

## Key nutrition messages for children aged 1-5 years

Children in this age group are growing quickly and are very active so they need foods that provide plenty of calories and nutrients. They have small tummies and therefore need small amounts frequently to ensure they get all the nutrients they need for growth and development. To achieve this, they require **3 small meals** and **2-3 nourishing snacks** daily.

Children of this age are able to regulate their own energy intake and should be allowed to decide when they have eaten enough. Their appetite will vary day to day.

Some of the guidance for healthy eating for adults is not appropriate for young children. However, their diets should include foods from the 5 food groups illustrated in the Eat well Guide model as this will help them to get all the essential nutrients (**click on the Eatwell Guide link below for detail**)

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/528193/Eatwell\\_guide\\_colour.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/528193/Eatwell_guide_colour.pdf)

### Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates

- Offer some with every meal and for some snacks.
- Fortified breakfast cereals are a good source of iron and other essential vitamins and minerals
- Offer a mix of white and some whole-grains. High fibre diets which are normally suitable for adults and older children, are **not** recommended for young children as they small tummies and can also reduce absorption of some nutrients, such as calcium and iron.

### Fruit and vegetables

- Serve some at each meal – the Vitamin C content will help with iron absorption.
- Aim for 5 small portions per day (palm of hand) – cut them up into small pieces, it is easier to eat.
- Also offer as snacks.
- Promote “Eat a rainbow” message (includes lots of different colours)
- Parents should eat fruit and vegetables with children to offer encouragement.

## Dairy and alternatives

- Offer 3 portions per day – this can include 100-120ml milk (as a drink or in other foods), a small match box size serving of cheese and/or 120g pot yoghurt/fromage frais.
- Children under 5 are generally recommended to use full fat products. However, children who are eating a balanced diet and growing well can change to semi-skimmed milk from the age of 2 years, for family convenience.
- Other foods that are good sources of calcium include: custard, milk puddings, foods with white/cheese sauce e.g. macaroni cheese, breakfast cereal fortified with calcium.
- Drinking excess milk will reduce children's appetite for food. Intakes in excess of 500mls can contribute to iron deficiency.

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

- These are the most important sources of iron in the diet. Children under 5 have high requirements for iron.
- Offer 2 to 3 servings per day of a variety of these foods. A food or drink high in vitamin C should be eaten with these to increase iron absorption (for example, citrus fruits and diluted pure juices, potatoes, tomatoes, berries or kiwi fruit).
- **Eggs** – infants and children can safely eat raw or lightly cooked eggs produced under the British Lion Code of Practice. Eggs that are UK non-Lion eggs, non-hen eggs and eggs from outside the UK should continue to be well cooked through to avoid food poisoning. **For further information click on <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/eggs-nutrition/>**
- Whole nuts should be avoided in children less than 5 years due to the risk of choking. Chopped, ground or nut butters can be served.
- Peanuts (and other nuts) can be included in the diet unless the child has a diagnosed allergy (eczema or other food allergy) or there is a history of allergy in the immediate family (parents, brothers, sisters). In this case parents should speak to their, GP or health visitor before introducing peanuts and other nuts.
- Oily fish should be included once a week (limit to 4 servings a week for boys and 2 servings a week for girls) Oily fish includes salmon, sardines, pilchards, mackerel, trout or herring. **Fresh and canned tuna do not count as oily fish.**
- Avoid swordfish, marlin and shark as these contain mercury.

## Oils and spreads

These provide children with energy and some can be included each day.

- Full fat margarines and oils (from olive and rapeseed oil sources) should be used in cooking or for spreading; these are an important source of energy in children under 5 years.
- Puddings, which are nutritious, are important for this age group as they increase the variety of foods and nutrients consumed.

## **Sugary Foods**

- Sugary foods increase the risk of dental decay and obesity and should only be included as part of a meal rather than as snacks or in between meals.
- Cake, biscuits or ice cream can be included with fruit for some puddings.
- Confectionery, such as chocolates and sweets can be included occasionally at the end of a meal.

## **Drinks**

- Include 6-8 drinks per day; a serving would be 100-150 ml. Any milk drinks will count towards this.
- Milk and water are the best drinks to serve between meals, in a cup or free-flow beaker.
- Squash or fruit juice should be well diluted and served in a beaker at mealtimes.
- Avoid sugary soft drinks, tea, coffee, fizzy, herbal or high energy caffeinated drinks.

## **Salt**

- Limit salty snacks e.g. crisps, Bombay mix. These can be included as an occasional treat.

## **Vitamin supplements**

It is important for children aged from birth to 5 years to take vitamin drops containing Vitamins A, C and D. Advice should be provided on the Healthy Start Scheme vitamins as some children are entitled to these free of charge and other families can buy them from some health centres and community pharmacists. Families should ask their midwife, health visitor or GP for details. For more information on how to register to the Healthy Start Scheme, click on [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk)