

Nutrition & You

CHILDREN





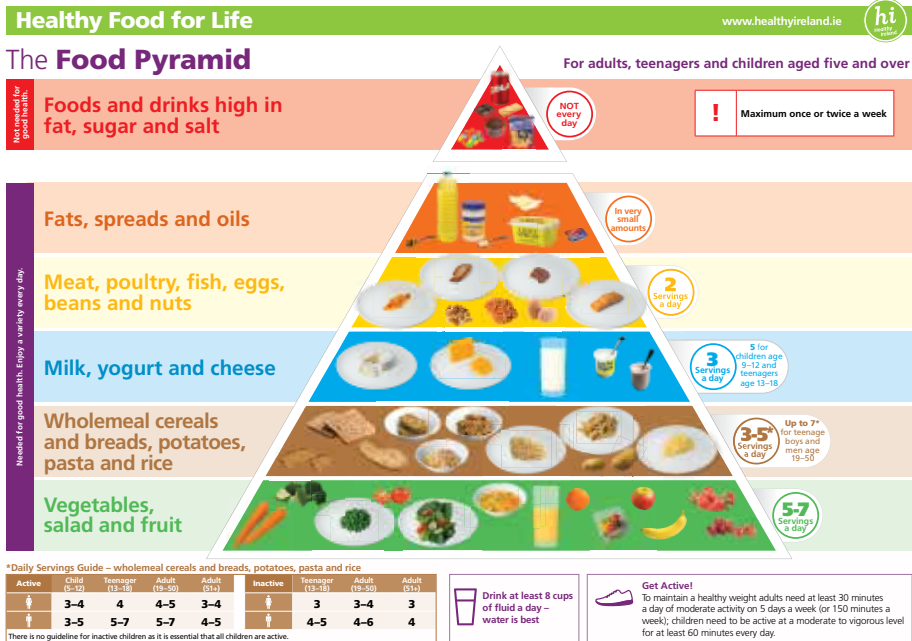
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Eating Well to Grow Well

Your child's energy and nutrient needs will vary depending on factors such as their gender, age, body size and activity levels.

The Department of Health's Food Pyramid provides general healthy eating guidance for adults and children over the age of five years. Following these guidelines can help your child get the right balance of nutrients that they need to stay healthy.



Source: Department of Health, December 2016.



Finding the Balance

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The Food Pyramid categorises food into groups depending on the main nutrients they contain and gives guidelines on the number of servings to be eaten daily from each group. Remember, it is important that your child eats according to their own growth, appetite and activity levels.

A variety of foods from the bottom four shelves of the Food Pyramid should be chosen every day for a good range of vitamins and minerals.

Vegetables, Salad and Fruit

Vegetables and fruit provide vitamins, minerals and fibre. Choose 5-7 servings a day. Base meals and snacks on this food group and aim for a variety of coloured fruit and vegetables.

Serving Examples: 1 medium apple, orange, banana or pear; 10 grapes; 16 raspberries; ½ cup cooked vegetables (fresh/frozen); a bowl of salad or homemade vegetable soup.

Wholemeal Cereals and Breads, Potatoes, Pasta and Rice

These foods are good energy providers. The number of servings needed from this group depends on age, size, gender and activity level. For children, 3-5 servings daily are recommended.

Serving Examples: 2 thin slices of wholemeal bread; ⅓ cup of dry porridge oats; 2 medium or 4 baby potatoes, 1 cup of cooked pasta, rice, noodles or cous cous.

Milk, Yogurt and Cheese

Milk, yogurt and cheese contain a number of nutrients, most notably calcium. Three servings from this food group are recommended each day for those aged 5-8 years. Five servings are recommended daily for those aged 9-18 years.

Serving Examples: A 200ml glass of milk; a 125g pot of yogurt; or a 25g piece of cheese such as cheddar.



Meat, Poultry, Fish, Eggs, Beans and Nuts

Foods from this group are noted for their protein content. Aim for 2 servings a day. Choose lean cuts of meat and limit processed meat (e.g. sausages, bacon and ham). Include oily fish (e.g. salmon, mackerel) up to twice a week.

Serving Examples: 50-75g of cooked lean beef, pork, lamb or chicken; 100g of cooked fish or tofu; 2 eggs; 40g plain, unsalted nuts or seeds.

Fats, Spreads and Oils






Spreads and oils provide essential fats but are only needed in very small amounts. Try steaming, baking, boiling or grilling as alternatives to frying.

Serving Examples: 1 portion pack of reduced-fat or light spread for 2 slices of bread; 1 teaspoon of oil (rapeseed, olive or sunflower) per person.

