

# Healthy eating

1-5 Years

5-11 Years

11-19 Years

SEND

**Feeding and eating**



Eating a healthy, balanced diet is an important part of maintaining good health, and can help you and your child feel your best. A balanced

diet means eating a wide variety of foods in the right proportions, and consuming the right amount of food and drink to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight. Encouraging your child to eat healthy can also mean they are less likely to have health problems as they grow older.

## Explore the topics on this page:

[How to help your child eat well](#)

[Encourage a healthy and balanced diet](#)

[The right portion size for your child](#)

[Check labels on packaged foods](#)

[What drinks to give your child](#)

[Feeding your child on a budget](#)

[Eatwell Guides](#)

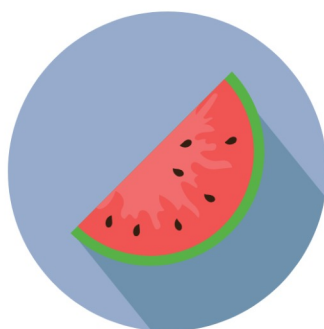
## How to help your child eat well

- Act as a role model for your child or young person. If they see you eating healthily, they will be much more likely to eat healthy too.
- [Encourage them to eat a healthy and balanced diet.](#) This includes eating 5 or more portions of fruit and vegetables every day. These can be fresh,

- frozen or tinned.
- Variety is key so try some [new healthy recipes](#). [↗](#) Encourage your child to pick out some recipes they may like.
- As they get older you can explain to them how to get a good balance of the different food groups in their diet. This can help them to make healthier decisions when you're not around. You can use the [Eatwell Guides](#) to help.
- It may help to have set mealtimes and encourage your child to eat slowly. Use mealtimes as an opportunity to talk to each other and catch up about the day.
- Encourage your child to eat whilst sitting at a table.

To help your child maintain a healthy weight, it's important to encourage them to engage in physical activity every day. Read our [information on keeping babies, children and teenagers active](#).

[Back to top](#)



## Encourage a healthy and balanced diet

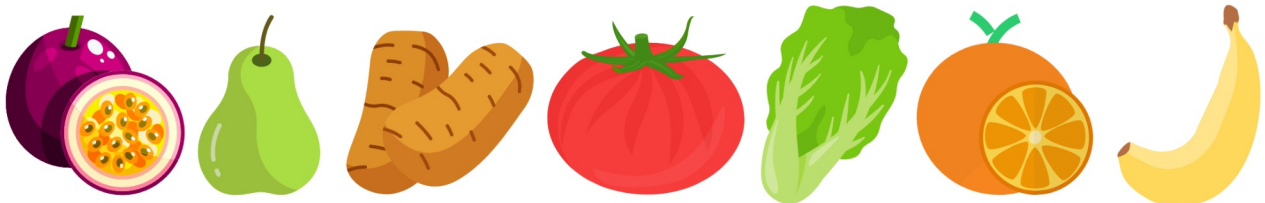
Try to encourage a healthy and balanced diet. You can do this by choosing a variety of different foods from each of the food groups below. You don't need to achieve this balance at every meal, but try to get the balance right over the course of a day or week.

## Fruit and vegetables

Help your child to eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables a day. Nearly all fruit and vegetables count as 1 of your 5 A Day. You can use fresh, frozen, tinned, dried or juiced.

Fruit juice and smoothies should be limited to no more than a combined total of 150ml a day.

[Read more about 5 A Day.](#) 



## Carbohydrates

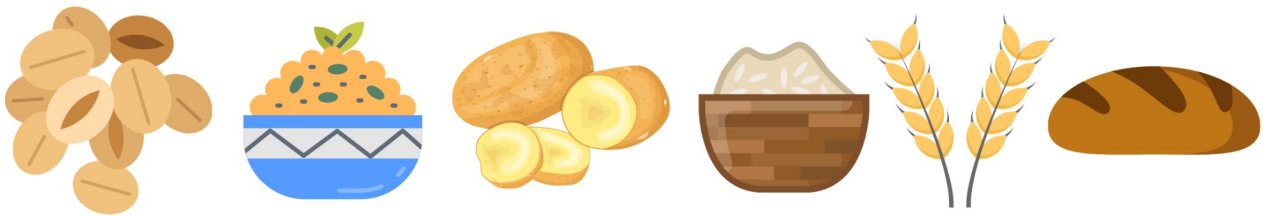
Starchy foods are a good source of energy. They should make up just over a third of the food your child eats.

Some examples of carbohydrates include:

- potatoes
- oats

- bread
- rice
- couscous
- bulgar wheat

Try to choose higher fibre or wholegrain varieties. For example, whole wheat pasta and brown rice, or simply leave the skin on potato.



