

Children's Section: Healthy Eating for 6-12 year olds

This dietary advice sheet gives some general information to help you make the recommended changes to your child's diet. If you need more detailed advice or if your child is following a special diet that makes it difficult to make these changes, please ask your doctor to refer your child to a registered dietitian.

Children require regular meals and snacks to give them the energy and nutrients they need to grow and fight 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. To encourage good eating habits, try to sit down and eat meals as a family without the distractions of the television or computer games.

Breakfast is essential every day as it gives children energy for busy mornings at school.

What does a balanced diet mean?

1. **Fruit and vegetables** – fruit and vegetables provide lots of vitamins and minerals which are important for fighting off illnesses; they also contain fibre which helps to maintain regular bowel movements and prevent constipation. Fruit and vegetables can be included as part of a meal, chopped up and as a snack or as fruit juice or smoothies. Children should aim for at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables every day. Fruit and vegetables can also help to keep our skin supple and prevent spots!

A portion is equal to:

- 1 medium sized banana, apple, orange, peach
 - 2 small fruits e.g., plums, apricots, satsumas
 - Handful of grapes, cherries, strawberries
 - 3 tablespoons of cooked vegetables or fruit
 - Small salad
2. **Cereals, potatoes, rice and pasta** – these are all carbohydrate foods which give children slow-release energy. Try and choose the low sugar varieties of breakfast cereals such as Weetabix, Shredded Wheat, Ready Brek or Shreddies and add dried fruit rather than sugar. Choose unrefined higher fibre types of bread and pasta such as wholemeal and granary bread, whole wheat pasta and brown rice. Children should aim to have a carbohydrate source at each mealtime plus sometimes as snacks in between meals too.
 3. **Meat, fish and alternatives** – these are all protein foods which are important for helping children to grow and repair muscles. Try and include a variety of different protein containing foods such as lean meats, fish, baked beans, eggs, pulses, peas and lentils. Children should aim to have protein at least twice a day.

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- Milk and dairy foods** – these are all calcium containing foods and are important in a child's diet to support bone and teeth development. Children over 5 years old should be offered either semi skimmed or skimmed milk and should aim to have dairy foods three times a day. Soya products which are calcium enriched are suitable alternatives for those who cannot tolerate or do not wish to eat dairy products.
- Foods containing fat and sugar** – fat is an important part of a child's diet to enable growth and development and provide them with their fat-soluble vitamins. Children should ideally be offered healthy fats such as those from vegetable sources e.g., sunflower oil, rapeseed oils and spreads, and not large quantities of fats from pastries, crisps and manufactured products. Sugar does not give us any vitamins or minerals only calories which can lead to excess weight gain if eaten regularly. Sugar can also cause tooth decay. Try and include low sugar puddings, snacks and drinks e.g., sugar free jelly and sugar free squash.
- Drinks** – the ideal drinks which should be offered to children are water and milk. A 200ml serving of pure fruit juice would count as one portion of fruit per day. Fruit flavoured squashes should be kept to a minimum and ideally sugar free. Excessive squash intake can sometimes be associated with loose bowels movements.

Example of a day's menu

Breakfast – breakfast cereal with milk, glass fruit juice or 2 slices toast with spread

Mid-morning snack – portion fruit/chopped fruit salad pieces

Lunch – wholemeal bread sandwich with ham and salad, yogurt, fruit,

Mid afternoon snack – piece of malt loaf or crumpet

Evening meal – family meal e.g., spaghetti bolognese or roast dinner, with sugar free jelly or low sugar custard and fruit

Bedtime snack – plain biscuit and glass of milk or water

Don't forget exercise....

Children should be doing at least 60 minutes of exercise every day. Including it into everyday living activities such as walking to school or the shop, walking the dog and playing in the garden tend to be easier to stick to compared to going to an event or leisure centre as they don't take much organising and are free!

If you are concerned about your child's weight and they are between the ages of 7-12yrs old why not enrol them onto the Fit4it Juniors programme?

Fit4it Juniors is a community programme for children aged 7-12 years old who are concerned about their weight. The project is a 10-week programme and focuses on teaching both parents and children about healthy eating, active living and ways to change their behaviour.

For more information about Fit4it Juniors or to sign up for the course contact Community Sports Foundation on 01603 761122, visit www.communitysportsfoundation.org.uk or email info@communitysportsfoundation.org.uk