Feeding your child from 1–3
By the age of one, your child will be joining in family meals

He'll also be more active and spending more energy, and he'll need a varied, energy-rich diet for good health and growth. For balance and variety, choose from the five main food groups: milk and dairy foods; meat, fish and alternatives; bread, other cereals and potatoes; fruit and vegetables; foods containing fat, foods containing sugar. You'll find them listed in this leaflet, along with tips and ideas for meals and snacks.

Food safety first

Young children are quite vulnerable to bacteria that can cause food poisoning. So it's very important to store, prepare and cook food safely, and to keep the kitchen clean. For a healthy, safe diet:

- Wash all fruits and vegetables before eating. Peel and top carrots and peel fruits such as apples.
- Avoid raw eggs. They sometimes contain Salmonella bacteria, which may cause food poisoning. (Also avoid giving your child uncooked cake mixture, home-made ice creams, mayonnaise, or desserts that contain uncooked raw egg.) When cooking eggs, the egg yolk and white should be firm.
- When re-heating food, make sure that it is piping hot all the way through, and allow to cool slightly before giving to your child. When using a microwave, always stir and check the temperature of the food before feeding your child, to avoid burning from hot spots.
- If your child likes to sit on the floor, keep the floor clean, and pick up any food that has fallen on it.

Encourage variety and family meals.

- Teach your child to wash their hands after touching pets and going to the toilet, and before eating.

What should I know about food allergies?

If someone in your family suffers from hayfever, asthma, eczema or any food allergy, then your child may be more prone to food allergies. It is best to avoid giving peanuts and foods containing peanut products (e.g. peanut butter, unrefined groundnut oil and some snacks, etc.) until your child is three years old. Read food labels carefully and if you are still in doubt about the contents, avoid these foods.

If your family has no history of allergies, you can introduce foods containing nuts after 1 year of age. Whole nuts can be given after 5 years of age.

If you suspect that your child may be reacting to a food, always seek medical advice. Don't be tempted to experiment by cutting out a major food such as milk. Your child's diet may not provide all the necessary nutrients. Talk about your worries with your doctor and health visitor, who may refer you to an expert dietitian.
Oh, what a mess!

Be prepared for messy mealtimes with children. It will take time for your child to learn how to behave when eating. You and the rest of the family will set an example, so try to eat and enjoy your food together. Some families prefer to eat with their fingers, while others use chopsticks or cutlery. Whatever tool is preferred, be patient. Your child will need time to get used to them.

Fingers and cutlery

By about one year of age, babies should be trying to feed themselves. Some babies are very independent and want no help — so be patient, even if most of the food does not reach their mouths. Others prefer help, but are happy to fiddle with a spoon whilst being fed. Encourage your child to feed herself, either with a spoon or by offering suitable finger foods.

Some safety tips

- Take care that your child only has access to small blunt knives at the meal table.

- Unbreakable plates or bowls are ideal for small children, who often decide their meal is finished when their plate hits the floor.

- When your child no longer needs the high chair, make sure that she is sitting safely and at the right height for the table. Booster seats, cushions or a lap may be useful.

- Always supervise your child while they are eating.

Examples of finger foods for snacks or with meals

- bananas or peeled apple slices
- chapatti or pitta bread fingers
- breadsticks
- toast fingers with cheese spread
- cooked pasta twirls
- cooked vegetables, e.g. carrot or green beans
- raw vegetables, e.g. cucumber and carrots
- cubes of cheese
- sandwiches cut into small pieces
- chopped hard-cooked egg
Milk and dairy products

Milk is important for young children. A minimum of ½-pint (250–300ml) of milk a day will provide energy for growth, and calcium for strong bones and teeth. After the age of one you can change from infant formula or follow-on milk, to full-fat cow’s milk. You can, of course, continue breastfeeding but all other drinks should be given in a cup.

- If your child doesn’t like drinking milk every day, give at least two servings of milk-based dishes, cheese, yoghurt or fromage frais daily.

- Use full-fat milk and dairy products until your child is at least two years of age. Semi-skimmed milk can be introduced from two years of age, provided your child is a good eater and growing well. Skimmed milk is not suitable for children under five.

- Families receiving Income Support or an income-based Job Seeker’s Allowance with children under five years of age can receive 4 litres (7 pints) of milk per week per child, free of charge. For more details, contact the NHS Response Line for a leaflet (see p.27).

What if I don’t want to give my child cow’s milk?

If your child is allergic to cow’s milk or is a vegan, you will avoid giving cow’s milk or its products to your child (see p.3). But you still need to make sure they are getting enough calcium and energy.

You can:

- Give unsweetened soya drink with added calcium (check the label).

For vegan diets, give soya-based infant formula as a drink (see also p.17), but only on the advice of your doctor or health visitor. Soya-based infant formula contains added sugar, unlike cow’s milk, so it needs to be used exactly as stated on the label, to protect teeth.

Some ideas to try:

**Milk**
- porridge, hot oat cereal or cornmeal made with full-fat milk
- breakfast cereals with full-fat milk
- rice pudding, custard and other milky puddings

**Cheese**
- macaroni cheese, cheese on toast, cheese on vegetables and bakes
- vegetable soup with grated cheese, paneer in curries
- chunks of cheese and pieces of fruit
- cottage cheese dips

**Yoghurt and fromage frais**
- add fruit (fresh, frozen or canned) raw, stewed or baked, to full-fat yoghurt or fromage frais
- yoghurt made into lassi drinks (don’t add salt or sugar)
- add yoghurt to curry
Bread, other cereals and potatoes

Whether it is bread, breakfast cereals, maize, millet, potatoes, yams, plantains, rice, couscous or pasta, chappatis, rotis or pitta bread, most children don’t need much encouragement to eat one or more of the foods from this group.

- A portion with each meal will provide energy, various nutrients and some fibre. Let your child try lots of different varieties of starchy foods. Try wholemeal versions, but not every time. (see also p.24).

- Potatoes are a useful source of vitamin C and can be cooked in lots of ways (e.g. boiled or mashed). It’s best not to give chips everyday and to choose thick, straight chips or lower fat oven chips.

Starchy staples form an important part of anyone’s diet. But they can be very filling, so make sure small tummies have room for other foods too.

Potatoes are a good source of vitamin C. Boil or mash them, and serve with vegetables, meat or fish (or alternatives).

Some ideas to try:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasty snacks</th>
<th>More substantial meals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fortified breakfast cereals (preferably not sugar coated)</td>
<td>baked potatoes with baked beans and cheese</td>
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<tr>
<td>popcorn or breadsticks</td>
<td>pasta – a favourite with nearly all children – with vegetables, meat, fish or cheese sauces</td>
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<tr>
<td>toast, bagels, bread buns or potato cakes</td>
<td>pitta bread filled with cream cheese, ham or fish</td>
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<td>fingers of toasted bread covered with cheese spread</td>
<td>couscous mixed with peas and flaked fish or cooked minced meat</td>
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<td></td>
<td>pilau or kitchri with yoghurt</td>
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<td></td>
<td>noodles or rice mixed with shredded omelette and vegetables</td>
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<td>chapattis with dalh</td>
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