



# Getting the Food and Activity Balance Right

A guide to achieve and stay at a healthy weight for children aged 6-11 years

Thirst is often confused as hunger by many children and some adults too! Everyone needs to have at least 6 to 8 drinks a day. Have a drink with each main meal and between meals too. Changing to a lower energy drink can reduce total energy intake. Studies have shown people lose weight when sugary drinks (fizzy drinks, squashes and juice drinks) are replaced with water or sugar free choices. Remember, fruit juice and smoothies can have a similar sugar content to many fizzy drinks, so it is better to encourage your child to eat their '5 a day' as fresh fruits or vegetables, not juice and drink water instead.

Your child's food intake needs to balance with their activity level. If they eat more than the amount of energy they burn with exercise they will gain excess weight. Being active when we are young is very important for our health. Activity is known to reduce our risk of heart disease and diabetes. Children should be active for a minimum of one hour each day. Any activity counts towards this daily target. Try to build activity into your daily life e.g. walking to school. It is really important that you act as a good role model for your child by being active yourself and also trying to organise fun activities for your family e.g. bicycle rides, trips to the park or family swims.

Many children spend a significant amount of time looking at a screen playing on a game console, watching TV or YouTube channels. Too much time sitting around can make it difficult to achieve the daily activity goal so it is very important to have a limit on screen time. In the UK there are no specific screen time limits, but other countries often recommend a maximum of one hour a day. For school-aged children, sticking to this maximum two hours will allow time to meet the one hour activity target. With our busy lives we often lose track on how much we or our children are moving compared with sitting still. It can be really helpful to record your child's activity and screen time for a few days to see if any changes are needed.



The information on this target chart and poster overleaf has been written for your child. Have a look at this together to see how you can use numbers to achieve some healthy lifestyle goals.

Already doing all of this every day and still concerned about your child's diet or weight? If you haven't already met with a paediatric dietitian, it may be helpful to have an appointment with one - ask your family doctor for a referral.

Which numbers can you achieve now? Fill in the chart below to find out:

How many glasses of water or sugar free drinks?	How many fruit or vegetable or salad portions?	How long do you spend on a screen?	How much activity today?	Daily Total	How many of these daily goals did you achieve?
Target minimum	Target 5	Target 5	Target 1 hour		Target 5
MON					
TUES					
WEDS					
THURS					
FRI					
SAT					
SUN					

How many goals did you meet every day this week? /5. If you haven't scored 5/5 how can you do better next week?

Goal Setting  
Firstly, choose one goal to work on: [ ]  
Now think about how you can work on this goal. Remember gradual changes are more likely to become part of your usual routine. If you are stuck for ideas, then have a look at the example below:  
My aim is to eat 5 fruits and vegetables. I am currently eating 3 portions on school days but less at weekends

- (1) Have one portion of fruit as a mid-morning snack at weekends
- (2) Add a vegetable to my packed lunch
- (3) Increase to 2 types of vegetables with evening meals
- (4) Have a piece of fruit at breakfast on the weekend

It can be difficult to know how much food to give your child to meet their needs for growth while keeping their weight in check. As children grow up they may be less sensitive to feelings of fullness and tend to eat the amount of food they are offered. Additionally, children can confuse thirst with hunger and may eat when what they really want is a drink, which makes balancing their diets tricky. It can be helpful to remember children have smaller stomachs than adults and therefore need less food than you.

Simple changes can be made to help keep portion sizes in check and lower calorie intake without altering the amount of food offered. Below are three ideas to help - see which would work best for you and your family.

### Use smaller plates or bowls at mealtimes

- A small plateful of food looks much more appealing than a large half empty plate
- Side plates are perfect for younger children to eat from

### Try increasing vegetable and salad portions – aim for ½ the plate to be filled with vegetables or salad

- Vegetables and salad have a high water and fibre content - both of these can help you with feeling fuller for longer
- Vegetables and salad (as long as they don't have any dressing!) have a lower energy content than the protein or starchy carbohydrate food they replace; this helps reduce the total energy intake
- Potato should be counted as a starchy carbohydrate not as a vegetable



### Use your child's hand as a portion guide

- Use your child's palm size as a guide for the amount of protein food they need (e.g. meat, fish, poultry, beans, pulses, soya mince, Quorn®, eggs, lentils, dahl)
- Use their fist size for the size of the starchy carbohydrate portion (e.g. pasta, rice, potato, chapatti, couscous)
- Both their hands cupped together for the vegetable portion (remember not to include potato as a vegetable)



Ideally meals should be eaten around a table without distractions like the television, tablets or smart phones. Encouraging everyone to chat at mealtimes can help slow the pace of eating and this may also allow your child to feel full quicker and not over-eat.

