FOOD FOR
THE
SCHOOL YEARS
5-16 year olds
CARBOHYDRATE

Carbohydrate foods are normally the 'filler foods' in the diet. Examples of these are bread, potatoes, pasta and rice. These foods provide energy and B vitamins which are essential for growth.

It is better to eat wholemeal and wholegrain carbohydrate foods because they contain more fibre than white varieties.

Fibre helps to prevent constipation. Foods which are high in fibre are more filling and help reduce the temptation to overeat.

Sugar, sugary foods and drinks are also carbohydrate foods. Too much sugar can cause tooth decay and may cause excess weight gain. These foods should be considered as treats and replaced in the daily diet by more starchy foods such as bread, potatoes and breakfast cereals. Try to replace sugary drinks with milk or water.
PROTEIN

Protein foods are needed for growth and repair of the body. Protein is found in a variety of foods such as meat, fish, cheese, eggs and milk. Peas, beans, lentils and nuts also contain protein. As a rough guide try to eat a portion of protein food twice a day. Remember that some protein foods, particularly sausages, burgers, meat pies and full-fat cheese contain a lot of fat.
FAT

Fat is important in the diet because it helps food to taste better and provides energy and vitamins A and D.

There are two types of fat, saturated and unsaturated. It has been shown that eating too much saturated fat may increase the risk of heart disease. This type of fat is found in butter and other animal products. The best way to reduce the amount of saturated fat in the diet is to reduce the total amount of fatty food eaten. Ways to do this are:

- Avoid fried foods.
- Spread butter or margarine thinly.
- Eat lean meat and always trim off visible fat.
- Eat more fish and chicken.
- Try semi-skimmed or skimmed milk.
- Try low fat yogurt or fromage frais instead of cream.
- Try lower fat cheese, e.g. Edam or cottage cheese.

Polyunsaturated and unsaturated fats should be used in preference to saturated fats as spreads or in cooking. Examples of these fats are olive oil, rapeseed oil, soya oil, sunflower oil, corn oil, polyunsaturated margarine and olive oil margarine.
VITAMINS AND MINERALS

Vitamins and minerals are essential to help the body function properly. Fruit and vegetables are good sources of vitamins and minerals as well as fibre.

Overcooking vegetables destroys some of these valuable nutrients. Vegetables are best cooked in a small amount of water and for a short time so they are still ‘crisp’ when served.

Iron is a mineral which helps to keep red blood cells healthy. Insufficient iron intake will lead to anaemia.

Teenage girls, because of menstruation, need plenty of iron and should be especially careful to eat at least two portions of iron containing foods each day. Good sources of iron are: red meat, liver, egg yolk, corned beef, fortified breakfast cereals, beans and pulses, eg. baked beans, lentils, kidney beans and chick peas. To help absorb the iron in these foods eat them with foods rich in vitamin C, eg. oranges, tomatoes, tangerines or fruit juice.

Calcium is a mineral which is vital to the development of healthy bones, particularly during the teenage years. Good sources of calcium are milk, cheese and yogurt. Try to have 600ml (1 pint) of milk or the equivalent each day (1 yogurt or 30g/1oz of cheese contains the same amount of calcium as 200ml of milk).

Vitamin D is an important vitamin as it is needed for calcium absorption. This vitamin is manufactured within the body when the skin is exposed to the sunshine – so try to spend some time outdoors. This is important, as only a few foods contain Vitamin D, eg. oily fish, eggs and margarine.
How often do people think about the type of food they eat? To stay fit and healthy it is important to choose a variety of the right types of foods to provide all the essential nutrients.

BREAKFAST

Always leave enough time for breakfast. It is not a good idea to go to school without anything to eat as it may be difficult to concentrate on school work later in the morning.

Here are some ideas:
- High fibre cereal, eg. Weetabix, Bran Flakes, Shreddies or Mini Shredded Wheat with dried fruit or a banana and milk.
- Boiled egg with wholemeal toast spread thinly with butter or margarine.
- Fresh orange juice, porridge with milk.
- Wholemeal toast, butter or margarine and marmalade or jam (reduced sugar varieties of these are available).

SCHOOL MEALS

A school meal is often the biggest meal of the day. It is therefore very important to make sure that this is a good meal where the right type of food is eaten.

Most school meals are now served on a ‘catering’ type basis allowing a choice to be made from a range of foods. Try not to fall into the trap of eating chips and cakes every day as these foods do not provide a balanced meal. To help you choose a more nutritious meal, try to:

- Always have a protein food. This may be meat, fish, eggs, cheese, beans or lentils. Try not to have pies, burgers or sausages every day as these are very high in fat.
• Choose at least one starchy food at each meal which will help to fill you up such as bread rolls, jacket potatoes, boiled potatoes, pasta or rice. Chips can be eaten occasionally, but are too high in fat to eat daily.

• Add at least one portion of vegetable to each meal. This may be raw or cooked vegetable or salad.

• Have a piece of fruit after a main meal – either fresh, dried or tinned in fruit juice.

PACKED LUNCHES

Many people take packed lunches to school. To add variety use different types of bread for your sandwiches, eg. wholemeal bread, granary rolls, pitta bread, high fibre white bread, crackers, crispbreads, bagels, baps or crusty rolls.

Try different types of fillings, eg. egg mayonnaise and cress, tuna fish and cucumber, cottage cheese and pineapple, cheese and beetroot, chicken and salad or ham and coleslaw.

Other foods to take in a lunch box are: sticks of raw vegetables, yogurt, fromage frais, fresh or dried fruit salad.

SNACKS AND DRINKS

• Common snacks eaten by children are crisps, sweets, chocolates, and fizzy drinks. These may satisfy the appetite because they contain a lot of fat and sugar but they do not contain many vitamins and minerals which are important for good health. Try to cut down on these types of snacks and eat more fruit, extra sandwiches, muesli bars and yogurt.

Choose milk, fruit juice or water to drink.
SALT not too much

Eating too much salt can lead to high blood pressure. Try to reduce salt intake by not adding salt to food before it is eaten. Cut down on salty food and snacks, eg, crisps, nuts, bacon, cheese, packet and tinned soups.

VEGETARIANISM

As vegetarians do not eat meat or fish, milk, eggs, cheese, beans, pulses and nuts provide the protein in a vegetarian diet. This type of diet can be a very good one if a wide variety of foods are eaten. As vegetarians do not eat meat it is especially important to make sure enough iron containing foods are eaten.

VITAMIN & MINERAL SUPPLEMENTS

There have been some widely criticised claims that intelligence may be improved by taking vitamin and mineral supplements. If a variety of foods are eaten there should be no need to take these supplements.

EXERCISE

As well as eating a healthy, balanced diet it is a good idea to exercise, at least three times per week.