

A group of six children are playing tug-of-war on a sandy beach. They are arranged in two teams of three, pulling on a rope. The children are wearing colorful clothing: a pink shirt and blue pants, a blue hoodie and blue pants, a light blue shirt and dark pants, a yellow hoodie and dark pants, a black shirt and black pants, and a blue hoodie and red pants. The background shows a clear blue sky and the ocean waves in the distance.

A Parent's Guide

Food and Fitness for School-Aged Children

Childhood is a time of rapid growth and development. It is vital that our children eat a nutritionally balanced and varied diet to ensure they get all the nutrients they need. Now is the perfect time to teach them the value of healthy eating and plenty of physical activity, to prepare them for the years ahead.

What makes a **healthy, balanced diet** for children?

Starchy foods such as bread, potatoes, rice, pasta, sweet potato, plantain and noodles should form the basis of the diet. Include one of these foods at every meal.

- Starchy foods are a good source of fibre and B vitamins.

Protein-rich foods for example, meat, poultry, fish, eggs, pulses and vegetarian alternatives to meat, such as tofu, should be eaten in moderation.

- Red meat is a good source of iron, which is essential for healthy blood cells and immune function. Other sources of iron include green leafy vegetables, fortified breakfast cereals, eggs, pulses, wholegrain cereals, dried fruit, nuts and seeds.

Milk and dairy products, (such as cheese and yoghurt), should be included in moderate amounts.

- These foods contain calcium and vitamin D, as well as other important nutrients, and will help to build strong bones and teeth.

Fruit and vegetables: eat plenty! Aim for at least 5 different types a day. Remember fresh, frozen, canned, dried and juiced all count.

- Fruit and vegetables are good sources of vitamins, minerals and fibre.

Drinks are essential to help children stay well hydrated. Drinking will help maintain your child's concentration and prevent fatigue.

- Water and milk are good choices between meals.
- Fruit juices, squashes and fizzy drinks are best limited to mealtimes and should be consumed in moderation.



It is important to eat and enjoy a variety of foods

TOP TIPS FOR HEALTHY EATING FOR KIDS

Make food fun!

Encourage children to eat regular meals, especially breakfast.



Breakfast is an essential start to the day. Examples of healthy breakfast choices include fortified breakfast cereals (providing extra vitamins and minerals, including iron), wholemeal toast with jam or marmalade, boiled eggs with soldiers, baked beans on toast and yoghurt with fruit.

Remember to eat fat sparingly and choose lower fat options whenever possible, for example, semi-skimmed milk, reduced fat burgers and sausages and lean cuts of meat.

Encourage sensible food choices, particularly snacks.

Snacks can form part of a healthy, balanced diet as long as they are appropriate to your child's needs. Remember snacks shouldn't be eaten in place of meals.

Healthy snacks include fruit, fruit smoothies, low fat milkshakes, crumpets, cereal and cereal bars, bagels, vegetable sticks, toasted teacakes, fruit scones with jam and fromage frais.

Snacks such as cakes, biscuits, chocolate, sweets and crisps can be included as long as they are part of a healthy balanced diet and your child maintains a healthy bodyweight.

Don't forget to visit your dentist regularly and brush teeth twice daily with fluoride toothpaste.

Teeth can cope with three meals and two snacks every day. Try to keep sweet and starchy foods to these occasions.

GET ACTIVE!

Eat the right amount and be physically active to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.

Children should be encouraged to enjoy regular physical activity (60 minutes every day).

Weight bearing exercise, such as dancing, walking and tennis, is especially important in childhood to help build strong bones and should be included at least twice a week.

Team sports, for example, football, netball and hockey also help to enhance self-esteem, social skills and teamwork.

All types of physical activity will help to maintain a healthy body weight, promote wellbeing and encourage activity in later life.

“This leaflet contains sound and practical advice regarding diet, physical activity and wellbeing for school-aged children. It reflects the current scientific thinking applying it to everyday use, and provides a valuable guide for parents”.

Barbara Livingstone, Professor of Nutrition at the University of Ulster.



This leaflet is provided through an educational grant from The Sugar Bureau.

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Published 08/06

