

Healthy eating and weight control in children

Our body shapes and sizes vary through the stages of life and are determined by factors such as our family history, diet and exercise. That means we can change our body weight if we want to! Maintaining a healthy weight for your child's height is important for good health.

It is important to establish a healthy lifestyle and eating pattern during childhood and continue to encourage these habits for life. Children learn by example; parents are the best role model for their children when it comes to healthy eating.

Do not:

- ✖ Place your child on a very restrictive diet (e.g. excluding whole food groups). This can result in a poor nutrition and may affect your child's growth.
- ✖ Make negative comments about your child's weight or size.
- ✖ Single your child out as being "on a diet".

Do:

- ✓ Follow a balanced diet and include healthy snacks.
- ✓ Praise frequently for healthy food choices and reward your child with non-food items (eg. stickers or books).
- ✓ Limit "screen time" (the amount of time your child spends watching television or playing computer games).
- ✓ Limit intake of high fat and high sugar snack foods. These foods contain lots of extra energy (calories / kilojoules) and minimal amounts of nutrition.
- ✓ Set a good example for your child by modelling healthy eating habits. Eating together as a family is a good opportunity to teach your child about healthy food and model good eating habits.
- ✓ Encourage your child to learn to recognise feelings of hunger and satiety.
- ✓ **Involve the whole family in diet and lifestyle changes.**

Fats

You may also wish to use bullets like this:

- Fat is one of the main nutrients found in food. It is the nutrient that is highest in energy (kilojoules/calories) and this can contribute to being overweight.
- Avoiding fat completely is not recommended. Fat provides important vitamins that are not found in other foods.
- Some fats are better for your health than others; your dietitian can provide more information about this.
- A reduced fat diet is generally suitable for children over two years of age. Speak with a dietitian before placing your child on a reduced fat diet.
- Check the food label to determine the amount of fat. Aim for products with less than 10g of total fat/100g.

Sugars

- Sugar is a carbohydrate that provides extra energy to your child's diet. Some examples are white, raw or brown sugar and corn or glucose syrup. Too much sugar can contribute to being overweight and other health concerns such as tooth decay.
- Unnecessary sugar is easily consumed in fruit juice, soft drinks and cordials, energy drinks, iced teas, and vitamin waters. Sugar is also

found in chocolate, lollies and snack foods such as muesli bars.

- Small amounts of sugar may be appropriate on special occasions.
- Sugar will be listed on the food label. You should aim for no more than 10-15g of sugar/100g.

Extra Foods

Processed foods are often high in fat and/or sugar. They do not provide important nutrients that your child needs for growth. Children learn to prefer these foods if they are offered regularly. They should be limited to occasional use.

Extra foods include:

- ✕ Potato crisps
- ✕ Chocolate bars
- ✕ Lollies
- ✕ Ice-cream
- ✕ Cakes, pastries, donuts
- ✕ Muesli bars, health food bars/ fruit bars/ fruit sticks,
- ✕ Sweet biscuits (including small lunch box packet biscuits)
- ✕ Pies, sausage rolls
- ✕ Fried takeaway foods
- ✕ Processed meats and sausages (e.g. devon)

Drinks

- Water should be encouraged as your child's main drink. It is readily available, free of sugar and food additives and contains no kilojoules.

- **Limit cordial, soft drink, sports drinks and fruit juice.**
- Most children enjoy water if it is encouraged from an early age.
- Try keeping a jug of water in the fridge so its icy cold. You can add crushed ice or fresh fruit slices (e.g. lemon, orange, mint, cucumber).
- Reduced fat milk can be offered to children from 2 years. Skim milk may be offered from 5 years.

This table outlines the sugar content of common drinks:

Beverage	Amount	Number of Teaspoons
Soft drink	375mL	9-14
Fruit Drink	250mL	5
Fruit Juice	250mL	4
Cordial	250mL	4
Flavoured milk	250mL	2.5
Water	250mL	None

Activity & Sleep

Regular exercise and activity is an **essential** part of maintaining a healthy weight and good health.

National physical activity guidelines indicate:

1. Children and adolescents should participate in **at least 60 minutes** (and up to several hours) of moderate-to-vigorous intensity activity every day.

2. Children and youth **should not spend more than two hours** per day using electronic media (TV, video games, phones). Long periods of sitting should be broken up as often as possible.
3. Exercise should be encouraged as a part of your child's routine. It is important to involve the whole family in the activity.
4. Limit screen time in the bedroom.
5. No electronic devices during mealtimes
6. Try having screen-free days.

Some activity ideas:

- ✓ Play outside!
- ✓ Walk to school.
- ✓ Ride a bike along a bike track or park.
- ✓ Take a ball to your local park and try football, cricket, soccer or basketball.
- ✓ Swim at the local pool or beach with supervision.
- ✓ Walk the dog!
- ✓ Frisbee at your local park or beach.
- ✓ Dancing, gymnastics, tap, or ballet.
- ✓ Fly a kite
- ✓ Join a sporting or activity club
- ✓ Go on bush or nature walk.
- ✓ Encourage your child to participate in active household chores eg. raking the lawn or sweeping floors.
- ✓ Rollerblading/roller-skating.

Suggested meal plan

BREAKFAST
MORNING TEA
LUNCH
AFTERNOON TEA
DINNER
SUPPER

Things I can do to improve my family's healthy eating:

1.

2.

3.

4.

For further information contact your Dietitian or Nutritionist: _____

References:

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2. Nutrition and Dietetics Department, *Information sheet: Is my child overweight?* Mater Hospital.
3. Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, (2005). *Helping Children Eat Well (4-7yrs) & (8-11 years)*, Royal Children's Hospital.
4. Nutrition and Dietetics Department, *Fun Food – What's to drink?* Mater Hospital.
5. Department of Health and Ageing, (2017). *Australia's Physical Activity Recommendations*, Canberra.

This is a consensus document from Dietitian/ Nutritionists from the Nutrition Education Materials Online, "NEMO", team.

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