

Healthy choices

Choose wisely: advice for parents on nutrition and activity for primary school children





Index

Healthy eating for primary school children	2
Meal ideas	8
Snacks	12
Drinks	14
Looking after your child's teeth	16
Maintaining a healthy weight	17
Setting goals for the whole family	19
Acknowledgements	20
Where to get help and support	20
Healthy choices reward chart	21

Fruit and vegetables

These foods are rich in vitamins, minerals, and fibre and are low in fat. Aim to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day.

Tips

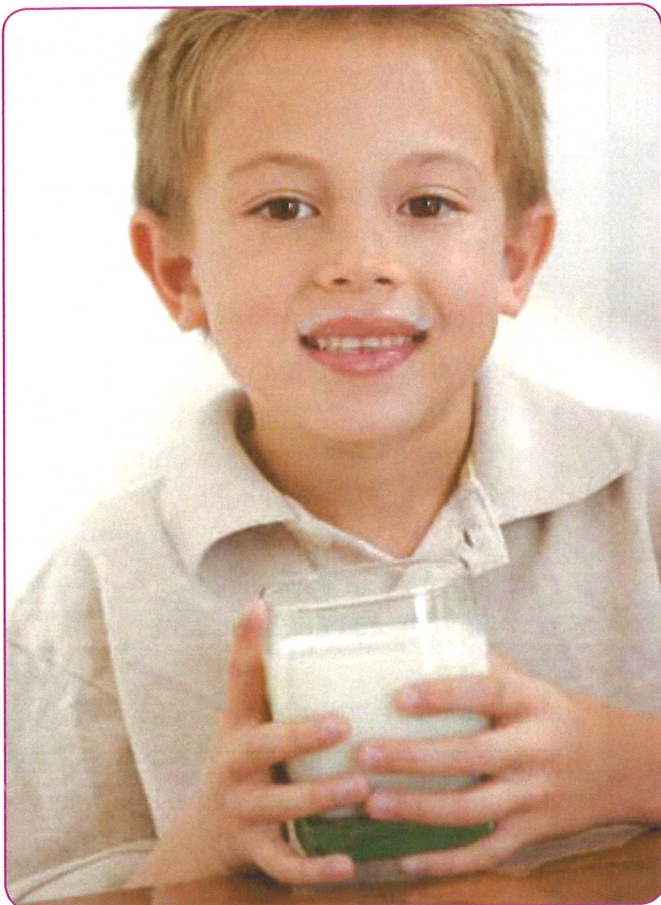
- Offer lots of different types and colours of fruit and vegetables – aim to eat a rainbow of colours.
- Fresh, frozen, dried and canned fruit and vegetables all count towards the five-a-day target.
- Fruit and vegetables make excellent snacks.
- Vegetables can be added to soups, casseroles and stews.
- Do not overcook fruit and vegetables as this will reduce the vitamin content.
- Unsweetened fruit juice is a good source of vitamin C but is high in natural sugar, and lower in fibre than eating whole pieces of fruit, so it's best taken only at meal times when it is less likely to cause damage to teeth. Limit fruit/vegetable juices and smoothies to a combined total of 150ml a day. It can only count as one of your five-a-day.
- Dried fruits are a good source of nutrients and fibre but are high in natural sugars so can cause tooth decay. They are not recommended as a snack between meals but are best served as part of a main meal when they are less harmful to teeth.
- Help your child get their five-a-day by including some fruit or vegetables as a snack for morning break.
- If they take a packed lunch try to include two portions of fruit and vegetables (ideally one fruit and one vegetable). This includes all fresh fruit and vegetables and pots or tins of fruit in fruit juice, but not in syrup. Although potatoes are a vegetable they do not count towards the five-a-day target.
- Processed fruit bars (eg fruit winders, fruit flakes etc) are not recommended as they are high in sugar and can cause tooth decay.

Some examples of one portion:

- 1 medium sized piece of fruit, eg apple, orange, banana, pear;
- 2 small fruits, eg kiwi fruits, satsumas, plums;
- 1 cup of grapes, cherries or berries;
- 1 large slice of pineapple or melon;
- 1 cereal bowl of salad, eg lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber and celery;
- 3 heaped tablespoons of fresh veg, eg chopped or sliced carrots, peppers or sugar-snap peas;
- 3 heaped tablespoons of fruit salad (fresh or tinned in fruit juice).

For younger children (4–6 years), reduce these portion sizes by about half, then increase the amount as they grow. Older primary school children should be eating full portions.





