

Nutritional Analysis

Good eating habits start at home, but it's difficult to keep track of your child's eating habits as she becomes older. Show her how to analyze the caloric and nutritional value of her favorite meals. She may be surprised to find out how healthy—or not—her favorite foods actually are. This activity's sure to increase her awareness of her diet and provide a gateway to a healthier future.

What You Need:

- Favorite meal recipes
- Lined paper
- Pen or pencil

What You Do:

Ingredients	# of Calories	Nutritional Value
mac & cheese		
- cheese	259	protein, thiamin, riboflavin
- milk	146	vitamin D, calcium, B12
- pasta	249	protein, selenium
- butter	400	vitamin A, sodium
spaghetti		
- pasta	249	protein, selenium
- meat sauce	229	vitamin A, K, E, B6, niacin
- butter	200	vitamin A, sodium

1. Have your child list her favorite meals on a sheet of lined paper. They don't all have to be complete meals; she can also jot down her favorite side dishes and desserts.
2. Next, have her take another piece of lined paper and divide it into three sections, lengthwise. Ask her to write the word "Ingredients" at the top of the first column, "Number of Calories" at the top of the second column, and "Nutritional Value" at the top of the final column.
3. Now, invite her to choose one of her favorite meals and write it in the margin on the left hand side of her lined paper.
4. Encourage her to write each ingredient in a bulleted list if it's a recipe from scratch. If it's a prepared box meal, such as macaroni and cheese, have her write just the basic ingredients, cheese, pasta, milk, and butter.
5. Then, ask her to look up and record the number of calories in the second column across from each ingredient, based on serving size if made from scratch. Vegetables are extremely low in calories, so they don't need to be taken into account in this column. Fruits are a little higher in calories and amounts can be found via the internet. If it's a prepared meal, just have her write the total number of calories found on the back of the package. Remember: Most of the calories are based on small serving sizes, so try to take that into consideration.
6. Finally, have her write down the other important nutritional values or facts from the packaging from each ingredient, such as minerals, vitamins, fat, etc.
7. Invite her to repeat the above steps with all of her favorite foods and meals.
8. Now, have her add the total number of calories per meal. Have her analyze each meal paying attention to the amount of calories, fat, vitamins, minerals, etc.
9. Help your child come up with ideas to modify her meals if they are unhealthy in certain aspects, such as high in saturated fat. For example, packaged macaroni is high in calories and fat. Instead, you could use whole grain pasta, low-fat cheese, margarine, and add chopped zucchini and tomatoes. Another example is cheeseburgers; instead of beef burgers, you could substitute turkey (which has about half the fat and calories), low-fat cheese, a whole wheat bun, tomatoes, and romaine lettuce.
10. Finally, have her write her new modified recipes in each column. Encourage her to compare and contrast the old and new recipes for calories, fat content, and other nutritional values.
11. Try the new recipes together to promote a healthier lifestyle that will continue throughout adulthood!