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Food and Nutrition

What Nourishes Our Children?

by

Petra Kühne

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Author: Petra Kühne

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Food and Nutrition: What Nourishes Our Children?

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What is Quality Nutrition?

Surveys indicate that children's best-loved foods are pizza, frenchfries with catsup, spaghetti, and pudding. Vegetables, fruits, and grains are at the bottom of the list. What kind of a taste for food are our children developing? What do they need and how can we make those foods palatable? Balanced nutrition makes possible the growth of the physical body, its formation, and vitality. It is the foundation of children's soul-spiritual development, that is, their ability to concentrate, activate their will, and sustain energy. It has also been found to influence social behavior. Proper nutrition influences children's development far more than is generally recognized.

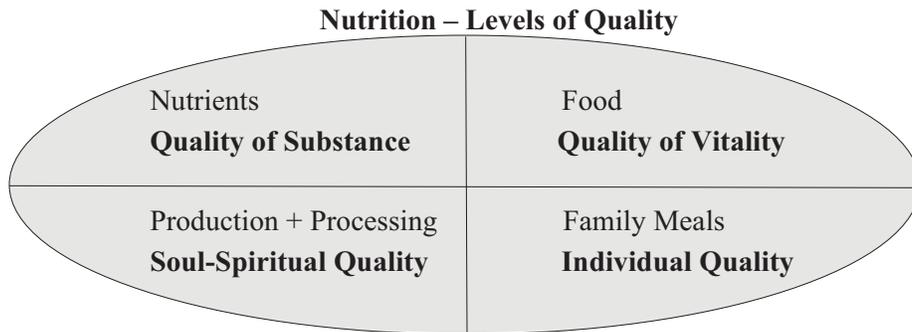
Four Levels of Quality in Nutrition

1. Nutrition indicates supplying *nutrients*, but that only represents nutrition at its basic level. Naturally, food must contain enough protein, fat, carbohydrates, vitamins, and so forth.

2. Nobody eats nutrients. Everybody eats *food*. What matters is the form in which it is eaten. Like protein, for example, protein found in the grain of bread is completely different from protein found in meat and it has different effects on a child.

3. The next level of quality has to do with how food is grown, processed, and prepared. This level of quality is brought about through human activity, a quasi *soul-spiritual* process. Farmers decide which method of farming will be employed: organic, biodynamic, or methods using mineral fertilizers and pesticides. The consumers have in their control the quality level of food that they purchase for their children and ultimately how nature and the earth are treated in the growing of the food they buy. The same goes for food processing and preparation. Our choices in food exhibit varying grades of quality: sugar-based soda beverages or fruit juice, chocolate candy bars or shortbread, fish sticks or fresh fish. The *quality of production* structures and changes food and also the nutrients in food. Consequently, it has an overall, formative effect on the quality of the food.

4. Finally, nutrition becomes *individualized* by the food and drink that is put on the family table and consumed by the children.



The Character of Food

In order to nourish children according to their developmental requirements, we need knowledge and experience in the area of nutrition. Adequate nutrition for children consists of a sensible mix of high quality foods. That means that the inner vitality, the actual nourishing power within food, should be taken into consideration *along with* its nutrient content. Food should not only fill the stomach, it should stimulate the human organism and activate it into a state of agility. This depends upon the degree of “life energy” in the food product. Digestion of food challenges the metabolism of human beings. Thus human beings are invigorated. That is real nutrition.

This inner structure of vitality within a plant or an animal is predetermined as to its character (grain, pumpkin, pig, sheep, and so forth) which unfolds itself during growth. For example, grain has its own substantial power to stand upright. Its blades, heads, and ears grow toward the sun by their own power. A pumpkin, with its heavy weight, does not stand upright. It does not have this special strength aspect. The differing energies of nutritional plants also have differing effects on human beings. For instance, one would feed a child who has a phlegmatic temperament (pudgy figure, prefers comfort) more grains rather than watery, less-upright, melon-type plants. Beyond that, the farming method used is decisive, *how* these energies can unfold. A greenhouse plant that is transplanted outdoors will have less resistance and heartiness than one that is planted outdoors from the beginning. Accordingly, it can also pass on only certain energies to human beings. If a child eats only such “sheltered” plants, then no “robust” stimulation can be expected from food. This is also significant for the psychological constitution of the child.

The quality of nutrition opens up possibilities to give a child the stimulation needed for his or her development. The biodynamic farming method takes the characteristics of these energies into consideration and their species-appropriate unfolding in a special way. For this reason, food grown using biodynamic methods (Demeter® or Helios®) are highly recommended.

