

How to feed your children healthily

It can be tricky to make sure children are eating a healthy balanced diet, and for some parents it may seem like an impossible task.

After all, how many children can resist the idea of a plate of pizza and chips, washed down with a sugary fizzy drink? But when you offer them a piece of fruit or a bowl of healthy green vegetables, they suddenly lose their appetite.

Children need a nutritious diet to grow and to do well at school. In-fact studies suggest children who eat lots of junk food may have a lower IQ while they're growing up compared with those who eat healthily. Some experts also believe children who eat too much fat and sugar and not enough fibre, vitamins and minerals could have a higher risk of developing illnesses such as heart disease when they're older.

The good news is it doesn't cost a fortune or take hours slaving over a hot stove every day to feed your family well.

Did you know?

According to the latest figures from Public Health England, children aged 11-18 years are, on average, eating just 2.8 portions of fruit and vegetables per day.

Source: National Diet and Nutrition Survey 20012-2014

Nutrition for children: the basics

Healthy eating for children – as well as adults – means eating the following every day:

- Plenty of starchy carbohydrates, such as pasta, rice, potatoes, bread, porridge and other cereals. These provide fibre, vitamins, minerals and carbohydrates to help keep your child's energy levels high.
- Five portions of fruit and vegetables – though remember to make children's portions smaller (the amount that would fit into your child's hand is a roughly the size of a single portion). Eating plenty of fruit and veg means they're getting enough fibre, vitamins, minerals and other healthy nutrients such as antioxidants that help support a growing body.
- Some protein, such as lean meat, fish, pulses, beans, eggs and other vegetarian and non-dairy sources of protein.
- Some milk and dairy foods to provide calcium (though you can also find calcium in broccoli, cabbage, soya beans and okra, as well as in white or brown bread).
- Food and drinks that are high in fat and/or sugar, such as chocolate, sweets and cake should be eaten less often and in small amounts. Children can still have these foods as long as they only have them occasionally

and as part of an otherwise healthy balanced diet. Also, ideally you should give children

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as well-cooked mashed-up pasta, meat, eggs, cheese and yoghurt. Around this time your baby could have one solid meal each day, but at other times they will still need their milk.

- sugary foods at the end of a main meal rather than in between meals.

Feeding your baby

Babies also need good nutrition to grow into healthy toddlers and children. Here's what you should be aware of:

0-4 months

Experts believe breastfeeding is the best start you can give your baby, though some mothers are able to only breastfeed for a short while or they may use bottle feeding from day one. Some also combine breastfeeding with bottle feeding.

4-8 months

This may be a good time to start introducing solid foods, such as baby cereals or very finely mashed-up or pureed fruits or vegetables. However, the main food at this stage is still breast or formula milk, with any solids being introduced gradually. Some experts recommend introducing solids at six months, but if your baby is showing an interest in what you're eating, or if they seem to want more than the breast or formula milk you're giving them, you could start letting them try some solid foods from four months.

8 to 10 months

Start adding a wider variety of fruit and vegetables and introduce other foods such

Try to introduce new foods earlier in the day rather than later, just in case your baby has a reaction to something they haven't tried before.

12 months and beyond

By their first birthday babies are usually ready for more solid foods that they can chew. So cut and chop their food into small pieces instead of mashing it up. Introduce lots more tastes, colours and textures at this stage too, as most babies at this stage are ready to experience different things.

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How much is enough?

There's not much official guidance on exactly how much food babies and children need, but one thing we do know is they require different amounts than adults. Indeed, feeding your child adult-sized portions could encourage them to develop an overeating habit, which could make them gain too much weight.

According to the NHS, it's a good idea to start with small servings and let your child ask for more if they're still hungry. If you're good at working out the number of calories in food, the latest report from the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition has estimated the average energy requirements for children up to the age of 18:

AGE	BOYS (CALORIES)	GIRLS (CALORIES)
1	765	717
2	1004	932
3	1171	1076
4	1386	1291
5	1482	1362
6	1577	1482
7	1649	1530
8	1745	1625
9	1840	1721
10	2032	1939
11	2127	2032
12	2247	2103
13	2414	2223
14	2629	2342
15	2820	2390
16	2964	2414
17	3083	2462
18	3155	2462

How to feed a fussy eater

Many parents have problems with children who refuse to eat anything but baked beans and fish fingers. However, it's quite normal for young children from the age of two onwards to refuse to eat or even taste new foods, and experts believe it's their way of asserting their independence.

But for some parents – especially those who are concerned about their children being underweight – fussy eating can be a big worry. One of the best ways to get your child to eat healthily is to set them a good example, as experts believe children are influenced by what and how their parents eat.

