

Healthy Eating Ideas for Children, Young People & Families

Children and young people need regular, balanced meals and snacks to get the energy and nutrients they need for growing, moving and strengthening their natural immunity. This leaflet provides useful information to support your family in making healthier food choices, nourishing children and young people as they grow.

Family eating

Eating family meals together as often as possible helps encourage children to enjoy a variety of foods and to spend time with the family. It is a good idea to eat together as a family at the table and not alongside other activities, for example watching the TV, to prevent distractions.

Try to **put a jug of water on the table** to keep everyone hydrated. Plus there is some evidence that children who drink extra water perform better in attention and memory tests!



Recommended daily quantities of sugar, salt and fat for children

Sugar The maximum recommended daily amounts of sugar are:

Take the sugar calculator quiz: www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/food-facts/sugar-calculator/

4-6 year olds: 19 grams or 5 sugar cubes per day
7-10 year olds: 24 grams or 6 sugar cubes per day
11 years +: 30 grams or 7 sugar cubes per day



Salt The maximum recommended daily amounts of salt are:

4-6 year olds: 3 grams or 6 salt sachets per day
7-10 year olds: 5 grams or 10 salt sachets per day
11 years +: 6 grams or 12 salt sachets per day



Fat The maximum recommended daily amounts of fat are:

4-6 year olds: 3 grams or 6 salt sachets per day
7-10 year olds: 5 grams or 10 salt sachets per day
11 years +: 6 grams or 12 salt sachets per day



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Healthy Food Swaps

One to two simple food swaps each day, reducing sugar, salt and fats that your children eat, can really help to make a difference to their overall health.

Breakfast Swaps

Children who have a fulfilling, healthy breakfast have been shown to concentrate better. Sugar and fats are the things to watch out for at breakfast time. Find recipes: www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/recipes/breakfast/

Swap from	Chocolate cereals, frosted flakes, honey crunch cereal, croissants, cereal bars
Swap to	Wheat cereals, whole grain cereal/ toast, no-sugar added muesli, porridge, natural yoghurt

Lunchtime Swaps

Try some simple lunch swaps. For more ideas: www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/recipes/healthier-lunchboxes/

Swap from	Crisps, chocolate, muffins, juice pouches, tinned soup, ham/ cheese sandwiches, cereal bars
Swap to	Fresh/ tinned fruit, sugar-free jelly, natural yoghurt, homemade soups, raisins, rice cakes

Dinner Swaps

Salt and saturated fats can add up at dinner time. Find recipes: www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/recipes/dinner/

Swap from	Sausages, pizza, ketchup, gravy, chicken nuggets, fish and chips
Swap to	Low-fat mince meat, healthy homemade pitta pizzas, herbs, reduced salt/ sugar sauces

Drink Swaps

A quarter of sugar children have each day comes from sugary drinks which is a leading cause of tooth decay.

Swap from	Cola, fizzy drinks, milkshakes, whole milk
Swap to	Low-fat milks, water (add fruit for flavour), sugar-free drinks, no-added sugar drinks

Snack and Pudding Swaps

Aim for no more than 2 packaged snacks/ day. Ideas: www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/food-facts/healthier-snacks/

Swap from	Biscuits, chocolate, cake bars, crisps, doughnuts, split-pot yoghurts, muffins, salted peanuts
Swap to	Malt-loaf, fruit teacake, scotch pancake, crumpet, bagel and banana, fruit/ chopped salads

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Getting your five fruit and vegetables each day

Fruit and vegetables, whether they are fresh, frozen, tinned or dried, are a great source of vitamins, minerals and fibre which are important for reducing risks of disease.

What counts towards 5-a-day?

Does not count	Potato, nuts, ketchup, more than 1 smoothie or serving of beans, yam, cassava, plantain
Counts 5-a-day	Unsweetened 100% juice, onions, garlic, mushrooms, peas/ sweetcorn, tinned tomatoes, dried fruit, ready-made salads, olives, chickpeas and lentils, tomato puree, sweet potatoes

Portion sizes for children

A portion size depends on their size and age. A rough guide:

- **One portion of food:** the amount they can fit in the palm of their hand (approximately 80g)
- **One portion of drink:** Roughly 150ml glass (Juice and smoothies only count once each day)

Importance of Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps to keep bones and muscles healthy . Government advice is that children and young people aged 1-4 years (unless they're having more than 500ml of infant formula a day) should take a 10 microgram vitamin D supplement each day.

Good sources of vitamin D include :

Oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, trout, red meat, egg yolks, fortified foods such as some cereals or spreads

Find more information about vitamin D: www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitamin-d/

IMPORTANT NOTE: Please remember the information given in this leaflet is for informational and educational purposes only and is NOT intended to be medical advice, nor replace the advice of your GP or healthcare practitioner. The information included was believed correct at time of publication and has been taken from NHS Better Health Healthier Families (January 2026). **Always speak to your, GP or healthcare practitioner before making any major nutritional or physical activity changes.**