# hour activity



- Being active helps you stay healthy and feel great!
- Any activity can count towards your 60 minute daily goal
- Think about how you can build some active time in to your day - could you walk, cycle or scoot to school? Can you take a dog for a walk?
- Do more of the activities you enjoy
- If you don't enjoy team sports at school then look out for 'taster sessions' for other activities or clubs near you e.g. indoor climbing, canoeing or Taekwondo
- Try something new as a family – letterboxing or geocaching are fun ways to get your step count up whilst you are out treasure hunting
- If you prefer to exercise at home then have a look at the 10 minute shake up ideas at [www.nhs.uk/10-minute-shake-up/shake-ups](http://www.nhs.uk/10-minute-shake-up/shake-ups), dance to your favourite music or do your own exercise circuit. Anything that makes your heart beat faster and gets you warm and sweaty is perfect!
- An activity tracker or pedometer can help you monitor your activity and help you set your own goals to move more... you could even set up a family challenge to see who can move the most!



# hours screen time

- Set a timer or an alarm to limit your screen time
- It is easy to sit for much longer in front of your favourite TV programme, game or tablet than you intended. You may miss your chance to be active if you sit for too long
- Think about how long you spend on a screen. Is it more than 2 hours? If yes, start thinking about how you could change this



# Meals

- Eat 3 meals every day
- Eating regularly is important for our health. If we skip a meal we often make unhealthy food choices later in the day
- Always try to have breakfast as it helps you to concentrate at school



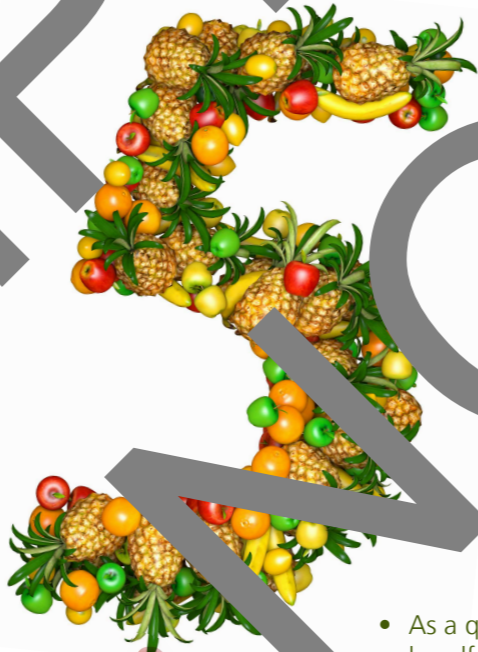
# Portions



you

- Everyone needs a different amount of food to stay healthy
- Remember you have a smaller stomach than an adult so you will not need to eat as much as them
- Did you know we usually eat everything we are served at a meal? Try eating from a smaller plate and having more vegetables to help you make healthy food choices

# Fruit and veg



- Fruits and vegetables are packed with vitamins, minerals and fibre which are important for us to stay fit and healthy
- Try and eat the colours of the rainbow by eating as many different coloured fruit and vegetables every day
- Aim to have at least one vegetable with your lunch and one with your evening meal

Vegetables make great snacks too helping you reach your '5-a-day' every day!

- As a quick guide, one handful of fruit or two cupped handfuls of vegetables is the right portion size for you

# Drinks



- Did you know you need to have at least 6 to 8 drinks every day?
- Water is the best drink to choose
- Fizzy drinks, squashes and fruit juices/smoothies all contain lots of sugar. Too much sugar is bad for our teeth and our health - choose water or sugar free drinks instead
- If you have a fruit juice/smoothie, make sure you do not have more than 125ml per day
- Sometimes when you think you are hungry, you might be thirsty. Try having a drink and wait to see if you are still hungry after that