## Proteins

Foods such as beans, pulses, fish, eggs and meat are good sources of protein.

Try to eat 2 portions of fish per week, 1 of which should be oily such as salmon or sardines. Fish can be frozen, tinned or fresh.

Beans, peas and lentils are low in fat and a good source of fibre of protein. They make a good and cheaper alternative to meat.

Try to choose lean cuts of meat and mince. Reduce red and processed meat like bacon, ham and sausages.



## Dairy and dairy alternatives

Milk, cheese, yoghurt and fromage frais are good sources of protein and some vitamins. They are also an important source of calcium, which helps keep your child's bones healthy. Try to choose unsweetened yoghurts.

Full-fat cheese and other dairy products are recommended up to the age of 2, as young children need fat and energy to help them grow. From 2 years old, if your child is growing well, you can give them semi-skimmed milk. Once your child reaches 5 years old, it's ok to give them 1% or skimmed milk.

Once your child is over 1 year old, adding milk or cheese to food when cooking, counts towards their dairy intake.

There are also lots of dairy alternatives including soya milks and yoghurts. Try to choose fortified dairy alternatives.



## Oils and spreads

Choose unsaturated oils and spreads such as vegetable, rapeseed, olive and sunflower oil. Try to avoid adding extra oil or butter when cooking. You could try grilling, baking, steaming or poaching instead.

All types of fat should be eaten in small amounts.

[Read more about fats.](#) 



[Back to top](#)

## The right portion size for your child

It can be difficult to work out how much you should be feeding your child. Here are a few simple tips to help with portion sizes:

- Start by giving your child a smaller serving. If they are still hungry once they've finished, they can ask for more.
- Try to avoid using adult sized plates, as it may encourage portion sizes which are too large for your child.
- As your child gets older, they will require different amounts of food.
- Remember that your child doesn't have to finish everything on their plate or eat more than they want to.

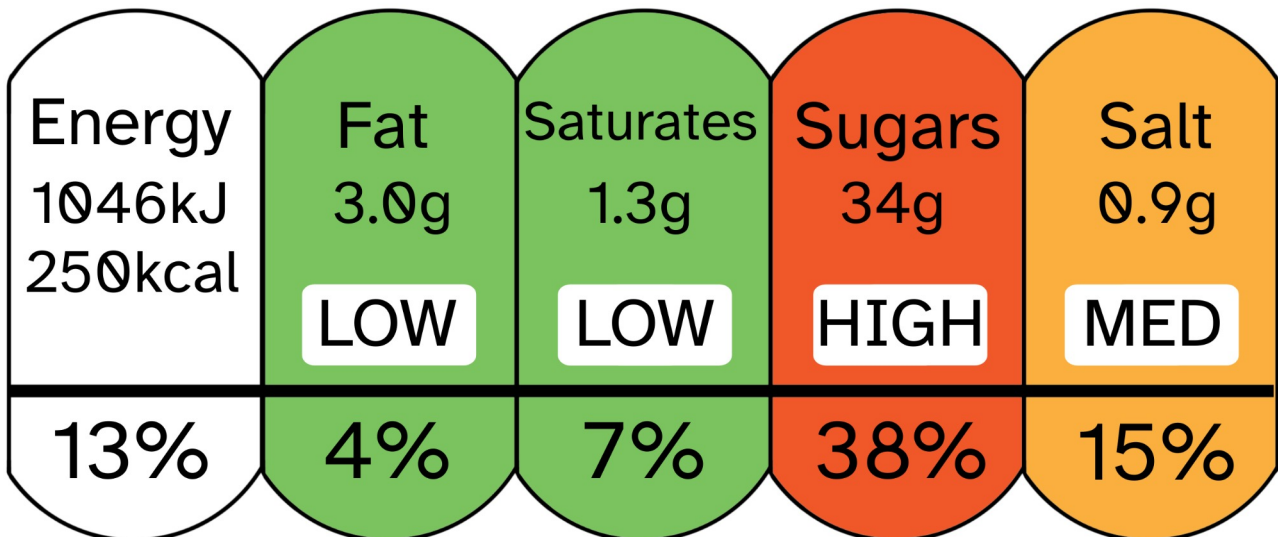
[Back to top](#)

## Check labels on packaged foods

When buying packaged foods, always check the nutrition labels. Most food and drink will have a traffic light label on the front of the packaging. This contains information on energy, fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt.

These amounts will be colour coded in red, amber or green.