As in many other areas of life today, we see big changes in the choices of food and drink available to us. Foods designed and marketed to children by well-known name-brands are supposed to speak to the “kids.” Even the natural foods industry is going this route. However, we must ask if all of these offers are in line with the goal to provide a foundation for the health and development of our children?

Our eating habits are formed in the first years of life. Later in adult life, these habits are very hard to correct unless an illness or deficiency forces us to change. It is the task of those raising children to introduce them to many different foods. Just as we do not give full responsibility to children in questions of daily life because their faculty of judgment is not fully developed, so, too, we should not give them full responsibility for their nutrition by granting all of their wishes and cravings. Adults must lay the foundation, with consideration for particular likes and dislikes that a child may have. In this way, parents have control over whether their children become used to white bread or whole-grain bread, canned or fresh vegetables.

Illnesses Caused by Over-consumption and One-sidedness – Results of Faulty Nutrition

We in the industrialized nations have enjoyed a high standard of living since the 1950s. Seldom has there been such a wide choice of food available at such affordable prices. However, a wide choice requires that people choose their food selectively to create healthy and tasty nutrition. Herein resides the problem. All too often food is bought and eaten according to tastes and cravings to such an extent that while we seldom run into deficient nutrition, we often have faulty nutrition. Eating the wrong foods for years can cause afflictions and illnesses resulting from inappropriate nutrition. These afflictions even begin in childhood.

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| <p style="text-align: center;">Illnesses Caused by Faulty Nutrition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diabetes• Gout (Uric Acid)• Problems with Fat Metabolism (too much animal fat)• Goiter (iodine deficiency, iodine utilization)• Anemia (iron deficiency, iron utilization)• Tooth Decay (too much sugar, white flour)• High Blood Pressure• Heart – Circulatory System Illnesses• Cancer of the Digestive Organs |
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Adults have a special responsibility to children in choosing their food and nutrition. A small child can not differentiate between “healthy” or “unhealthy,” “desired” or “less-desired.” Today, learning to eat right is more important than

ever before since many products, such as sweets, are produced with children in mind and marketed directed to children in a wide variety of advertisements.

The main nutritional mistakes that appear during childhood are:

- Over-eating at meals
- Eating too much sugar
- Eating too little fiber
- Eating too much fat
- Snacking too often

These things can be remedied if children eat only at mealtimes as much as possible and if they are given fruits, vegetables and whole-grains. One can reduce the amount of fat in the diet by reducing deep-fried foods (frenchfries, deep-fried chicken, potato chips), fatty meats like hotdogs, and cheese. Sweet foods should be chosen very carefully and sugar replaced with sweet fruit.

From Infancy to Adolescence – The Needs Change

Humans require twenty years for their physical growth to be completed. During this time, various impulses are working that are also indicators of nutritional needs. This shows itself very clearly during infancy, and is met in the way in which the infant is slowly introduced to solid foods. Starting at age two the child is slowly brought to the point of eating the same food as the rest of the family at mealtimes. However, a two-year-old is a long way from eating everything and also should not be given everything that is put on the table. In order to understand the nutritional needs of the child, it is helpful to observe the phases of growth because children do not always grow at a steady pace, but rather in “spurts.”

During these growth phases children have more appetite for protein-rich foods. Inbetween the growth spurts there is more desire for carbohydrate-rich foods like bread, rice, potatoes, and sugary foods. Carbohydrates act more on the *nerves* and support soul/spiritual development. Protein is significant in *physical growth* and muscle development.

These phases of growth occur in children at the following times:

Ages 5 – 7 – End of kindergarten
Ages 10 – 12 (Girls), 12 – 14 (Boys) – Preadolescence
Ages 16 – 18 – Full height reached

Soul-spiritual development is more of an inner process. In a toddler, for instance, it shows itself with the first forays into thought, learning to speak, and, later, at the beginning of kindergarten age, in the development of social abilities. By the time they reach school age, children are capable of new things: directed learning, a desire to “discover” and experience the world. They no longer just play. Foodstuffs in their manifold variety are discovered and differentiated more according to likes

and dislikes. Puberty follows and brings an end to childhood. From this point onward, one speaks of *adolescence*. Often, adolescents develop their individual personalities separately from their environment. As a result, their nutritional needs are also in a state of transition. These growth phases can be ordered within the following three stages of development:

Ages 0 – 7 infancy and early childhood
Ages 7 – 14 school-age
Ages 14 – 21 adolescence

During these stages of development a child has differing needs to be supported by the appropriate nutrition.