Dairy and alternatives

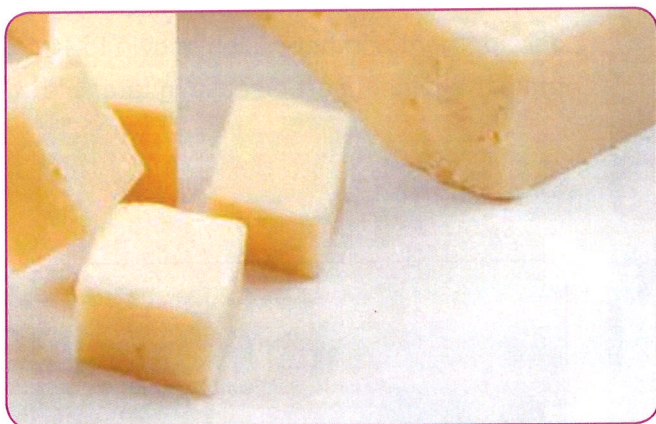
These foods provide protein, calcium, vitamin A and vitamin D. Calcium is very important for strong bones and teeth, especially for growing children. Foods high in calcium include: milk, yogurt, cheese, fromage frais and milk puddings.

Offer lower fat varieties of dairy foods such as semi-skimmed milk, low-fat or natural yogurt and fromage frais.

If your child does not like milk or dairy products, or cannot tolerate these foods, it is important to get advice from your doctor, school nurse or health visitor as a suitable alternative should be provided in order to meet their calcium needs.

Aim to include three portions a day – some examples of one portion:

- 1 glass of semi-skimmed milk (200ml);
- 1 matchbox size piece of cheese (30g);
- 2 triangles of spreadable cheese;
- 1 125g pot of yogurt, custard or rice pudding.



Oils and Spreads

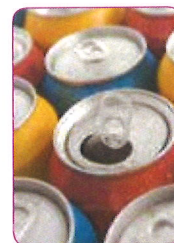
Some fat is essential as it provides energy, essential fatty acids and fat soluble vitamins. However, it should be eaten in small amounts, for example:

- spread butter or margarine thinly on bread or toast;
- use small amounts of oil when cooking.

Good fats (unsaturated fats including both monounsaturated or polyunsaturated) are better for our health, so when using spreads and oils use the ones labelled high in mono or polyunsaturates such as olive oil, rapeseed oil, corn oil or sunflower oil.

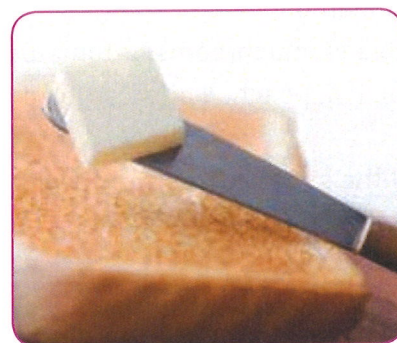
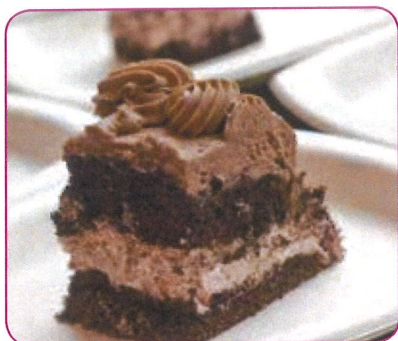
Eat less often and in small amounts

Cakes, biscuits, chocolate, savoury snacks (eg crisps, corn snacks), fizzy drinks, pastries, cream, ice cream, mayonnaise and dressings are all high in fat, salt and/or sugar. Too many of these foods increase the risk of your child becoming overweight or obese, putting their health at risk. Try to look for healthier alternatives to these foods (see information on snacks on pages 12 and 13).



If you choose to offer sweet foods and or drinks:

- give small amounts of them at the end of a meal instead of between meals - sugary foods and drinks are most likely to cause tooth decay when they are taken between meals.
- avoid using them as rewards - instead try to encourage good behaviour using smiles, praise and positive attention (look at the Healthy choices reward chart on page 21).



Healthy eating summary for primary school children

From five years of age, children should aim to eat the following every day:

- 5 or more portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables;
- a starchy food such as potatoes, bread, rice, pasta or breakfast cereal at every meal;
- 3 portions of lower fat dairy foods such as milk, cheese, yogurt, fromage frais;
- 2 portions of foods such as beans, pulses, lentils, fish, eggs or meat;
- less fatty and sugary foods.

Eating a balanced diet with plenty of variety will provide all the nutrients needed for healthy growth and development.

Healthy lunches

Whether your child takes a packed lunch to school or has school lunch, it's important they choose a balanced meal to keep their energy levels up. A packed lunch should include a variety of foods from each of the main food groups.