Foods and Drinks High in Fat, Sugar and Salt

These top shelf foods and drinks are not needed for good health. Avoid having these foods every day – maximum once or twice a week of small or fun-sized servings.

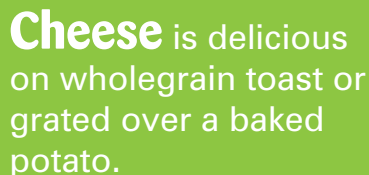
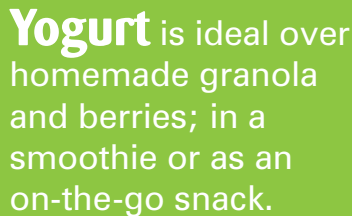
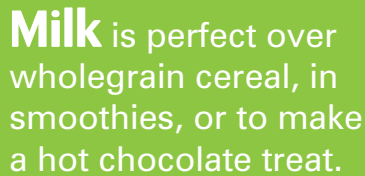
Serving Guide:

				
Cereals, cooked rice and pasta, vegetables, salad and fruit Use a 200ml disposable plastic cup to guide serving size.	Cheese Use two thumbs, width and depth to guide serving size.	Meat, poultry, fish The palm of the hand, width and depth without fingers and thumbs, shows how much you need in a day.	Reduced-fat spread Portion packs found in cafés can guide the amount you use. One pack should be enough for two slices of bread.	Oils Use one teaspoon of oil per person when cooking or in salads.

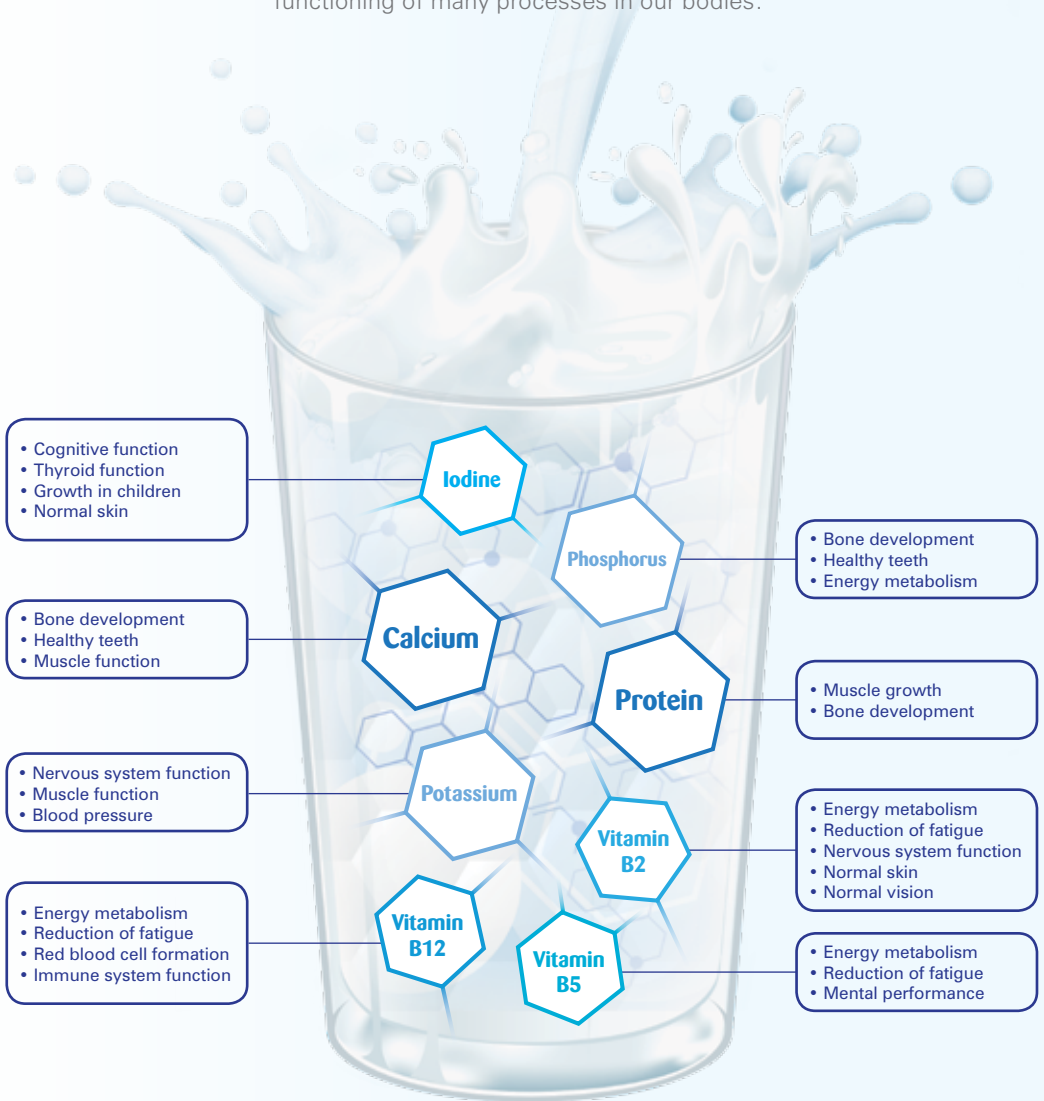
Source: Department of Health, December 2016