- red means high
- amber means medium
- green means low

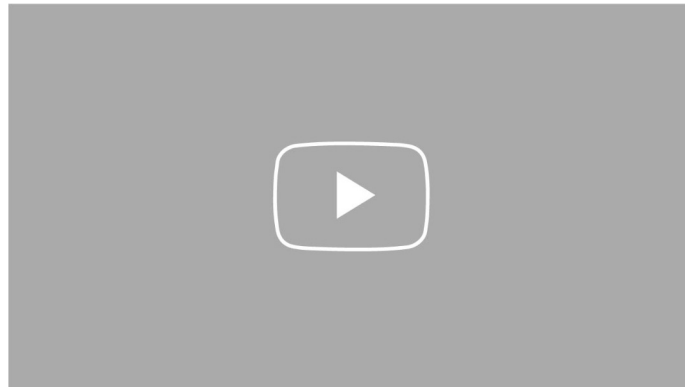


Choose foods lower in fat, salt and sugar. Normally, food and drink with mostly green on the label is a healthier choice.

[Read more about food labels.](#) [↗](#) If a product says sugar free or low fat, just check the ingredients as they may have been replaced with sweeteners or additional ingredients you might not have expected.

You can also try cutting down on sugar, salt and saturated fat by making some healthier food swaps. Why not try swapping sausages for low-fat mince and making [spaghetti bolognese](#). [↗](#) You can also swap your child's cake bars and cereal bars for a slice of malt loaf or a fruited teacake.

[Read more about healthy swaps.](#) [↗](#)



[FSA Explains Front of Pack](#)



[Labelling - Watch video](#)

Video taken from the Food Standards Agency.

[Back to top](#)

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## What drinks to give your child

Encourage your child to drink plenty of fluids. All children should drink 6 to 8 cups of water a day. The size of the cup will depend on your child's age.

Read our [information on how much your child should drink](#).

Milk and water are best for your child's teeth. Fruit juice can have a lot of sugars in which may increase the risk of tooth decay. It's best to drink juices or smoothies at mealtimes.

Try to avoid giving your child fizzy drinks where possible. They are low in

nutrients and can damage their teeth.

[Back to top](#)

## Feeding your child on a budget

### Top tips:

- Cooking from scratch is often cheaper and healthier than buying ready-made or takeaway meals.
- Choose tinned and frozen fruit and vegetables rather than fresh. They last much longer and are cheaper.
- Look out for wonky fruit and vegetables in the supermarket. They may look a little different, but they taste the same and are often cheaper.
- Try batch cooking some of your meals. It can help save you time and money.
- Pop any leftovers into a container and use them for lunches the next day.
- The 'best before' dates on products show when foods are at their best. It's completely safe to eat them after this date. 'Use by' dates are the date which the foods should be eaten. Eat, cook or freeze the food before the 'use by' date has passed.

🕒 Need more specific support for your child?

If your child needs more help or has additional needs, you can visit our

specific section for extra support.

[Feeding and eating for additional needs](#)

[Back to top](#)

Last reviewed: 22 October, 2024

## Other related pages

- [Bottle feeding](#)
- [Breastfeeding](#)
- [Feeding cues and signs of getting enough milk](#)
- [Responsive feeding](#)
- [Weaning and introducing solid foods](#)
- [Developing your child's cutlery skills](#)
- [Dental health](#)
- [Feeding and eating for additional needs](#)
- [Fussy eating](#)
- [Feeding and eating](#)
- [Keeping babies, children and teenagers active](#)

# Eatwell Guides



**Standard  
Eatwell  
Guide**



**Vegetarian  
Eatwell  
Guide**



**Vegan  
Eatwell  
Guide**



**South Asian Eatwell  
Guide**



**African and  
Caribbean Eatwell  
Guide**

**Back to top**

## **?** Who can help

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's health, a health professional in our team will be able to offer advice and support.

You can **Call Us** on **0300 029 50 50** or **Text Us** on **07520 649887** to start a conversation.

Open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm (excluding bank holidays).


Getting ready for change






# Discover our young person's portal

You can signpost young people to our getting ready for change information. Find advice aimed at young people on a range of topics, including, mental health, substance use, relationships and sexual health.

[Visit our young person's portal](#)

## Need more information?

- [Advice for parents of healthy-weight children - NHS](#) 
- [Advice for parents of overweight children - NHS](#) 
- [Budget dinner recipes - BBC](#) 
- [Get help to buy food and milk - NHS](#) 

- [Healthy eating tips for teenagers - British Nutrition Foundation](#) 
- [How to eat a balanced diet - NHS](#) 
- [How to help your child gain weight - NHS](#) 
- [Water, drinks and hydration - NHS](#) 
- [How to apply - NHS Healthy Start](#) 

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