and independence.