There are also several other ways to get around fussy eaters:

- Studies suggest that making fruit look fun and attractive may encourage children to eat more of it. Researchers who prepared fruit using brightly coloured cocktail sticks and cutting it into fun shapes discovered children ate almost twice as much compared to when they served the fruit on a plain white dish. You can apply the same principle to any type of food – if your child thinks they're having fun while they're eating, they may forget they don't like broccoli.
- Get creative in the kitchen by sneaking vegetables into your child's food. For instance, finely chop or puree vegetables and add them to tomato sauce served with pasta, or mash up some cauliflower thoroughly and mix it into their mashed potatoes.

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According to the Change4Life campaign, getting

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a good breakfast is the best start to the day, not just for children but for adults too. Here's some

- If your child is aged seven or older, give them a choice of what they're going to eat and encourage them to help with the buying and preparing food. Children love to be involved and will often eat what they cook and prepare themselves.
- Try not to use food as a reward. Instead, think of other ways you could reward your child – for instance, take them to the park or read them a story. Meanwhile, praise your child whenever they eat a new food and try not to react when they refuse to eat something.
- Invite your child's friends around for tea on a regular basis, especially those friends who are good eaters. And try to introduce new foods on fun occasions such as at a picnic or a party – as it helps your child to associate those foods with having a good time.
- If your child never seems to be hungry at mealtimes, try to give them fewer snacks during the day. Also make sure the snacks they have are healthy, such as a piece of fruit or a glass of milk instead of biscuits or crisps.

Healthy breakfasts

A survey by breakfast cereals company Kellogg's suggests more and more children are turning up at school hungry, with 75 per cent of teachers saying hungry children are more lethargic in class and 62 per cent claiming being hungry makes children unable to learn.

advice to help you give your family a healthy breakfast every morning:

- Base breakfast on starchy foods such as bread or breakfast cereals. Choose wholegrain or granary bread, or wholegrain cereals that are lower in salt and sugar served with semi-skimmed or skimmed milk. If your children are five years old or older (younger children need whole milk).
- Add some fresh, frozen, tinned or dried fruit to cereals or have a sliced banana on toast (it all counts towards your five daily portions of fruit and veg). You could also try making a fruit smoothie the night before and keeping it in the fridge for breakfast – put some fruit, yoghurt and milk or fruit juice into a blender and blend together until smooth.
- Porridge is an ideal breakfast as it's cheap and contains lots of vitamins, minerals and fibre – but try to avoid adding any sugar or salt (try adding some fruit instead if you like your porridge sweet).
- Avoid giving your children breakfast bars – they may be convenient, but they can also be high in fat, salt and sugar.

For lots of breakfast recipe ideas, use the Change4Life recipe finder.

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Healthy school lunch boxes

If your child takes their lunch to school, it's important to make sure the food you pack is healthy and balanced, and provides the nutrients your child needs to get the most out of their day.

According to the NHS, a balanced packed lunch should contain the following:

- Starchy foods (such as wholegrain or granary bread, rice, potatoes or wholemeal pasta – these should make up about a third of their meal).
- Protein (such as meat, fish, eggs, beans or other vegetarian protein – but avoid nuts, as some schools don't allow nuts on the premises to reduce the risk to pupils who may have a nut allergy).
- Dairy (a portion of cheese or a yoghurt).
- Vegetables or salad.
- A portion of fruit or fruit salad instead of sweets or chocolate (save these for occasional treats).
- Drinks (water, skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, sugar-free or no-added sugar drinks).

You can find lots of suggestions for healthy lunch boxes on the Change4Life website.

On the other hand, your child may be eligible for free school meals if your family is receiving certain benefits. Find out more by reading our guide 'How to get the best out of your child's education: Help with school costs.'

Vitamins for kids

Because some children don't eat a varied diet, they could be missing out on essential vitamins. So the Department of Health suggests all children from the age of six months to five years take vitamin drops containing vitamins A, C and D.

You may be entitled to free vitamin drops if you qualify for Healthy Start, which will mean you'll also get free vouchers every week to spend on milk, plain fresh and frozen fruit and vegetables, and infant formula milk.

You may be entitled to Healthy Start if your child is under four years old and you're getting Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or Income related Employment and Support Allowance, or if you're on a low income and receiving Child Tax Credit. Find more information at www.healthystart.nhs.uk

Useful links

If you are experiencing any of the issues covered in this guide, in the first instance call our free helpline on 0808 801 0550. Our Advisors will listen without judging and will work with you as best they can to achieve a positive outcome.

If you prefer you can email: helpline@ltcharity.org
Visit our website:

www.licensedtradecharity.org.uk It's full of useful information about the kind of issues we know people who work in the licensed trade face.

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Other sources of information

British Nutrition Foundation

www.nutrition.org.uk

Information on healthy living and nutrition, including nutrition for babies, toddlers and children.

Change4Life

www.nhs.uk/change4life-beta

For lots of fun and budget-friendly ideas on keeping your family healthy, including tips on eating well.

NHS Choices Live Well

www.nhs.uk/livewell/Pages/Livewellhub.aspx

Health and healthy eating advice for adults and children.