



Food for Kids

The right start to healthy eating for pre-primary and primary school children

Things are changing

- When your child starts pre-school and primary school you will notice plenty of changes, including the foods he or she wants to eat.
- No longer is it just the family who decides which foods will be served. There are many new influences on their food choices.
 - Schools will teach new skills in preparing and choosing foods.
 - Other children will give your child ideas about foods to try.
 - Messages from TV and food companies marketing to children play a big part in setting trends and promoting particular foods.
- You might not always be happy about some of these influences, but children can learn to make healthy food and lifestyle choices with your help.



Experts Say...

The world is beginning to open up for children as they start their school life.

They learn quickly and there are many influences extending beyond the home environment.

Physically, children continue to grow steadily.

They need a wide variety of nutritious foods, and to be given plenty of opportunities to be physically active.

Foods children need

Regular meals and a wide variety of different foods will ensure that they have the nutrients needed to grow and develop. Appetites vary along with their activity, and this influences how much your child will eat.

Breakfast is an important meal if children are to be alert and able to concentrate in school.

Snacks at morning recess and after school are usually needed by busy, active children.

School lunches need to be appetising, nutritious and convenient to eat. Some schools have canteens but your child will probably need some help in choosing a healthy and satisfying lunch. If you are not happy with the choice of foods on the menu, talk to the school about healthy alternatives.

Family evening meals are important times for talking and sharing the day's news and activities. Plan to have meals together without TV or telephone interruptions.

Water and milk are the best drinks for children. Fluids are important for children throughout the day. Thirsty or dehydrated children cannot maintain concentration and activity.

Best food choices for school aged children

The early school years are a time of rapid learning and slow and steady physical growth. Children need a variety of foods to meet nutrient needs. As body size increases, so does the amount of food needed. When children are very active they have higher energy (kilojoule) needs. Appetites usually increase to meet these needs.

The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating will help you select the type of foods to make the best choices for your child. Amounts are suggested for ages four to eight and nine to eleven years, but remember the amounts your child eats will vary depending on their appetite, activity levels, individual needs, and body size as they are growing. (Source: www.eatforhealth.gov.au)

Australian Guide to Healthy Eating

Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from these five food groups every day.
Drink plenty of water.



Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain and/or high cereal fibre varieties



Vegetables and legumes/beans



Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds and legumes/beans



Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives, mostly reduced fat



Fruit



Use small amounts



Only sometimes and in small amounts



Recommended serves for Children 4 to 8 years

Bread, cereals, rice, pasta, noodles

4 serves per day



a serve is:

- = 1 slice (40g) of bread
- = ½ medium bread roll
- = ½ cup (90g) cooked rice, pasta or noodles
- = ½ cup porridge
- = 2/3 cup (30g) breakfast cereal
- = 1/4 cup (65g) muesli

Vegetables, legumes

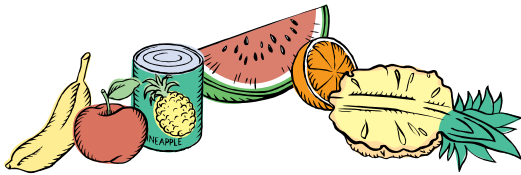
4½ serves per day



- = ½ cup (75g) cooked vegetables
- = ½ cup (75g) cooked or canned beans, lentils, chick peas or split peas
- = 1 cup salad vegetables
- = 1 medium tomato
- = 1 or ½ medium potato

Fruit

1½ serves per day



- = 1 medium (150g) piece (e.g. apple, banana, orange, pear)
- = 2 small (150g) pieces (e.g. apricots, kiwi fruit, plums)
- = 1 cup diced or canned fruit
- = ½ cup (125mL) 100% juice (no added sugar)
- = dried fruit* (e.g. 4 apricot halves, 1½ tbsp sultanas)

***Limit as they are high in sugar and tend to cling to teeth, causing tooth decay**

Milk, yoghurt, cheese

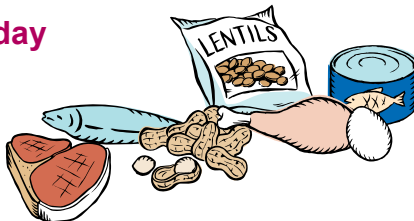
1½–2 serves per day



- = 1 cup (250mL) milk
- = ½ cup evaporated milk
- = 2 slices (40g) cheese
- = 1 small carton (¾ cup or 200g) yoghurt
- = 1 cup (250mL) soy, rice or other cereal drink with at least 100mg added calcium per 100mL

Meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, legumes

1½ serves per day



- = 65g cooked lean meat or chicken (e.g. ½ cup mince, 2 small chops, 2 slices of roast meat)
- = 1 cup (150g) cooked or canned beans, lentils, chick peas or split peas
- = 100g cooked fish fillet
- = 2 large eggs
- = 30g nuts, seeds, peanut or almond butter or tahini or other nut or seed paste

Limit “extra”foods.

Some foods do not fit into the five food groups. They contain too much fat, sugar and/or salt and very few essential nutrients.

It is recommended that young children are not given these foods (or very occasionally only) as they replace other foods and the essential nutrients needed for growth and development.

Recommended serves for Children 9 to 11 years

Bread, cereals, rice, pasta, noodles

4–5 serves per day



a serve is:

- = 1 slice (40g) of bread
- = ½ medium bread roll
- = ½ cup (90g) cooked rice, pasta or noodles
- = ½ cup porridge
- = 2/3 cup (30g) breakfast cereal
- = 1/4 cup (65g) muesli

Vegetables, legumes

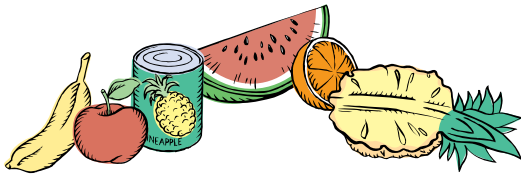
5 serves per day



- = ½ cup (75g) cooked vegetables
- = ½ cup (75g) cooked or canned beans, lentils, chick peas or split peas
- = 1 cup salad vegetables
- = 1 medium tomato
- = 1 or ½ medium potato

Fruit

2 serves per day



- = 1 medium (150g) piece (e.g. apple, banana, orange, pear)
- = 2 small (150g) pieces (e.g. apricots, kiwi fruit, plums)
- = 1 cup diced or canned fruit
- = ½ cup (125mL) 100% juice (no added sugar)
- = dried fruit* (e.g. 4 apricot halves, 1½ tbsp sultanas)

***Limit as they are high in sugar and tend to cling to teeth, causing tooth decay**

Milk, yoghurt, cheese

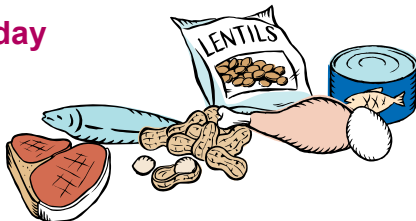
2½–3 serves per day



- = 1 cup (250mL) milk
- = ½ cup evaporated milk
- = 2 slices (40g) cheese
- = 1 small carton (¾ cup or 200g) yoghurt
- = 1 cup (250mL) soy, rice or other cereal drink with at least 100mg added calcium per 100mL

Meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, legumes

2½ serves per day



- = 65g cooked lean meat or chicken (e.g. ½ cup mince, 2 small chops, 2 slices of roast meat)
- = 1 cup (150g) cooked or canned beans, lentils, chick peas or split peas
- = 100g cooked fish fillet
- = 2 large eggs
- = 30g nuts, seeds, peanut or almond butter or tahini or other nut or seed paste

Limit “extra”foods.

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What to do if your child...

Won't eat the evening meal

It's not unusual for busy children to eat very little at the evening meal. Make sure after school snacks are nutritious and varied. Try a sandwich and drink of milk or even a bowl of soup and toast. Then just offer a small serve of the family meal. Let your child tell you when they are full. Don't argue and force them to finish the food on the plate.

Is a fussy eater

Offer words of encouragement but don't force your child to eat. Try not to fuss if your child refuses to eat a particular food. Just keep offering that food at other times. Some children need to see a new food 10 – 15 times before they will try it. Seeing others enjoy the food will help. Offer new foods with other foods you know your child likes.

