



Creating healthy Eating habits & Lifestyle for our Children - October 2010

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Children are gaining more weight than ever before, they're eating too much high-fat, high-sugar food and are spending less time being physically active. Weight problems that develop during childhood can lead to weight-related illnesses such as cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes, as well as a lack of self-esteem and being bullied at school.

As responsible parents we need to teach our children how to lead healthy lives and what better time to start teaching these lessons is when they are young, before unhealthy choices become lifelong bad habits. If you want to pass on healthy habits to your children, it is important to practice what you preach. Just telling your kids what to do won't necessarily work they need to see you choosing healthy options as well.

By the time your child becomes a toddler, they'll have formed their own likes and dislikes about food. But like adults, they need to eat a balanced diet. When children start school, they're growing fast and should be getting more active. So they need foods that satisfy their high energy needs.

When should we start creating healthy choices for our children?

Breastfeeding

In most cases, breast milk is the most perfect food for your baby. It contains easily digestible proteins, many factors that support your new baby's immature immune system, and other factors that aid in digestion. It is also low in cost and requires no preparation.

Breast fed babies are also less likely to have colic, upper respiratory infections, ear infections, constipation, asthma or allergies.

Breastfeed for 6 months exclusively and then, after starting solids, continue to breastfeed for at least 12 months and thereafter for as long as mutually desired.

A few tips to remember

- Prepare your own food for your baby, and then you know what ingredients are contained within food.
- Introduce new foods to your baby's diet one at a time.
- Allow at least five days between each new food. This will give you time to spot any allergic reactions.
- Introduce them at breakfast or lunch to reduce the risk of any allergic symptoms developing during the night.
- Be sure to only give your baby foods that are appropriate for his/her age.
- Make the progression from thin liquid purees to more solid, chunkier meals slowly, making sure that your baby is able to cope comfortably with the new texture every step of the way.
- Keep it wholesome - no salt, no sugar, no additives
- Avoid forcing your baby to eat if they don't want to! Remember your baby has no way of telling you when they are full, give them only the amount they want, they will always make up for it next time.
- Always test temperature of food
- Never start a baby on solids before 4 months their little digestive systems are unable to cope with it. Normal transition is between 5-7 months and no later than 8 months is recommended.

Good website for baby recipes [Homemade-baby food recipes](#)

Toddlers

Toddlers can eat the same food as adults, but before they're two years old they can only eat small amounts. Young children need energy (calories) from food and nutrients such as protein, fat, carbohydrate, vitamins and minerals, to make sure their bodies work properly and can repair themselves.

What to give

At this age, children grow very quickly and are usually very active, so they need plenty of calories and nutrients. A healthy and varied diet should provide all the nutrients your toddler need.

Remember to include these sorts of foods every day:

- Milk and dairy foods - these provide protein, vitamins and minerals and are a good source of calories for growing children.
- Meat, fish, eggs, beans, peas and lentils - these are rich in nutrients such as protein, vitamins and minerals. You can give boys up to four portions of oily fish a week, such as mackerel, salmon and sardines, but it's best to give girls no more than two portions of oily fish a week.
- Bread, and other cereals such as rice, pasta and breakfast cereals, potatoes, and sweet potatoes - these starchy foods provide calories, vitamins, minerals and fibre.
- Fruit and vegetables - these contain vitamin C, and other protective vitamins and minerals, as well as fibre.
- **Avoid**
- Salt or Sugar
- Fizzy or sugary drinks
- Raw eggs
- Whole or chopped nuts for under 5's because of the risk of choking - you can crush or flake them. Careful with peanuts incase they are sensitive to them.
- Shark, swordfish and marlin, these fish contain relatively high levels of mercury, which might affect a child's developing nervous system.
- You should also avoid giving raw shellfish to your toddler to reduce their risk of getting food poisoning.

Your growing child

When your child first starts school, he or she will suddenly start growing fast and becoming more active. Children's energy and nutrient needs are high in relation to their body size compared to adults.

What to give

Children need a healthy, balanced diet, which is rich in fruit, vegetables and starchy foods.

Meal size

Children often like to be treated like little grown-ups before they've really grown up and this applies to mealtimes as well, make sure they are given child size portions and not adult sizes. If they are presented with more food than their body needs and then made to clear their plates, that excess food converts to stored fat. So make sure they have a small plate and not an adult one.

Encourage your child to choose a variety of foods to help ensure that they obtain the wide range of nutrients they need to stay healthy.

Remember to include these sorts of foods:

- Milk, cheese, yoghurt, soya beans, tofu and nuts are rich in calcium, which is needed for healthy bones and teeth.
- Fortified breakfast cereals, margarine and oily fish are good sources of dietary vitamin D, which helps ensure a good supply of calcium in the blood and therefore healthy bones. The main source of vitamin D is from the action of sunlight on skin, but avoid strong sun especially around midday when there is a risk of burning.
- Meat, particularly red meat and fish are rich sources of iron. Pulses (beans and lentils), green vegetables and fortified breakfast cereals are also good sources of iron. Iron is needed for healthy blood and research has shown that some children have low intakes of iron, particularly older girls.
- Continue to give at least two portions of fish a week to girls and 4 to boys because fish are a good source of protein, vitamins and minerals and they are low in saturated fat. Oily fish, such as mackerel, salmon and sardines, also contain omega 3 fatty acids.
- Citrus fruit (such as oranges and lemons), tomatoes and potatoes, are all good sources of vitamin C, which is essential for health. Vitamin C may help the absorption of iron, so having fruit juice with an iron-rich meal could increase iron absorption.
- Milk, margarine with added vitamins, green vegetables and carrots are all good sources of vitamin A, which is important for good vision and healthy skin.

Encourage your child to drink water or milk and avoid sugary drinks, which can damage teeth.

Limit sweets and snacks such as cakes, biscuits, chocolate and sweets.

Healthy snacks

Fruits:

- Small pieces of fruit stirred into non fat yogurt
- Strawberries
- Raisins
- Grapes
- Pineapple chunks
- Orange or grapefruit sections
- Bananas cooked lightly in apple juice
- Apple slices with all natural peanut butter
- Dried fruit mixed

Vegetables:

- Carrot sticks
- Celery sticks with all natural peanut butter
- Raw broccoli and cauliflower florets with a low-fat dip or salsa
- Cherry tomatoes

Encourage them to get plenty of exercise, sporting activities and fresh air daily, remember you owe it to your children to start their lives off with a healthy eating pattern and lifestyle habits, so they can grow into healthy adults.