Try some of these packed lunch suggestions:

- Sandwich, wholemeal roll, pitta bread, bagel, wrap or other types of bread with a tasty filling, for example:
 - cheese and tomato;
 - salmon and cucumber;
 - egg and cress;
 - tuna and cucumber;
 - cheese and sliced apple;
 - chicken and sweetcorn;
 - hummus and cherry tomatoes;
 - mashed chopped dates with apple.
- Rice, pasta, potato or couscous salad.
- Slices of pizza, quiche or frittata.
- Low-fat soft cheese or hummus with bread and vegetable sticks.
- Vegetables can be used as part of the sandwich filling or included separately, eg cucumber, carrot, cherry tomatoes, celery sticks or peppers.
- Include fresh, canned or dried fruit.
- Remember to include a drink. The best drinks are water and milk.
- Although pure fruit juice contains some naturally occurring sugar, it is also suitable at meal times, when it is less likely to cause tooth decay. Limit fruit/vegetable juices and/or smoothies to a combined total of 150ml a day.
- Remember, children have small appetites, don't pack too much in. The key to success is variety.

Keep it cool!

To make sure the lunch is safe to eat, remember to use a cool bag and pop in an ice pack.

For more ideas for packed lunches, refer to the leaflet *Are you packing a healthy lunch?* produced by the Public Health Agency (see www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications).



Are you packing a healthy lunch?



**school
food**

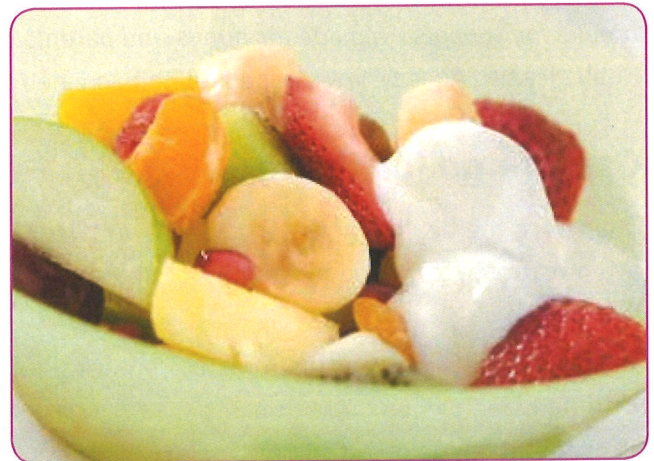
Tasty desserts

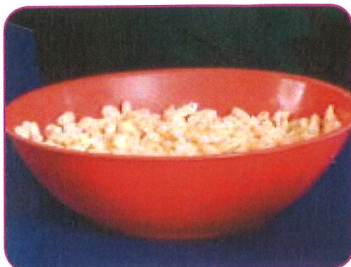
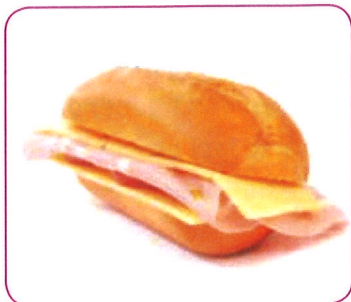
- low-fat yogurt with fresh fruit;
- stewed or canned fruit in natural juice with low-fat custard;
- fresh fruit salad with fromage frais;
- tinned pears in natural juice with low-fat rice pudding;
- fruit crumble and low-fat custard;
- sugar-free jelly and fruit.

Healthy eating habits

To help children develop healthy eating habits, try to do as many of the following as possible:

- ✓ switch the television off when you are eating;
- ✓ sit together as a family to eat your meal;
- ✓ offer new foods – don't be discouraged if the children don't like them straight away;
- ✓ encourage and praise good eating habits;
- ✓ involve your child in shopping for and preparing food;
- ✓ set a good example by eating healthy foods yourself and being positive about them.





Amber - think!

Most of these foods are nutritious but still contain some sugar, fat or salt. They are best taken at meals (when they are less damaging to teeth) and should not be taken too frequently as snacks between meals. Choose low-fat, low-sugar, low-salt varieties where possible.

These foods should not be taken too frequently between meals:

- sandwiches with cheese filling or processed meats like ham;
- crumpets spread thinly with unsaturated margarine or butter;
- breakfast cereals, eg Bran Flakes, Shreddies, Weetaflakes, Cornflakes, Rice Krispies;
- oatcakes;
- cheese and crackers;
- cubes of cheese;
- low-fat plain yogurt or plain fromage frais.

Red - stop!

These are the least healthy choices as most are high in sugar and may also be high in fat or salt or both. If eaten, they are best taken at the end of a meal (when they are less damaging to teeth) and not between meals.

The foods in the red section should only be given occasionally. They are best eaten at meal times and taken all at once rather than at intervals throughout the day:

- chocolate, cream or jam filled biscuits;
- cake;
- scones;
- pancakes;
- brioches, Danish pastries or pain au chocolat;
- crisps;
- cereal bars;
- sweets;
- dried fruit*.

*Dried fruit is high in sugar and is therefore not recommended between meals. If taken at meal times, dried fruit is less harmful to teeth and can help to meet the five portions a day target.

