

A healthy, balanced and varied diet is important for your child's health. To meet the extra demands of growth children, they need to have higher energy (calorie) and nutrient requirements for their body size compared to adults.

In the UK, the healthy eating model is known as [the Eatwell Guide](#). The Eatwell Guide shows the proportions of the main food groups that form a healthy, balanced diet. The five main food groups are:

- Fruit and vegetables;
- Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates;
- Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins;
- Dairy and alternatives;
- Oils and spreads.

Children's diets from the age of 5 should be based on the principles of the Eatwell Guide:

- Eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day.
- Base meals on potatoes, bread, rice, pasta or other starchy carbohydrates; choose wholegrain versions where possible.
- Have some dairy or dairy alternatives (such as soya drinks); choose lower fat and lower sugar options.
- Eat some beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins (including 2 portions of fish every week, one of which should be oily).
- Choose unsaturated oils and spreads and eat in small amounts.
- Have 6-8 unsweetened drinks every day.

Fruit and vegetables

Children should eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables every day – fresh, frozen canned and dried – all count! 150ml of unsweetened 100% fruit/vegetable juice or smoothie also counts towards the 5 A DAY – but only once per day.

Portion sizes for children vary depending on their size and age. As a guide, a portion is what fits into the palm of the individual's hand.

Fruit and vegetables provide a range of different vitamins and minerals needed for health. They also provide fibre which is important for a healthy digestive system.

Dried fruit and dried fruit products can stick to teeth so should be eaten at mealtimes not as a between-meal snack, to reduce the impact on teeth.

Encourage your child to eat a variety of fruit and vegetables everyday, as each type provides different amounts and combinations of nutrients. Eat a rainbow!

Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates

Starchy carbohydrates are the best source of energy for your growing child. They also contain fibre which is important for a healthy digestive system. Choose wholegrains and other high fibre versions where possible such as wholemeal or wholegrain bread,

wholewheat pasta and potatoes with their skin on as they contain more fibre, vitamins and minerals. Include food from this group with every main meal.

Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins

This food group is important for normal growth and development in children and repair of muscles. Food examples include beans, lentils, peas, fish (white and oily), soya products, eggs, lean meat and dairy products.

Try to include more plant sources of protein such as beans and pulses. They can be inexpensive, high in fibre and naturally lower in fat than animal sources of protein. One portion of pulses per day also counts towards the 5 A DAY recommendation.

We're all recommended to eat at least two portions of fish a week, one of which should be oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, trout or sardines.

Dairy and alternatives

Food from this group provides protein, calcium, iodine and B vitamins. Dairy and dairy alternatives are an important source of calcium which is needed for the development and maintenance of strong bones and teeth. Food examples include milk, cheese, yogurt, fromage frais, and calcium fortified dairy alternatives.

Choose lower fat and lower sugar options – [check the labels!](#)

Oils and spreads

Some fat is needed in the diet but it needs to be the right type of fat and in the right amount. Choose unsaturated oils and spreads made from unsaturated oils and use in small amounts. Remember that all types of fat are high in energy (calories) and should be limited in the diet.

Generally we are eating too much saturated fat and should be reducing this and choosing unsaturated fats.

Sources of unsaturated fats include olive, rapeseed, sunflower and corn oils, oily fish, nuts and seeds. Sources of saturated fat include animal products such as fatty meats, butter, lard, ghee, and dairy products and foods made with these such as cakes, biscuits and pastries.

Drinks

Children should have at least 6-8 unsweetened drinks every day.

Water, 1% or semi-skimmed milk and 100% fruit/vegetable juices and smoothies (combined maximum of 150ml per day) are healthy choices for children! (Note that 1% and skimmed are not suitable for under 5s)

Food high in sugar, salt and saturated fat

Food that is high in salt, saturated fat and sugar is not needed as part of a healthy, balanced diet. If it is consumed it should be infrequently and in small amounts. Check the labels and avoid giving your child food that is high in fat, salt and sugar.

Examples of food high in sugar, salt and saturated fat include chocolate and sweets, cakes and biscuits, puddings and pastries, jams, sugar, syrups and honey, crisps, rich sauces and gravies, cream and ice-cream, mayonnaise and sugar containing drinks.

For more information on a healthy, balanced diet visit www.nutrition.org.uk