Asks for treats like lollies, chips and take-away foods

Peer pressure and food marketing urging children to try all sorts of foods can be very strong. Most are not the type of food you want your child to eat every day. Many of these foods replace other nutritious foods. They are high in energy (kilojoules), which can lead to overweight if eaten regularly, and they are costly. Let your child try these foods occasionally as a special treat, sharing them with all the family. "Treats" are not needed in the lunchbox every day.

Seems to be gaining too much weight

Limiting the amount of time spent in front of the TV or computer is a proven start to a healthy weight. Encourage your child to do something active – play games or sports, walk to school if possible, or take the dog for a walk. It's best if the family joins in some of these physical activities every day.

Attention to diet is also important. Limit "extra" or "treat" foods that are high in fat and sugar. Reduce usual portion sizes a little.

Weight loss diets are not suitable for children unless carefully supervised by a doctor or dietitian. Foods eaten must be balanced with growth and development needs and daily activity requirements. If you are worried about your child's weight you might want to talk with your family doctor.

What drinks are best?

Milk is an important drink for children as it provides calcium needed for growing bones and teeth. Two and a half to three serves of dairy foods each day are recommended for children.

If your child does not drink milk make sure they have yoghurt or cheese. Calcium fortified soy milk is also suitable.

Encourage your child to drink plain water when thirsty.

Cordials, soft drinks and fruit juice should be limited. They are all high in sugar and children who have a sugary diet run the risk of tooth decay. The extra kilojoules may also contribute to unhealthy weight.

Filling up on sweet drinks takes away the appetite for more nutritious foods. Sweet drinks are not recommended.

Artificially sweetened drinks are not suitable for children.

Fruit juice contains many important vitamins but it lacks the fibre needed to prevent constipation. Limit intake to 125mL per day. A piece of fresh fruit every day is better for your child than fruit juice.

Got off to a bad start?

Is your child already used to sweet drinks?

- Start now to break the habit
- Be prepared for upsets
- Be patient. This may take time
- Try watering down the drinks
- Ration sweet drinks to once a day only
- Don't buy sweet drinks
- Don't drink them yourself



10 tips for feeding toddlers

- 1 Give children a variety of different foods at all meals and snacks
- 2 Snacks are important. Offer nutritious foods like bread, crackers, cheese, yoghurt, fruit
- 3 Provide breakfast and allow time for children to eat it
- 4 Eat together as a family at least once a day
- 5 Pack your child's lunch from home. Involve children in selection and preparation from a range of healthy options
- 6 Don't make a fuss when your child refuses a new food, but try again several times
- 7 Let your child tell you when they are full
- 8 Encourage children to drink plain water when they are thirsty
- 9 Involve children with planning and preparing healthy meals
- 10 Plan physical activities for all the family to encourage a healthy balance between food eaten and energy used



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Healthy food children will love

Frozen fruit, such as grapes, banana, pear or rockmelon, make healthy iced snacks, perfect in hot weather.

Blend fruit, such as strawberries, banana or mango, with milk and a spoonful of low-fat yoghurt to make a delicious fruit smoothie.

Toast bread, muffins or fruit bread topped with ricotta cheese and slices of banana, dust lightly with cinnamon.

Cut vegies into bite-sized pieces and serve in a small container so that children can help themselves.

Children prefer vegies raw or lightly cooked, as in a stir-fry.

Add chopped tomato and green capsicum to a can of baked beans. Use as a 'topper' on toast or muffins, or a 'filler' for baked potatoes or jaffles. Sprinkle with a little grated low-fat cheese.

Scrambled vegetables make a great breakfast or tasty snack. Simply add cooked vegetables – leftovers are fine – to lightly beaten eggs. Melt a little polyunsaturated margarine in a pan, add mixture and cook gently over low heat until eggs are firm. Season with pepper and serve on toast.

Keep school lunches cool, fresh and safe to eat by using a cool bag or placing a bottle of frozen water in the lunch box.

Instead of the same old sandwiches you can expand the variety to include salads, wraps using pita bread or tortillas, and dips with rolls and cut up vegies.



For more information...

Your child health nurse, doctor or...

Dietitians Association of Australia

- Find a local Accredited Practising Dietitian at www.daa.asn.au

Raising Children Network

- www.raisingchildren.net.au