
Food for the School Years

A guide for parents and caregivers with children aged 5-16 years



Food Groups

Eating a combination of foods from all the food groups will give your child all the nutrients they need to stay healthy, active and keep growing.

The food groups needed to make up a healthy balanced diet are shown in the picture below which is known as the Eatwell Guide.

Putting foods into the food groups may seem easy but some foods are made up of ingredients from more than one food group, for example pizza. The pizza base is from the starchy food group. It also has tomatoes and tomato sauce from the fruit and vegetable group and cheese from the dairy and alternatives group.

As well as energy and fluids, protein, carbohydrate and fat, vitamins and minerals (such as calcium, iron and zinc) and fibre are needed every day.



Fruit and vegetables

Always have fruit and vegetables at every meal and aim for at least 5 servings a day. Fruit and vegetables give you vitamins A and C and fibre. Some contain a little iron too.

Lightly cook vegetables to retain nutrients. Cook them in a small amount of water and for a short time so they are still 'crunchy' when served. Vegetables can be stir-fried or roasted

Choose canned vegetables without salt

Eat a range of different fruits and vegetables.

Add vegetables such as parsnip, carrot, butternut squash or sweet potato to your usual mashed potato

Keep frozen vegetables in the freezer so they can be quickly added to meals

Have sliced salad vegetables with sandwiches, picnics and packed lunches

Slices of frozen banana make a great snack in warm weather



Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods

Give your child at least one food from this group with each meal. They include breakfast cereals, bread, chapatti, pasta, rice, noodles, couscous, millet, potatoes, cornmeal, yam and green banana.

Foods made with flour, e.g. pizza bases, buns and pancakes are also in this group. Foods in this group give you plenty of energy. They also give you B vitamins, fibre and some iron and zinc.

Choose fortified breakfast cereals with added vitamins and iron such as cornflakes or wheat biscuits - try cereals labelled as wholegrain such as porridge.

Offer potatoes baked, mashed, boiled, roasted or cut into wedges

Offer fresh or dried pasta with meat, tomato or cheese sauce

Offer wholemeal, granary and rye breads as they are higher in fibre - you can also try pita bread, chapattis, English muffins, bagels, wraps and crumpets

Try egg or rice noodles with stir-fry

Try the nutty taste of brown rice or whole wheat pasta on savoury dishes as a change

- Jacket potatoes can be served with a variety of different fillings and you can get more fibre by eating the skin
- New potatoes can be roasted in their skins to give you more fibre too!

Top
tips

Meat, fish, eggs, beans, pulses other protein foods

Offer foods from this group twice a day. These give your child protein, iron, zinc, magnesium, B vitamins and vitamin A. Some of these also give omega-3 fats which are good for your brain and heart.

Offer tuna, cold meats, pastes, pâtés, mashed sardines, hummus or nut butter in sandwiches or on toast

Oily fish (salmon, fresh tuna, mackerel, pilchards, sardines) contain omega-3 - try to have once per week

Avoid shark, swordfish and marlin as they contain high levels of mercury

Try to serve eggs different ways, eggs can be boiled, poached, scrambled, made into omelettes or egg bread

Sausages, chicken nuggets, burgers and fish fingers are popular processed foods - only offer once or twice a week as too much salt can lead to high blood pressure later on in life

Try lean minced meat, soya or Quorn™ mince to make burgers, meatballs, bolognese or shepherd's pie

Lentils, chick peas, red kidney beans and butter beans make good curries and casseroles



- Make fish cakes using oily fish and mashed potato. See the recipe section at the end of this booklet
- Try reducing the meat content of your usual Bolognese sauce by adding red lentils, soya mince or Quorn™ mince

Top
tips