Infancy and Preschool-age

In the *first years of life* a child becomes accustomed to the rhythm of mealtimes: They progress from liquid food (breast milk or a formula) to porridge and finally to solid foods. The infant is given only small amounts at a time to get used to the food.

Starting at age two, the child increasingly eats what the rest of the family has at mealtimes. Some children begin this earlier while others need more time to make the transition and still enjoy their meals of porridge.

The important thing at this age is the *regularity of mealtimes*. Most children do not value change; they would rather eat the same, well-liked foods. At this age, children mimic what they experience with others. They learn from the behavior and nutritional habits of their parents. Sometime around kindergarten age, children begin to get much joy in preparing “real” food for others and not just playing in their doll kitchens.

School-age Children

The needs change when children reach school age, and, not only that, they eat more. Their increasing need for movement also creates increased thirst and an interest in more food variety, and they want to experience the world through their sense of taste. At the same time, their likes and dislikes begin to take shape and be strongly identified. This is the last period of time during which it will be possible to instill good eating habits; this kind of training is no longer possible during the adolescent period. In addition to having breakfast at home, a snack for recess should be given, perhaps whole grain bread or crackers with cheese or some kind of vegetarian spread along with a piece of fruit or vegetables (carrots, celery, turnips). At noon, there should be an easily-digested, but filling, lunch with warm soup, if possible. After school a glass of milk and snack will allow the efforts expended at school to recede. A lacto-vegetable, whole-food diet is well-suited for this. Furthermore, it is important to continue with regular mealtimes.

Adolescence

When you begin to hear very critical comments about foods that were previously well-liked, then you will know that adolescence has begun. During puberty, adolescents experience the outside world more intensely, its temptations and dangers. They want to come to grips with it. Daily life becomes a “matter of taste” and there is a “hunger” for experience. The eating habits of the family are often rejected. New, different foods are tried of which parents often disapprove. This behavior is a result of their normal development. Adolescents want to choose and judge for themselves. In conjunction with this there is a need for more nutrition, especially protein. Parents should try to balance out the adolescent’s often one-sided food choices by serving more fruits and vegetables.

Modern Food Choices – Are They Child-Appropriate?

In earlier times children took part in their fair share of family meals soon after infancy. Parents were careful that certain things were not given to the children such as spicy foods or drinks with caffeine. Today there is the opposite trend of putting special emphasis on the requirements of the child. This is manifested also by the development of special foods for children or recommendations for increased consumption of certain added vitamins or minerals.

Does My Child Need Vitamin and Mineral Supplements?

Vitamins and minerals belong to that group of nutrients which human beings need in small amounts. Vitamin and mineral deficiencies are actually unknown in our present varied diet. Only people who have extreme or one-sided diets are affected by deficiencies. In spite of that, the number of vitamin and mineral fortified foods, especially for children, is very much on the upswing. Calcium, iron, and iodine are the most prevalent minerals with which foods are fortified. Of the vitamins, B1, B2, and C are the most commonly supplemented. New food supplement regulations for children younger than three years of age require such a high vitamin content that practically all products destined for children must be vitamin-fortified.

Vitamins are effective mainly through their relationship to the whole food as well as to the other ingredients. Isolated, artificially-added vitamins can not take over these functions. Experts agree that vitamin and mineral supplementation of foods is mostly superfluous and accustoms the child’s organism to enriched food. With a reduced supply (no vitamins added), the child might possibly have problems subsisting on what nutrients are available. Fat soluble vitamins (A, D, E, and K) can be dangerous at high dosage levels. For the consumer, the addition of vitamins and minerals to a variety of food products can lead to uncontrolled dosages: for example, calcium in juice, calcium in yogurt, and so forth. Vitamin C supplements can not replace oranges.

Iron-rich Foods

- millet, oats, beans, lentils, sunflower seeds, pistachio nuts,
- sesame seeds, peaches, red fruits, eggs, animal innards

Calcium-rich Foods

- milk, milk products, sesame seeds, almonds, legumes

Vitamin B-rich Foods

- oil-rich seeds, yeast, oats, wheat germ, pork

Vitamin C-rich Foods

- sea buckthorn, black currants, oranges, paprika, parsley,
- broccoli, kale, kiwi, fennel

What Can You Do?

Children should learn to get their nutrition from a palette of natural foods and not depend upon artificially enriched products. Hence, such products are not recommended. Instead, concentrate on food that has not been fortified with artificial enrichments.

Some general guidelines:

- Sweets are not improved simply because they contain supplemented vitamins.
- A glass of fresh milk is better than one that has been enriched with minerals.
- A piece of fruit is a good replacement for sweets.