Sweets and treats

Avoid using sweets, chocolate or crisps as rewards for good behaviour or achievement. Try non-food treats instead such as having a friend to play, a trip to the park, going to the cinema or swimming (see the Healthy choices reward chart on page 21).

Amber – think!

These drinks should only be given occasionally and are best taken with meals.

- fruit and vegetable juices and smoothies (limit to a combined total of 150ml throughout the day);
- flavoured milk drinks.

Red – stop!

Caffeinated energy drinks, eg Redbull, Monster, Cola, coffee and tea

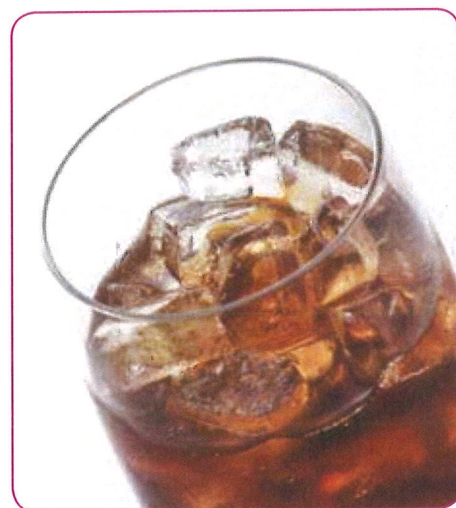
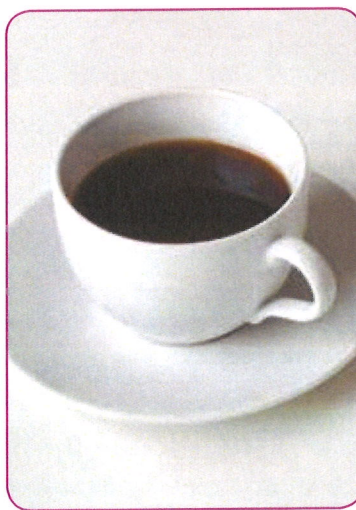
These drinks contain caffeine and may keep children awake at night. Tea also contains tannins which hinder the absorption of iron.

If sweetened and acidic drinks are being taken, the following can help prevent damage to teeth:

- avoid holding the drink in the mouth or swishing it about before swallowing;
- drink through a straw placed well to the back of the mouth;
- rinse the mouth out with water after taking sweet/acidic drinks;
- do not brush teeth for at least one hour after taking acidic drinks to avoid tooth erosion;
- remember to brush twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.

Acidic and sugary drinks can cause damage to teeth, especially when taken between meals. Sweetened and acidic drinks include:

- fizzy drinks, including diet drinks;
- squashes, including diet varieties.



Maintaining a healthy weight

Children are getting heavier and that's bad news for their health now and in years to come. Children who are overweight are more likely to get diabetes or heart disease in later life and they can also be affected by more immediate consequences, including:

- teasing or bullying;
- low self-esteem;
- embarrassment when playing games or sports;
- difficulty in being active (eg getting breathless quickly).

Keep an eye on your child's weight. If you feel your child is overweight and you want to talk to someone about this, make an appointment with your school nurse or doctor. It is best to take action early to help your child to improve their eating habits and activity levels as this will help guide him/her on a lifelong path of eating well and being active.



Helping children to manage their weight requires a lot of support from other members of the family; try not to single your child out for any special treatment. Any changes you make should benefit the whole family. The best thing you can do to help your child develop healthy eating habits and be more active is to show them how it is done. Children who see their parents, grandparents and carers following a healthy lifestyle tend to learn by example.

If your child is overweight

- The aim is to keep weight steady while your child continues to grow.
- Lifestyle change is the best approach and can be used for the whole family.
- Try to get the whole family to:
 - eat a balanced diet (see section on Healthy eating for primary school children from page 2).
 - become more active.
- Start by encouraging small changes such as swapping sugary fizzy drinks for water.
- Agree some goals together with your child so that they are involved.




























Setting goals for the whole family

A healthy lifestyle means not only eating well, but also being active every day. Think of ways the whole family could become healthier. Write some goals in the spaces below for your family to become healthier. A couple of examples have been included.

Goals	Reward
Examples: Eat 1 extra portion of fruit or vegetables every day Play ball for 15 min each day	Example: A trip to the swimming pool on Saturday morning

Healthy choices reward chart

You can photocopy this page before you use it, so it can be used over and over again. Your child can write his or her name in the box above and colour a smiley face for each healthy choice each day. You can decide as a family how many smiley faces each week (eg total of 20 or more) will earn a healthy reward like a new comic, a trip to the cinema or a trip to the park at the weekend.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
I ate breakfast today					
I ate at least 5 portions of fruit and veg today					
I had less than 2 hours' screen time today					
I got 60 minutes of physical activity today					
I brushed my teeth twice today					
Total					