

# Healthy eating for children

TEACH YOUR CHILD HEALTHY HABITS FOR A HEALTHY LIFE



## WHAT ARE THE DIETARY GUIDELINES?

The *Australian Dietary Guidelines* provide up-to-date advice about the amount and kinds of foods that we need to eat for health and wellbeing. They are based on scientific evidence and research.

The *Australian Dietary Guidelines* of most relevance to children are included below:

### GUIDELINE 1:

To achieve and maintain a healthy weight, be physically active and choose amounts of nutritious food and drinks to meet your energy needs.

- Children and adolescents should eat sufficient nutritious foods to grow and develop normally. They should be physically active every day and their growth should be checked regularly.

### GUIDELINE 2:

Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from these five food groups every day:

- Plenty of vegetables of different types and colours, and legumes/beans
- Fruit
- Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain and/or high cereal fibre varieties, such as breads, cereals, rice, pasta, noodles, polenta, couscous, oats, quinoa and barley
- Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds, and legumes/beans
- Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or their alternatives, mostly reduced fat (reduced fat milks are not suitable for children under the age of 2 years)

And drink plenty of water.

### GUIDELINE 3:

Limit intake of foods containing saturated fat, added salt, added sugars and alcohol.

- a. Limit intake of foods high in saturated fat such as many biscuits, cakes, pastries, pies, processed meats, commercial burgers, pizza, fried foods, potato chips, crisps and other savoury snacks.
  - Replace high fat foods which contain predominately saturated fats such as butter, cream, cooking margarine, coconut and palm oil with foods which contain predominately polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats such as oils, spreads, nut butters/pastes and avocado.
  - Low fat diets are not suitable for children under the age of 2 years.
- b. Limit intake of foods and drinks containing added salt.
  - Read labels to choose lower sodium options among similar foods.
  - Do not add salt to foods in cooking or at the table.
- c. Limit intake of foods and drinks containing added sugars such as confectionary, sugar-sweetened soft drinks and cordials, fruit drinks, vitamin waters, energy and sports drinks.

### GUIDELINE 4:

Encourage, support and promote breastfeeding.

### GUIDELINE 5:

Care for your food; prepare and store it safely.



[www.eatforhealth.gov.au](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au)

Want more information about healthy eating?

[www.eatforhealth.gov.au](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au)

## FOODS TO LIMIT: DISCRETIONARY CHOICES

‘Discretionary choices’ are called that because they are not an essential or necessary part of our dietary patterns. Discretionary foods are high in kilojoules, saturated fat, added sugars, added salt, or alcohol. If chosen, they should be eaten only sometimes and in small amounts.

### Examples of discretionary choices include:

- Sweet biscuits, cakes and desserts
- Processed meats and sausages
- Ice-cream, confectionery and chocolate
- Meat pies and other pastries
- Commercial burgers, hot chips, and fried foods
- Crisps and other fatty and/or salty snacks
- Cream and butter
- Sugar-sweetened cordials, soft drinks and sports drinks.

It is also important to remember that young children (less than 3 years of age) can choke on hard foods. To prevent this from happening:

- Sit with them when they eat and don’t give them hard foods such as popcorn, nuts, hard confectionary or crisps.
- Cook or grate hard fruit and vegetables to soften them.
- Remove all bones from fish or meat.



## ENCOURAGING HEALTHY HABITS

**Childhood is a time of learning. Children who grow up in families that enjoy a variety of nutritious foods from the Five Food Groups are more likely to make their own healthy choices as they get older.**

You can help by teaching your whole family to:

- Choose ‘everyday foods’ for home and school from the Five Food Groups.
- Save discretionary choices for special occasions.
- Provide a variety of types and colours of fresh vegetables and fruit that are in season.
- Enjoy reduced fat varieties of milk, yoghurt and cheese (once they are 2 years or older).
- Eat mainly wholegrain cereal foods and breads.
- Drink plenty of water instead of sugary drinks like cordial, energy drinks, sports drinks, fruit drinks, vitamin waters and soft drink.
- Eat a healthy breakfast every day.
- Learn about how foods are grown and where they come from.
- Try new foods and recipes – help with cooking and preparing foods and drinks too.
- Turn off the tv and computer at mealtimes – make this family time.
- Wash their hands before eating or cooking.
- Be physically active – play outside, walk the dog or run around at the local park.



The *Australian Dietary Guidelines* provide up-to-date advice about the amount and kinds of foods that we need to eat for health and wellbeing.

**For more information visit:**  
[www.eatforhealth.gov.au](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au)

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SERVE SIZES



Vegetables and legumes/beans

		Serves per day				
		2–3 years	4–8 years	9–11 years	12–13 years	14–18 years
Boys		2½	4½	5	5½	5½
Girls		2½	4½	5	5	5

A standard serve of vegetables is about 75g (100-350kJ) or:

- ½ cup cooked green or orange vegetables (for example, broccoli, spinach, carrots or pumpkin)
- ½ cup cooked, dried or canned beans, peas or lentils\*
- 1 cup green leafy or raw salad vegetables
- ½ cup sweet corn
- ½ medium potato or other starchy vegetables (sweet potato, taro or cassava)
- 1 medium tomato

\*preferably with no added salt



Fruit

		Serves per day				
		2–3 years	4–8 years	9–11 years	12–13 years	14–18 years
Boys		1	1½	2	2	2
Girls		1	1½	2	2	2

