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# Food For the Growing Years

A healthy eating  
guide for  
parents and  
caregivers  
with  
children  
aged 1–5 years

# Establishing healthy eating

Eating a combination of foods from each food group will give your child all the nutrients they need. The food groups listed below are based on the Eatwell Guide. The Eatwell Guide uses a plate model to show what the main food groups are: 1) fruit & vegetables, 2) bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods, 3) meat, fish, eggs, beans, pulses and other proteins, 4) dairy and alternatives. These are discussed on the following pages together with information on how many foods from each group should be eaten daily.

Children need to eat a variety of foods to provide the nutrients needed for good health. This leaflet will help you make mealtimes fun and enjoyable for your child.

## Fruit and vegetables

Offer fruit and vegetables at every meal and aim to give at least 5 servings a day.

A serving of fruit or vegetables is roughly equal to the amount that will fit into the palm of a child's hand

Frozen and canned vegetables can provide nutritious alternatives to fresh - choose canned vegetables without added salt

Use fresh, frozen, canned (in juice, water or syrup, rinsed off) or dried fruit

Serve sliced or grated vegetables with sandwiches

Add vegetables to soups, casseroles and pizzas

Add carrot, parsnip, sweet potato or butternut squash to mashed potatoes

Sticks of raw vegetables with a dip make an excellent snack

Freeze slices of banana for a quick snack to eat in warm weather

- Keep a supply of frozen vegetables such as peas and sweetcorn in the freezer so that you always have some to hand
- Use cookie cutters to make different shapes of fruit and vegetables
- Remember to cut grapes and cherry tomatoes in quarters as the whole fruit may be a choking hazard
- Involve kids in preparing fruit and vegetables, for example washing, peeling or grating
- For tips on safety while cooking with children, look up the 'Let's Get Cooking' website for some great advice: <https://letsgetcooking.org.uk/lets-get-cooking-at-home/how-to/get-started/safety/>

Top tips

# Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods

Have at least one food from this group with each meal. Include breakfast cereals (with no added sugar and salt), bread, chapatti, pasta, rice, noodles, couscous, millet, potatoes, cornmeal, yam and green banana. Foods made with flour, for example pizza bases, buns and pancakes, are also in this group.

Foods in this group give you energy. They also give you B vitamins, fibre and some iron and zinc.

Choose fortified breakfast cereals with added vitamins and iron such as cornflakes or wheat biscuits – try cereals labelled as wholegrain, for example porridge

Have fresh or dried pasta with meat, tomato or cheese sauce

Try egg or rice noodles with stir-fried vegetables

Have potatoes baked, mashed, boiled, roasted or cut into wedges

Have wholemeal, granary and rye breads, as they are higher in fibre. You can also try pitta bread, chapattis, English muffins, bagels, wraps and crumpets

Try the nutty taste of brown rice or wholewheat pasta in savoury dishes as a change



Tip

Small new potatoes can be dry roasted in their skins as a quick alternative to traditional roast potatoes



# Meat, fish, eggs, beans, pulses and other protein foods

Have foods from this group 2-3 times a day. They give you protein, vitamins and minerals including iron, zinc, magnesium, B vitamins and vitamin A. Some of these also provide omega-3 fats which are good for your brain and heart. It is important to offer children meat alternatives too such as beans, pulses (lentils), tofu or Quorn™.

**Use lean minced meat, soya or Quorn™ mince to make burgers, meatballs or shepherd's pie**

**Eggs can be boiled, poached or scrambled – omelettes and egg bread are different ways to serve eggs**



**Put tuna, cold meats, pastes, pâtés, canned sardines, hummus or peanut butter in sandwiches or on toast**

**Oily fish (salmon, fresh tuna, mackerel, pilchards, sardines) contain beneficial omega-3 fats – try to have once per week. Avoid shark, swordfish and marlin as they contain high levels of mercury**

- Make a fish pie using white and oily fish and top with a sweet potato mash
- Try reducing the meat content of your usual Bolognese sauce by adding red lentils, soya mince or Quorn™ mince

TOP  
tips

**Lentils, chick peas, red kidney beans and butter beans make good curries and casseroles**

**Sausages, chicken nuggets, burgers and fish fingers are popular but choose those lower in fat and salt or make them yourself – grill or bake them rather than frying – only serve once or twice per week**



# Dairy and alternatives



To ensure a good intake of calcium, have three servings of milk, yoghurt or cheese each day. A serving is 100ml milk, 120g pot of yoghurt or 25g of grated cheese, which is equivalent to 3 rounded tablespoons. These foods also give you protein, B vitamins and iodine.

Milk is a very nutritious drink – use full-fat milk for children under 2; semi-skimmed milk can be introduced at 2 years if your child is growing well.

- If you are using dairy alternatives, do check that they are fortified with calcium and other nutrients
- Be aware of organic varieties which are not fortified

Top tips

Try cheese on toast, cream cheese or cheese spread on crackers or oatcakes as a snack. Add paneer or have plain natural yoghurt with curry. Have milk or yoghurt on breakfast cereals.



**Add cheese to jacket potatoes, pasta, savoury flans, or use it in white sauce to make macaroni cheese and cauliflower cheese**