However, you may be surprised to learn that these foods are natural sources of many other nutrients, which are also needed for health.



The 'milk, yogurt and cheese' food group forms part of our healthy eating guidelines. The matrix of nutrients in milk contributes to the normal functioning of many processes in our bodies:



Source: EU Register of Nutrition and Health Claims made on foods

Preparing a Healthy Lunchbox



A healthy, yet appetising, lunchbox for children may often be viewed as a challenge. However, with a few simple tips, you can rest assured knowing your child is heading off to school with a nutritious, satisfying lunch.

Lunchbox tips

- Avoid your child getting bored with packed lunches by introducing variety, offering a range of tastes and presenting food in interesting ways.
- Base choices on the Food Pyramid guidelines as each food group includes many options (pages 1-3).
- If introducing something for the first time, try it at home first. It is important that the lunchbox is healthy but your child must also enjoy it.
- Involve your child in preparing their school lunch. This will help encourage responsibility and an interest in what they eat.
- School days can be hectic! So set aside some extra time during the weekend to plan for the week ahead.

It is important that children drink enough fluids throughout the day. Water and milk are considered the best choices and are suitable between meals and snacks.



School lunchbox ideas

Small Break

- Yogurt
- Plum
- Water

Lunch

- Tuna wrap with mixed peppers and sweetcorn
- Pear
- Carton of school milk

Small Break

- Apple
- Carton of school milk

Lunch

- Pasta salad with chicken/chickpeas
- Yogurt
- Water

Small Break

- Mixed vegetable sticks e.g. carrots, peppers
- Carton of school milk

Lunch

- Pitta pocket with cheese, lettuce and tomato relish
- Fruit salad
- Water

Remember food safety and hygiene when preparing packed lunches. Check out www.safefood.eu for advice and information on food safety.

Snacking

Often perceived as a 'bad' habit, it is important to clarify that snacking can actually play an important role in the diet. This may be especially relevant to some children who, due to their relatively small body size, may only be able to eat small amounts in one sitting.

Attention should be given to food choices, however. Snack foods should be nutritious – providing essential nutrients without excessive amounts of energy, fat, sugar or salt. Snacks should be selected based on your child's overall diet and lifestyle.

Examples of suitable snacks:

- Fresh fruit – whole fruits or a mixed fruit salad
- Yogurt
- Unsalted crackers/crispbread served with hummus or cheese
- Wholegrain cereal with milk
- Plain, unsalted nuts
- Vegetable sticks with a natural yogurt or hummus dip – try a variety of vegetables such as carrots, cucumber, green/red peppers
- Bowl/flask of homemade soup

Encouraging Activity

Being active can not only have a positive effect on your child's health, but it can also be a great way for them to meet new friends and form new interests. Including activity as a natural part of their everyday routine at a young age means they are more likely to continue this healthy habit throughout life.



It is recommended that children and young people be active at a moderate to vigorous level for **at least 60 minutes every day**. Muscle-strengthening, flexibility and bone-strengthening exercises should be included as part of these guidelines three times per week.

- **Moderate Activity:** Breathing and heart rates increase but conversation can still be carried out. You feel warm and sweat slightly. Examples include: cycling, brisk walking, hiking, rollerblading.
- **Vigorous Activity:** Breathing is heavy and it is more difficult to carry out a conversation. Heart and sweat rates are faster. Examples include: running, certain dance styles and team sports such as football, basketball, hurling.
- **Muscle-Strengthening** activities include: swinging on playground equipment or bars, rope climbing.
- **Bone-Strengthening** activities include: rope skipping, gymnastics, running, dancing, tennis, most team sports.
- **Flexibility** activities include: gymnastics, ballet, martial arts.





Get them going

- Keep it fun by encouraging your child to take part in a variety of activities.
- Check out your local community or leisure centre for sport clubs or classes.
- Incorporate family time by enjoying a walk, cycle or swim together.
- Swap outdoor activities for indoor activities when the weather is wet - such as swimming/indoor soccer/a dance class - or be prepared with raincoats and wellies!
- Walk or cycle, even part of your journey, rather than taking the bus or the car.
- Give gifts that encourage activity such as a football or a skipping rope.
- Research shows that children of parents who are physically active are more active too. So why not set a good example and join in?

