

Nutrition

Nutrition is probably the single most important influence on growth. Dietary factors regulate growth at all stages of development, and their effects are exerted in numerous and complex ways. During the rapid prenatal growth period, poor nutrition may influence development from the time of implantation of the ovum until birth. During infancy and childhood, the demand for calories is relatively great, as evidenced by the rapid increase in both height and weight. At this time, protein and caloric requirements are higher than at almost any period of postnatal development. As the growth rate slows, with its concomitant decrease in metabolism, there is a corresponding reduction in caloric and protein requirements.

Growth is uneven during the periods of childhood between infancy and adolescence, when there are plateaus and small growth spurts. Children's appetites fluctuate in response to these variations until the turbulent growth spurt of adolescence, when adequate nutrition is extremely important but may be subjected to numerous emotional influences. Adequate nutrition is closely related to good health throughout life, and an overall improvement in nourishment is evidenced by the gradual increase in size and early maturation of children in this century (see Community Focus box).

Community Focus

Healthy Food Choices

Current research indicates that new lower fat recipes in school lunch programs are well accepted by children ([Matvienko, 2007](#)). However, less-healthy foods are still more readily available than more-healthy foods in our nation's schools ([Delva, O'Malley, and Johnston, 2007](#)).

Temperament

Temperament is defined as “the manner of thinking, behaving, or reacting characteristic of an individual” ([Chess and Thomas, 1999](#)) and refers to the way in which a person deals with life. From the time of birth, children exhibit marked individual differences in the