

Healthy Fats for Growing Brains

When parents hear the word “fat,” it’s easy to think less is better. But when it comes to kids, that’s not the whole story.

Healthy fats are essential for your child’s brain development, growth, and overall health.

In fact, a child’s brain is made up of nearly **60% fat**—which means the right kinds of fat play a big role in how they learn, think, and grow.

Why Healthy Fats Matter

Healthy fats help support:

- Brain development and learning
- Memory and focus
- Hormone production
- Energy and fullness
- Absorption of key vitamins (A, D, E, and K)

For infants, toddlers, and growing kids, fat isn’t something to avoid – it’s something to **include wisely**.

Not All Fats Are the Same

Healthy Fats (Include These): These fats support brain and body development:	Limit These Fats: These can crowd out healthier options:
Avocados	Fried foods
Nuts and nut butters	Highly processed snacks
Seeds (chia, flax, sunflower)	Foods high in saturated fat (fatty meats, full-fat processed foods)
Fatty fish (salmon, tuna)	Trans fats (often found in packaged baked goods)
Olive oil and other plant oils	

It’s not about eliminating fat – it’s about choosing **better sources more often**.

Easy Ways to Add Healthy Fats

You don’t need complicated recipes. Try:

- Apple slices with peanut butter
- Avocado on toast or in a sandwich
- Yogurt topped with nuts or seeds
- Cooking with olive oil instead of butter
- Adding salmon or tuna to meals

Small additions can make a big difference.



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Do Kids Need Low-Fat Foods?

Not usually – especially for younger children.

- Kids under 2 need **higher-fat diets** to support rapid brain growth
- Older kids benefit from **balanced fat intake**, not fat-free diets

Skipping fat altogether can mean missing out on important nutrients.

Fat isn't the enemy – **it's fuel for growing brains**. By including healthy fats in everyday meals and snacks, you're helping support your child's development, focus, and long-term health.

If you have questions about your child's diet, your UPMC CCP care team and registered dieticians pediatric care team can help guide you.