Screening their 'screen time'

Nowadays, we have become more reliant on technology as a form of entertainment - even for socialising - but this can lead to less time spent being active. Monitor your child's screen time (TV, computer, phone, tablet etc.) and try to reduce this gradually, aiming for less than two hours a day. Encourage your child to take part in sport or a physically active hobby instead.



Supporting Bone Health

The health of our bones is determined mainly by factors that we cannot control such as genetics, gender and age. However, there are factors that we can control such as the foods we eat and the type of physical activity that we do.

Childhood and adolescence are important stages for bone growth and development. In fact, about half of an adult's bone mass is built up during this time. Looking after our bones in our younger years can have a positive impact on our bone health for life.

Diet

A balanced diet which provides bone-friendly nutrients such as calcium, protein and phosphorus is important for our bones.

Vitamin D is another key nutrient for bone health. It is known as 'the sunshine vitamin' because it is made by the action of sunlight on the skin. Vitamin D is also found in foods such as: oily fish (e.g. salmon, mackerel); egg (yolk); and dairy products fortified with vitamin D.

Activity

Regular participation in 'weight-bearing' activities is also essential for bone health. Weight-bearing activities are activities that put the full weight of our body on our feet and legs.

Examples of fun 'weight-bearing' activities for children:

- **Dancing**
- **Running**
- **Gymnastics**
- **Tennis**
- **Basketball**



Keeping them Smiling

Although primary teeth fall out and are replaced with permanent teeth, it is essential that children look after their first teeth. Healthy primary teeth have clear roles in speech and eating but are also needed for guiding permanent teeth into their correct positions. It is important, therefore, to set a good foundation by teaching and encouraging your child to look after their dental health.

Nutrition tips

- Encourage your child to eat a balanced diet, basing food choices on the healthy eating guidelines (pages 1-3).
- Frequent consumption of sugary foods and drinks is the primary cause of tooth decay. Therefore, limit how often your child consumes sugary foods and drinks.
- Dietary acids (e.g. from fizzy drinks, fruit juices) can result in dental erosion. Remember to choose drinks wisely. Milk and water are suitable choices, often referred to as 'tooth-friendly' drinks.
- Certain nutrients play a role in dental health. For example, calcium and phosphorus contribute to the maintenance of our teeth. Milk, yogurt and cheese are natural sources of these nutrients.

Practical tips

- Ensure your child brushes their teeth twice daily, once before bedtime and at one other time during the day.
- Supervise brushing until your child is seven years of age. Teach your child to brush their teeth using gentle and very short sideways movements.
- Ensure your child has regular dental check-ups.



Balancing Body Weight



Maintaining a healthy body weight is a balancing act. Food and drinks provide energy (calories) and this energy is used by the body – for example, during physical activity. However, if energy intake is greater than energy used, over time, this will result in weight gain.

Useful tips

- Watch portion sizes! Serve portion sizes relative to your child's age and size – not adult-sized portions.
- Monitor and limit intake of 'treats'. However, try not to ban these foods as this may make them more appealing.
- Encourage your child to be active.
- Be enthusiastic about healthy choices. Praise and compliment good decisions.
- Ensure all adults who care for your child are aligned regarding your child's diet and activity.

A positive body image

Children need to be aware that there is more to their body than how it looks.

It is important that children appreciate that healthy choices are necessary for overall health and wellbeing, not just body weight.

Remember, behaviour and comments from influential adults in a child's life (e.g. parents, carers, teachers) are hugely important. Be positive and lead by example.

Children are often rewarded for good behaviour. But, remember, these rewards don't have to be food or drinks. Try a trip to the park, a new football, a colouring book or a fun family day out.

Check out INDI fact-sheets (www.indi.ie/fact-sheets) for more information.



Further Reading

The National Dairy Council

www.ndc.ie

Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute - Factsheets

www.indi.ie/fact-sheets

Safefood

www.safefood.eu

Department of Health - The Food Pyramid (2016)

www.healthyeireland.ie

Dental Health Foundation

www.dentalhealth.ie

Get Ireland Active - Promoting Physical Activity in Ireland

www.getirelandactive.ie

Moo Crew: The Primary Dairy Moovement is the National Dairy Council's education programme for primary school pupils, helping children to learn about the importance of healthy eating, physical activity and the 'milk, yogurt and cheese' food group.

To find out more: visit www.moocrew.ie or email info@moocrew.ie



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