



Healthy Eating for Children



Children need regular meals and snacks to get the energy and nutrients they need for growing and fighting off illness. Eating family meals together will encourage them to enjoy a variety of foods. Snacking all day in place of meals, usually results in eating an unbalanced diet.

Breakfast is essential every day as it gives them an energy boost to cope with busy mornings at nursery or school. Offer both a savoury and a sweet course at the midday and evening meals to give two chances to eat different foods and nutrients.

Healthy Foods

The nutrients children need are found in the four important food groups - offer them every day:

1. Cereal Group:

Base each meal on bread, potatoes, rice, pasta, or breakfast cereal. Include scones, buns, muffins, crumpets and cereal bars as snacks. Use wholegrain varieties some of the time.

2. Fruit and Vegetables:

Include fruit and vegetables five times each day. For example fruit or fruit juice at breakfast; both a vegetable and some fruit at lunch and tea. Fruit also makes a great snack, chopped up in to bite size chunks makes it even more appealing to children.



3. Milk Group:

Make sure they have milk, cheese or yoghurt three times a day e.g. milk as a drink, on breakfast cereal or in a pudding. Cheese is popular on pizza or pasta or in sandwiches. Lower fat varieties have just as much calcium, protein and most of the vitamins.

4. Meat, fish and alternatives Group:

Meat, fish, eggs, nuts and pulses are needed two or three times a day. They give lots of vitamins and plenty of protein and iron.

Foods high in sugar and fat give extra energy but few nutrients. e.g. biscuits, cake, ice-cream, sweets, chocolates and savoury snacks such as crisps. They can be offered in small amounts in addition to the more nutritious foods

above, not instead of them. Only use a little butter, margarine or oil in cooking, or on bread. Grill, steam or bake foods rather than frying them.

Healthy Drinks:

The best drinks for children are milk and water as they do not damage teeth. Fruit juice is acidic and should be diluted with water and drunk with meals or snacks.

The number of drinks children need varies from day to day depending on the weather, how active children are and what food they are eating. Offer a drink with each meal and at least once between meals. Offer extra drinks in hot weather and during sport and energetic activities. Tea reduces iron absorption so only give it between meals.

Fats and Oils

Children under five have a slightly higher requirement for energy so will need foods that are slightly higher in fat. Over the age of five they should follow a healthy diet suitable for all the family. Fats and oils should be used in moderation.

Sugary foods

Sugar should be limited in children's food and sugary drinks and sweets should be limited to an occasional treat. This will also help to look after their teeth - remember to brush teeth twice a day and visit the dentist regularly.



Salty foods

Do not add salt to children's food - herbs and spices can be added for flavour instead of salt. Limit salty snacks like crisps to an occasional treat and reduce the amount of processed salty foods e.g. ready meals.

Finally...

Get children involved in buying the groceries, helping with cooking food, and talking about what is healthy food and why!

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