A standard serve of fruit is about 150g (350kJ) or:

- 1 medium apple, banana, orange or pear
- 2 small apricots, kiwi fruits or plums
- 1 cup diced or canned fruit (with no added sugar)

Or only occasionally:

- 125ml (½ cup) fruit juice (with no added sugar)
- 30g dried fruit (for example, 4 dried apricot halves, 1½ tablespoons of sultanas)



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

		Serves per day				
		2–3 years	4–8 years	9–11 years	12–13 years	14–18 years
Boys		4	4	5	6	7
Girls		4	4	4	5	7

A standard serve (500kJ) is:

- 1 slice (40g) bread
- ½ medium (40g) roll or flat bread
- ½ cup (75–120g) cooked rice, pasta, noodles, barley, buckwheat, semolina, polenta, bulgur or quinoa
- ½ cup (120g) cooked porridge
- ¾ cup (30g) wheat cereal flakes
- ¼ cup (30g) muesli
- 3 (35g) crispbreads
- 1 (60g) crumpet
- 1 small (35g) English muffin or scone



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

		Serves per day				
		2–3 years	4–8 years	9–11 years	12–13 years	14–18 years
Boys		1	1½	2½	2½	2½
Girls		1	1½	2½	2½	2½

A standard serve (500-600kJ) is:

- 65g cooked lean meats such as beef, lamb, veal, pork, goat or kangaroo (about 90–100g raw)\*
- 80g cooked lean poultry such as chicken or turkey (100g raw)
- 100g cooked fish fillet (about 115g raw weight) or one small can of fish
- 2 large (120g) eggs
- 1 cup (150g) cooked or canned legumes/beans such as lentils, chick peas or split peas (preferably with no added salt)
- 170g tofu
- 30g nuts, seeds, peanut or almond butter or tahini or other nut or seed paste (no added salt)

\*weekly limit of 455g



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

		Serves per day				
		2–3 years	4–8 years	9–11 years	12–13 years	14–18 years
Boys		1½	2	2½	3½	3½
Girls		1½	1½	3	3½	3½

A standard serve (500-600kJ) is:

- 1 cup (250ml) fresh, UHT long life, reconstituted powdered milk or buttermilk
- ½ cup (120ml) evaporated milk
- 2 slices (40g) or 4 x 3 x 2cm cube (40g) of hard cheese, such as cheddar
- ½ cup (120g) ricotta cheese
- ¾ cup (200g) yoghurt
- 1 cup (250ml) soy, rice or other cereal drink with at least 100mg of added calcium per 100ml

- To meet additional energy needs, extra serves from the Five Food Groups or unsaturated spreads and oils, or discretionary choices may be needed by children who are not overweight but are taller, more active or older in their age band.
- An allowance for unsaturated spreads and oils for cooking, or nuts and seeds can be included in the following quantities: 4–5g per day for children 2–3 years of age, 7–10g per day for children 3–12 years of age, 11–15g per day for children 12–13 years of age and 14–20g per day for adolescents 14–18 years of age.
- For meal ideas and advice on how to apply the serve sizes go to: [www.eatforhealth.gov.au](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au)

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION GO TO [www.eatforhealth.gov.au](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au)



WHICH FOODS SHOULD I EAT AND HOW MUCH?

The *Australian Dietary Guidelines* provide up-to-date advice about the amount and kinds of foods and drinks that we need regularly, for health and well-being.

By providing your child with the recommended amounts from the Five Food Groups and limiting the foods that are high in saturated fat, added sugars and added salt, they will get enough of the nutrients essential for good health, growth and development. They may have a reduced risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity and some cancers. Your child may also feel better, look better, enjoy life more and live longer!

The amount of food your child will need from the Five Food Groups depends on their age, gender, height, weight and physical activity levels. For example, a 3-year-old boy requires 1 serve of fruit a day, but an 11-year-old boy needs 2 serves of fruit a day. A 9-year-old girl needs 4 serves of grain (cereal) foods a day, and a 14-year-old girl needs 7 serves a day. Children who are taller, more physically active or in the higher end of their age band (and not overweight or obese) may be able to have additional serves of the Five Food Groups or unsaturated spreads and oils or discretionary choices.

For further information go to [www.eatforhealth.gov.au](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au).

HOW MUCH IS A SERVE?

It's helpful to get to know the recommended serving sizes and serves per day so that your child eats and drinks the right amount of the nutritious foods they need for health – as shown in the tables above. We've given you the serve size in grams too, so you can weigh foods to get an idea of what a serve looks like.

The 'serve size' is a set amount that doesn't change. It is used along with the 'serves per day', to work out the total amount of food required from each of the Five Food Groups. 'Portion size' is the amount your child actually eats and this will depend on what their energy needs are. Some children's portion sizes are smaller than the 'serve size' and some are larger. Children may eat smaller amounts more often if they choose.

HOW MANY SERVES A DAY?

Children rarely eat exactly the same way each day and it is common to have a little more on some days than others. However, on average, the total of their portion sizes should end up being similar to the number of serves they need each day.

If your child eats portions that are smaller than the 'serve size' they will need to eat from the Food Groups more often. If your child's portion size is larger than the 'serve size', then they will need to eat from the Food Groups less often.