Food for the Growing Years
Advice for feeding 1-5 year olds

Children need to eat a variety of foods for good health. Mealtimes should be fun and enjoyed by all.

A guide for families
Meals

- Have regular mealtimes so your child is not too hungry or too tired to eat.
- Sit down and eat together so everyone can enjoy the meal.
- Eating a wide variety of foods provides more nutrients so have a main course and a pudding at lunch and for your evening meal.
- Make meals colourful and interesting.
- Offer small portions of food on a small plate as many children are put off by large portions.
- Children’s food preferences will vary. Some like food moist with sauce or gravy, others prefer dry food, while others like the different foods separated.
- Limit mealtimes to a maximum of 30 minutes.

Breakfast

- Breakfast is a very important meal as it gives the energy boost we all need in the morning. Remember it is not good for your child to go for long periods without food.
- Good choices for breakfast include: cereal with fruit and milk, toast/chapattli/crumpets/muffins/pancakes with milk or fruit juice, or a boiled or scrambled egg with bread/toast and fruit juice.

Snacks

- Offer your child a small nutritious snack in between meals. This will help them to meet their needs for energy and growth.
- Avoid giving large snacks or a snack too close to a mealtime as this will reduce your child’s appetite for meals.

Ideas for healthy snacks

- Fresh fruit e.g. pears, apple slices, satsumas, banana, seedless grapes, slices of mango, melon or pineapple.
- Cheese cubes and crackers/chapattli.
- Toasted bread fingers/breadsticks with cream cheese, hummus or peanut butter.
- Small sandwiches.
- Yoghurt or fromage frais with fruit slices.

*NB Do not give whole nuts to children under 5 years as they may choke. If any parents or siblings suffer with allergy, asthma, eczema or hayfever do not give peanuts or peanut butter until after 3 years of age.
Iron

- It is important to offer iron-containing foods regularly. The best sources are red meat and other meats including pork and chicken. Some iron is also found in oily fish - sardines, mackerel and salmon - pulses, beans and egg yolks and a small amount in dark green leafy vegetables.
- Iron is better absorbed from meals including fruit and vegetables high in Vitamin C. Oranges, tomatoes and fruit juice are particularly high.
- Do not give tea with meals as it reduces iron absorption.

Salty foods

- Snacks high in salt should be limited - salt is usually included as sodium on food labels. Use mild spices and herbs to flavour foods rather than adding salt in cooking and do not add salt at the table.

Fats and Oils

- Young active children need some fats and oils but use them in moderation.

Allergies

- Only 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 that your child is having 6-8 drinks from a cup each day.
- Include vegetables and fruit at each meal and aim for at least 5 servings a day.
- Offer wholemeal bread instead of white or brown.
- Encourage high fibre cereals for breakfast e.g. Weetabix, Shreddies, Shredded Wheat, Cheerios, Porridge.
- Do not give bran to small children.

Drinks

- Offer children 6-8 drinks from a cup each day and more in very hot weather. Water and milk are the best drinks as they do not damage teeth.
- Limit juices, sugary squashes and fizzy drinks as these can fill up a child so that they have a smaller appetite for food at mealtimes.

Vitamins

- Children under 5 should have extra Vitamins A & D. This is particularly important for picky eaters and all Asian, African and Middle Eastern children.
- Vitamin drops are available at your Health Centre.

Sugary foods

- Limit the amount of sugar and sweets eaten. This will help look after your child’s teeth and remember to brush your child’s teeth and visit the dentist regularly.
Fruit and vegetables

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

- Vegetables may be eaten raw or cooked.
- Serve sliced salad vegetables with sandwiches.
- Sticks of raw vegetables with a sauce to dip into makes an excellent snack.
- Use fresh, frozen, tinned or dried fruit in puddings, fruit salad, crumbles and pies.
- Frozen and tinned vegetables can provide nutritious alternatives to fresh. Choose tinned vegetables without added salt.
- Another way of serving vegetables is to add them to soups, casseroles and pizzas.

- Young children enjoy fresh fruit cut into small pieces. Offer a wide variety.

Do not overcook fruit and vegetables as this reduces the vitamin content.
Bread, cereals and potatoes

Serve these with all meals: breakfast cereals, bread, chapatti, pasta, rice, couscous, millet, potatoes, yam or green banana

▲ Encourage vitamin and iron enriched breakfast cereals e.g. Weetabix, Shreddies, Cornflakes, Cheerios or Rice Krispies.
▲ Offer wholemeal, granary and rye breads as well as white as they are higher in fibre.
▲ You can also try pitta bread, chappatis, muffins, bagels, crumpets and bread sticks.
▲ Many children enjoy pasta shapes served with meat, tomato or cheese sauce.
▲ Try the nutty taste of brown rice in savoury dishes as a change from white rice.
▲ Potatoes can be offered as baked, boiled, mashed or try a jacket potato with a filling.
Meat, fish, eggs, dahl, pulses and nuts

Serve twice a day

- Try minced beef, turkey, chicken, pork or lamb. Many children prefer meat to be soft and moist. Shepherd's pie, meatballs, spaghetti bolognaise or a slow cooked stew are popular.
- Mashed sardines, tuna, cold meat, pastes, pates, hummus and peanut butter* are useful sandwich fillers.
- Pulse vegetables such as lentils, chick peas, red kidney & baked beans can be added to curries and casseroles.
- Fish is quick and easy to cook. Offer oily fish such as salmon, fresh tuna, mackerel, pilchards and sardines once or twice a week. Many children enjoy fish in a sauce. Always carefully remove all bones.
- Grilled sausages, chicken nuggets, burgers and fish fingers are popular but choose those lower in fat and salt or make them yourself.
- Offer boiled, poached or scrambled eggs on toast or in sandwiches. Omelettes and eggy bread are different ways to serve eggs.
- Convenience foods chosen carefully can make healthy meals. Select those with lower amounts of salt and fat.

*see note about nuts on page 2
Milk and dairy foods

Give 3 servings of milk, yoghurt or cheese each day

- Give milk as a drink, on breakfast cereals, in puddings or sauces.
- Offer yoghurt, yoghurt drinks or fromage frais as a pudding or snack between meals.
- Use paneer in curries or serve a curry with yoghurt.
- Grated cheese, cheese spreads or cheese portions can be used as sandwich fillers, on toast or as a snack.
- Add cheese to jacket potatoes, spaghetti, savoury flans, or use in white sauce to make macaroni cheese and cauliflower cheese.

Which milk?

- Give full fat/whole milk to children under 2 years.
- After 2 years semi-skimmed milk may be given if your child is eating and growing well.
- Skimmed milk should not be used under the age of 5 years.