



Helping your older child to eat well

Children should be eating a range of foods throughout the day, to be offered over 3 meals and 2 nutritious snacks. They should be mainly eating independently with meal times being a happy, social family occasion.

- The main milk drink for young children should be whole animal milk or breastmilk until your child reaches the age of 2. If they are a good eater, you can then move to semi-skimmed milk. If your child can't or won't eat dairy products, then an unsweetened calcium fortified alternative such as soya, almond, oat or coconut milk can be given. If you are using a milk alternative, talk to your health visitor to make sure your child is getting the energy and nutrients they need. Avoid rice milk for all under 5s. There is no need to buy expensive toddler milks as these are sweetened and may provide too much of some nutrients.
- Try to offer your child food which is as close to its natural state as possible: for example, mashed potato rather than potato waffles; pieces of meat or fish rather than processed burgers, sausages or fingers; fresh or frozen vegetables rather than canned ones in sauce; plain bread, toast or rice cakes rather than sweet biscuits or salty snacks.
- Buying ready prepared foods and snacks for toddlers is expensive and these foods are often not as nutritious as making your own food at home. Take a look at <http://bit.ly/2m3B5A9> for helpful advice on budget-friendly recipes the whole family can enjoy.

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For additional Parent Tips see www.ihv.org.uk

The information in this resource was updated on 23/09/2019 and will be reviewed again in 09/2021 and when new evidence becomes available.

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- Regularly offering sweetened drinks (such as squashes, fizzy drinks, fruit juices, cordials or milkshakes) is linked to poor nutrition and obesity in young children. These drinks can also damage teeth, particularly if you give them to your child in a bottle or before bedtime. Stick to milk or water as safe drinks between meals. You can offer your child diluted fresh fruit juice (dilute 1 part fruit juice to 10 parts water) at mealtimes, served in a cup but drinks other than milk or water are not needed. Avoid low sugar or no sugar drinks as these are acidic and can damage teeth enamel.
- Your child's snacks and packed lunches should follow the same principles of a healthy meal and include foods from a range of food groups, avoiding sweet items wherever possible. Good snacks for children include: small savoury sandwiches; raw vegetables; slices of hard-boiled egg; fresh fruit and plain yoghurt; breadsticks; rice cakes; toast and vegetable-based dips such as hummus or guacamole. Visit bit.ly/2m3B5A9 for some imaginative, delicious ideas for packed lunches and snacks for your child.
- Child health experts recommend that all 1-4 year-olds have vitamin drops every day containing vitamins A, C and D. This recommendation has been given for over 50 years, visit bit.ly/2m8pIHx for more information on vitamins for children.
- Relatives and friends may bring sweet treats for young children, and when there are lots of 'special occasions' this can mean your child ends up consuming a high intake of sugar. Stickers, games, bubbles, crayons or items that encourage outdoor play (balls or hoops, for example) are all fun alternatives to sweet treats.
- Children love to be involved in growing and shopping for food, helping with the cooking and laying the table. Involving your child in food preparation and meal times is a great way to encourage good eating habits and an interest in food and where it comes from, as well as preparing your child for life at nursery school and school meals.

More information:

For additional information on eating well in the early years, see: bit.ly/2mx9Ez9

Find out more about the Healthy Start scheme which helps families on low incomes by providing healthy eating vouchers and free vitamins: bit.ly/1jusLvR

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