

Healthy Eating

FOOD & NUTRITION for Children and Young People

A balanced diet is important for healthy growth and development, and recovering from illness or injury. Encouraging your child to eat a wide variety of foods influences healthy food habits when they are older.

There are no good or bad foods. The overall balance of a diet is what counts and in the right proportions. However, some foods are more likely to contribute towards health than others.

For more information please see the guide below:



Eating Well:

- Base meals on starchy carbohydrate foods
- Consume 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day
- Consume 3 portions of dairy & alternatives foods a day
- Consume at least 2 (3 if vegetarian) portions of beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins a day
- Choose unsaturated oils and spreads, and use in small amounts
- Do not consume large amounts of foods high in fat and or sugar
- Don't forget fluids (6-8 glasses a day recommended)

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Additional links and information can be found on our website: <https://children.movebettergwent.nhs.wales>

How does the Eatwell guide apply in the early years?

- The Eatwell Guide does not fully apply to children under 2 years as they have specific nutritional needs
- From the age of 2 years, children can apply the UK dietary recommendations depicted in the Eat Well Guide. A flexible approach is recommended here

General tips:

Meal Pattern

Calorie requirements on the Eat Well Guide applies to adults. **Regular meal pattern is more important for children** i.e. 3 meals and 2-3 snacks per day.

Fruit and Vegetables

It's important for children to eat a range of fruit and vegetables every day for vitamins, minerals and fibre.

Dried fruit is not suitable as a snack for children due to the free sugar content, but can be included within meals.

Aim for 5 portions a day, a portion is 40g.

Starchy Carbohydrates and Fibre

Children should consume starchy foods with each meal and with at least 1 snack a day.

Children **under 5** should have a mixture of white and wholegrain varieties as these foods are more filling which can make it more difficult for children to meet their energy needs.

Dairy and alternatives

Children should be offered three portions of **dairy foods per day**.

Children **under 2 years** should be given full fat dairy foods but can have semi skimmed milk if they are eating and growing well.

Children **between 2-5 years** can have lower fat dairy foods and semi skimmed milk if they are eating a variety of foods and are growing at the appropriate rate.

Skimmed and 1% milks are unsuitable as a main drink for children under 5.

Some children may drink cow's milk alternatives e.g. oat, soya or nut drinks / milks. For the under 2 years this will usually follow discussion with a health

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professional. It is important to choose unsweetened milk alternatives that are fortified with calcium.

Salt

A diet high in salt is associated with raised blood pressure, which can increase your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Choose brands with lower salt content and avoid adding to cooking.

Recommendations are:

- 1-3 years should eat no more than 2g salt daily
- 4 to 6 years should eat no more than 3g salt daily

Fat

The type of fat most children eat too much of is 'saturated fat' which is bad for heart health and contributes towards obesity. Saturated fats are often found in animal derived products.

Choose unsaturated oils and spreads over saturated fats.

Unsaturated fats are healthy for us in small quantities and are commonly found in plant-based foods. These are good for heart health and include omega-3. Examples include oily fish, nuts, seeds, avocados, olive oil and sunflower oil.

Sugar

The type of sugar most adults and children in the UK eat too much of is 'free sugars' which are associated with minimal nutritional benefits, dental cavities and contribute towards childhood obesity.

Free sugars are added sugar in any form, such as those in confectionary, sugary soft drinks, biscuits etc. It is important to limit these foods.

Natural sugars found in Fruits, Vegetables and Dairy foods do not need to be excluded. For more information on free sugars please see the following video:

Fluids

Aim for around 6-8 cups (100-150ml per cup) daily.

Water and milk count as healthy fluids. Teas, coffee and energy drinks are not recommended.

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Fruit juice and smoothies also count towards a child’s fluid consumption but they contain free sugars, so limit these drinks to a combined total of 150ml per day and at mealtimes only.

Key Nutrients

Nutrient	Source	Benefit
Calcium	Daily foods – milk, cheese and other; alternative milks – soya and almond (with added calcium!)	Helping to build strong bones and teeth. Prevents Rickets (childhood) & Osteomalacia and Osteoporosis (in later life).
Iron	Red meat; poultry; fish; tofu; pulses – lentils; baked beans; eggs; dark leafy vegetables; cereals (fortified with iron)	Healthy blood and immune system functioning. Prevents Iron deficiency anaemia.
Vitamin C	Fruit and vegetables including citrus fruits – oranges; peppers; strawberries; broccoli; tomatoes	Maintains – healthy skin (helps with wound healing also), blood vessels, bones and cartilage. Protective – keeps cells healthy. Prevents Scurvy.
Vitamin D	Oily fish; egg (the yolk); meat; margarine; some breakfast cereals; infant formula milk and some yogurts (fortified with Vit D). ALSO – Sunlight & supplements – recommended in the UK.	Helps to regulate amount of calcium and phosphorus in the body (works with these) to keep bones, muscles and teeth healthy. Protects – muscle strength. Prevents fits or Rickets.
Fibre	Fruit and vegetables, wholegrain options (of starchy foods).	Helps prevent constipation.

Vitamin and mineral supplements

It is recommended that all infants and children aged 6 months to 5 years have daily vitamin drops of vitamins A, C and D, unless as an infant they are drinking around 500mls (1 pint) of infant formula milk a day. This is important even if they are eating well and spending time in the sunshine. Healthy Start vitamins are ideal. You can find out more about healthy start here: www.healthystart.nhs.uk/



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