

Healthy eating for primary school children



The balance of good health

The Balance of Good Health applies to the majority of the population, including vegetarians and those who are overweight. It does not apply to children under five, or children who are very underweight as these groups usually require diets which are more energy and nutrient dense.

Fruit and vegetables Aim for at least 5 portions a day - a portion is about 80gms or 3oz of most fruit and vegetables, e.g. 1 tablespoon of dried fruit, 3 tablespoons of vegetables, 1 apple, 1 medium banana.



Meat, fish and alternatives Include a variety of foods from this food group such as lean meat, poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, beans, split peas, pulses and lentils.



Bread, other cereals and potatoes

This group includes starchy foods such as bread, cereals, potatoes, pasta, rice, chapatti, naan, yam, cassava, plantain. They provide energy, B-vitamins, iron and fibre. **Have something from this food group at every meal and choose wholegrain varieties where possible.**

Milk and dairy Low fat dairy foods are recommended if children are eating and growing well. From the age of 2 years, children can have semi-skimmed milk and from 5 years they can have skimmed milk if desired.

Foods high in fat and/or sugar - e.g. cakes, biscuits, pastry, crisps, fizzy and fruity drinks. Keep sugary foods to mealtimes and eat foods from this food group in small amounts.

Breakfast

Always leave enough time for breakfast. It may be difficult for your children to concentrate on school work later in the morning if they are hungry.

Here are some ideas:

- High fibre cereal e.g. Weetabix, Bran Flakes, Shreddies or Mini Shredded Wheat with dried fruit or a banana and semi-skimmed milk.
- Boiled egg with wholemeal toast spread thinly with butter or margarine.
- Fresh orange juice, porridge with semi-skimmed milk.
- Wholemeal toast. Try different toppings e.g. marmalade, Marmite, fresh grilled tomatoes or baked beans.



Healthy snacks

If your children are hungry between meals, try one of these:

- Fresh fruit - apple slices, orange segments, banana, seedless grapes.
- Washed and chopped raw vegetables, e.g. carrot, celery, cucumber, tomato.
- Wholemeal bread or toast - with savoury spread such as Marmite, peanut butter* or vegetable pate.
- Savoury cracker, bread sticks or matzos.
- Scone - plain or cheese.
- Crumpet.
- Small chunk of low fat cheese.
- Plain, home made popcorn.
- Breakfast cereal with semi-skimmed milk (choose the brands without sugar coating).
- Meat/vegetable samosa - baked, rather than deep fried.



*Some schools do not allow nuts due to the risk to children with severe nut allergies - check your school's food policy

Lunch

A good, hot meal in the middle of the day helps your children to keep going in the afternoon. When choosing their meal, encourage them to choose a variety of foods and always have a good balance. To help your children choose a more nutritious meal follow these basic tips:

- 1 Always have at least one portion of vegetables. This may be raw or cooked.
- 2 Have a piece of fruit after a main meal - either fresh, dried or tinned in fruit juice.
- 3 Always have a protein food. This may be meat, fish, eggs, cheese, beans or lentils. Try not to have processed foods like chicken nuggets, burgers or sausages every day as these may be very high in fat and salt.
- 4 Choose at least one starchy food at each meal which will help to fill them up. e.g. bread, jacket potatoes, boiled potatoes, pasta or rice. Chips can be eaten occasionally but most are too high in fat to eat every day.
- 5 Include a portion of dairy foods, such as semi-skimmed milk, custard, cheese or low fat yoghurt (but watch the sugar). Try to have 2-3 portions of foods from this group. Adolescent children should try and have 3-4 portions daily.



Healthy packed lunches

Fruit and vegetables

Always include fruit and vegetables in a packed lunch, try:

- Carrot sticks with a dip
- Cherry tomatoes
- Celery sticks
- Salad leaves or cucumber in sandwiches for a fresh taste
- Fresh fruit or fruit salad
- Dried fruit e.g. raisins, apricots or figs
- Fruit juice



Meat, fish and alternatives

Always include a protein-rich food in a packed lunch.

- Lean cooked meats – such as chicken or turkey
- Cheese – especially lower fat versions
- Eggs – hard boiled
- Fish – tinned tuna, sardines (drained of oil or brine)
- Pulses – home made or bought lentil or bean pate or hummus



Food safety tips: use a cool bag to keep dairy foods and meats cold and safe. For added chilling, freeze a carton of fruit juice the night before and it will keep the lunch box cold all morning. Lunchboxes should be stored in a cool place at school in the mornings.

