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

Eating a combination of foods from each food group will give your child all the nutrients they need.

Fruit and vegetables

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

Serve sliced salad vegetables with sandwiches

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

Add vegetables to soups, casseroles and pizzas

Frozen and canned vegetables can provide nutritious alternatives to fresh – choose canned vegetables without

Sticks of raw vegetables with a sauce to dip into makes an excellent snack

Lightly cook fruit and vegetables to keep their vitamin content

Use fresh, frozen, canned (in juice or syrup rinsed off) or dried fruit in puddings, fruit salad, crumbles and pies
Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods

Have at least one food from this group with each meal. Foods in this group include breakfast cereals, bread, chapatti, pasta, rice, couscous, millet, potatoes, commeal, 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 plenty of 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 such as porridge.

Have potatoes baked or mashed - try a jacket potato with a filling.

Have pasta with meat, tomato or cheese sauce.

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

Try the nutty taste of brown rice in savoury dishes as a change.
Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy protein

Have foods from this group 2-3 times a day. These foods give you protein, iron, zinc, magnesium, B vitamins and vitamin A. Some of these also give you omega-3 fats.

Use lean minced beef, turkey, chicken, pork or lamb to make burgers, meatballs or shepherd’s pie

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

Eggs can be boiled, poached or scrambled – omelettes and eggy bread are different ways

Oily fish (salmon, fresh tuna, mackerel, pilchards, sardines) contain omega-3 fat which is good for your brain and heart

Avoid shark, swordfish and marlin as they contain high levels of mercury

Pulse vegetables such as lentils, chick peas, red kidney and baked 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
Milk and dairy foods

Have three servings of milk, yoghurt or cheese each day. These foods give you protein, calcium, 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.

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

Try paneer or have natural yoghurt with curry.

Grated cheese, cheese spread or cheese portions can be used as sandwich fillers, on toast or as a snack.

Have milk on breakfast cereals.

Try natural yoghurt or fromage frais with fresh fruit.
What about a vegetarian diet?

A vegetarian diet is healthy as long as you find suitable meat and fish alternatives for your child. It is important to choose the right variety of foods to provide all the essential nutrients to stay fit and healthy.

Include foods rich in iron such as fortified breakfast cereals, eggs, pulses, tofu and green leafy vegetables. Make sure you offer at least 2-3 servings of these foods each day.

- Try using meat substitutes such as soya or Quorn™ in dishes such as spaghetti Bolognese, lasagne, casseroles, curries and shepherd's pie
- Baked beans, kidney beans, chick peas or lentils can be used with or instead of meat substitutes in the above dishes
- Add lentils and beans to home-made vegetable soups
- Use hummus, egg or peanut butter as sandwich fillers
- Use finely ground nuts, for example ground almonds in puddings, cakes, biscuits and on cereals

Offer food or drink high in vitamin C with these foods, for example: tomatoes, leafy vegetables, diluted orange juice – this increases iron absorption.

Allergies

Very few children have reactions to foods or food additives. Restricting foods unnecessarily may be harmful. If you think your child is intolerant to any food, consult a doctor or dietitian.
**Constipation**
- Check your child is having 6 to 8 cups of fluid each day - use a cup not a bottle
- Include at least 5 servings of fruit and vegetables each day
- Include some wholegrain starchy foods such as multi-grain bread, wheat biscuits, multi-grain loops, porridge
- Do not give bran to small children as it affects absorption of iron and calcium

**Iron**
It is important to offer foods containing iron regularly. The best sources are red meat, for example mince beef, lamb, sardines and fortified breakfast cereals.

Some iron is found in dried apricots, baked beans and eggs. A small amount of iron is found in pork, chicken, salmon and dark green leafy vegetables.

Tea and high-fibre cereals may reduce iron absorption.

Vitamin C from fruit and vegetables such as oranges and green leafy vegetables may increase absorption.

**Sugary foods**
These foods are high in calories but low in nutrients. They can also cause tooth erosion and decay. To look after your child's teeth:
- Keep milk and water as their main drinks
- Only offer sweet foods as part of a meal, rather than within snacks
- Brush your child's teeth twice each day and visit the dentist frequently

**Salty foods**
Eating too much salt can lead to high blood pressure in later life
- Limit snack foods that are high in salt such as crisps
- Use mild spices and herbs to flavour foods rather than adding salt at the table or in cooking
Drinks

- Children should be offered 6-8 drinks each day from a cup - in very hot weather children may need extra water.

- Milk and water are the best drinks to offer your child. Up to 1 pint (600mls) milk per day may be offered. Drinking more than this may reduce your child's appetite for food.

- A small drink of diluted pure fruit juice (one part water to one part juice) after breakfast or the main meal is a useful source of vitamin C.

- Squash and fizzy drinks, including low-sugar varieties, are not advised as they can cause erosion of tooth enamel and contribute to tooth decay. They can also reduce appetite for more nutritious food at mealtimes.

Vitamins and minerals

- All children under five should have vitamin drops containing vitamins A and D.

- For information on NHS Healthy Start Vitamins see: www.healthystart.nhs.uk

- If your child is taking other vitamins and minerals, check that the correct dose is being given as guided on the label.
Physical activity should be encouraged from birth, particularly through floor-based play and water-based activities in safe environments. Children under five who are capable of walking unaided should be physically active daily for at least 180 minutes (3 hours), spread throughout the day. Activity can include:

- Different sorts of play that involve movement — walking, crawling, rolling, running, dancing
- Water-based play such as swimming
- Active travel — walking, riding a trike, scooting to places such as the park, nursery, friend’s houses
- Rolling, kicking and throwing balls
- Physical tasks at home such as gardening, tidying toys

The amount of time spent sitting or being inactive should be kept to a minimum, for example watching TV or playing computer.