

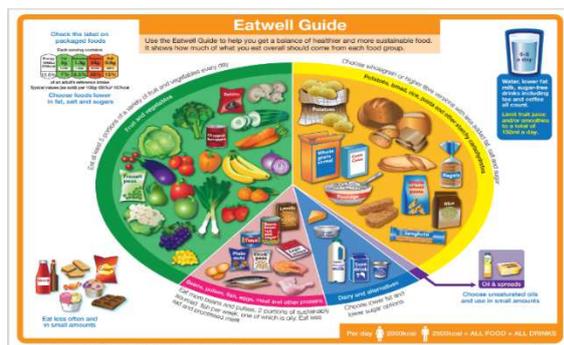
Eating Well for Children Aged 5-11 Years

Why does eating well matter at 5-11 years?

At age 5-11 years, children are growing rapidly and can be very active so they need enough energy and nutrients in their diet to provide everything they need for growth and development. Eating a poor diet in childhood can increase the risk of developing diseases in later life such as obesity, diabetes, coronary heart disease and some cancers (SACN, 2011). Eating a nutritious diet is linked to better long-term health and is important for brain development, mood, attention and behaviour (BDA, 2020). Getting your child started with eating well when they are young will also help them to maintain good eating habits as an adult.

What should my child aged 5-11 years eat?

It is important that children have food in portion sizes appropriate to their age and individual needs. When offering meals or snacks, it is important to remember to give your child a small, child-sized portion of food. A healthy balanced diet should include a wide variety of different foods based around the four food groups as shown in the Eatwell Guide below (NHS, 2020).



Fruit and vegetables

Try to offer at least 5 portions of different fruit and vegetables every day. Fresh, frozen, tinned (in own juice), dried or juice all count. Dried

fruit is best eaten at mealtimes to prevent tooth decay.

- *Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy foods*

Each meal should include food from this group. Other examples of starchy foods include chapattis, yams, breakfast cereals, scones, crumpets and couscous. Choose wholegrain foods such as wholemeal bread and fortified breakfast cereals which are lower in sugar as these will keep your child feeling fuller for longer.

- *Meat, fish, eggs, beans, pulses and other non-dairy sources of protein*

This group includes meat, fish, eggs, beans, pulses such as peas or lentils and other non-dairy sources of protein like tofu. Fish should be served at least twice a week with one of these servings being an oily fish such as salmon or sardines. Serve a variety of these foods 2-3 times a day.

- *Dairy and alternatives*

Dairy products such as milk, yoghurt, cheese and custard are important sources of protein and calcium which are needed to develop strong bones and teeth. Your child should have 3 servings of dairy or alternatives every day. If your child has an allergy or intolerance to cows' milk, talk to your Health Visitor or GP for advice about suitable milk alternatives.

Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar

It is important to have some fat in the diet but foods high in fat and sugar provide extra energy (calories) with few nutrients. Only offer foods or drinks from this group occasionally.

Drinks

You should encourage your child to have a drink 6-8 times a day. Water is the best drink

to offer and milk is also suitable. 100% fruit juice can be offered but it contains quite a lot of sugar so should be served with meals. Fizzy drinks and squash should only be offered occasionally with meals to prevent tooth decay and because they have extra calories with no nutrients which can contribute to excess weight gain.

How what children eat affects their brain development, mood, attention and behaviour



Eating regular meals is important to regulate blood sugar as this may influence some of the hormones that control mood and concentration. Poor mood and behaviour can occur in children who have missed a meal such as breakfast. This can make it difficult to concentrate in class, affect learning and performance. Fibre may also have a role to play in helping mood and concentration.

Research suggests that nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin b12, folic acid, zinc, iron and iodine have an important role to play in the cognitive development of children. Deficiencies in these nutrients can significantly affect brain development in children (Nyardi et al, 2013). Therefore, it is important to ensure

that your child eats a varied diet based on the Eatwell Guide to ensure that they get all the nutrients they need.

Iron

It is essential that your child gets enough iron in their diet. Lack of iron can lead to iron-deficiency anaemia which can affect your child's physical and mental development. Therefore, it is important to eat foods rich in iron such as meat, fish, fortified breakfast cereals, dark green vegetables, lentils and broad beans. If your child does not eat meat or fish, make sure that they get enough from the other sources of iron.

Overweight and obesity

Being overweight or obese as a child is linked to early onset type 2 diabetes, asthma and cardiovascular risk factors such as high blood pressure. Children who are overweight or obese are also more likely to suffer from behavioural and mental health problems and being overweight or obese can lead to future health problems such as type 2 diabetes, some cancers and coronary heart disease. If you are concerned about your child's weight, speak to your GP for advice.

Vitamin D

It is important that children have sufficient levels of vitamin D as it is important for bone and muscle health. Recent guidance has been issued which advises that children aged 5-11 years should take a vitamin D supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D (Scottish Government, 2020).

References

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2. British Dietetic Association (2020) Diet, behaviour and learning in children: Food Fact Sheet. Available: <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/diet-behaviour-and-learning-children.html>
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4. Nyardi A, Li J, Hickling S, Foster J & Oddy W (2013) The role of nutrition in children's neurocognitive development, from pregnancy through childhood. *Front Hum Neurosci* 7(97): 1-16. Available: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnhum.2013.00097/full>
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