



Nutrition and exercise for children



Children should grow up to be healthy and be able to feel at ease and confident in their own body. A balanced diet and regular exercise are important for proper development.



Health and wellbeing

A balanced diet and regular exercise will ...

... promote a healthy body weight

... strengthen bones

... improve the body's immune defences

... stimulate digestion

... improve sleep and concentration

... support well-being and emotional balance

All exercise counts

► **At least one hour per day**

There are opportunities for exercise everywhere. Support the natural urge of your child to be active and allow it to exercise freely for at least one hour per day in addition to normal everyday activities.

► **Exercise on the way to school**

The trip to school provides an excellent opportunity for regular exercise and making exciting discoveries. For this reason, allow your child to walk to kindergarten or to school.

► **Play outside**

The outdoors offers more opportunities for exercise than an indoors environment. Give your child the opportunity to play outdoors regularly and in all weathers.

► **Be active together**

Children enjoy being active together. Encourage your child to meet up with other children and undertake cycling trips, walks, play ball games and go on visits to the swimming pool together. If your child enjoys it, allow him or her to participate in a sports activity (e.g. gymnastics club).

Healthy and enjoyable nutrition

► **Slake that big thirst – without added sugar**

Tap water, mineral water and unsweetened tea are the best thirst quenchers.

► **Breakfast and a mid-morning snack for a good start to the day**

Breakfast and a mid-morning snack will provide energy for the school day. If your child does not eat breakfast, offer him or her something to drink and give a more substantial mid-morning snack.

► **Regular meals**

Several meals spread throughout the day can help to avoid ravenous hunger. Three medium-sized main meals and two snacks (a mid-morning and afternoon snack) would be ideal.

► **Lots of fruit and vegetables**

Offer your child fruit or vegetables at every meal. It's the easiest way of getting five servings a day.

► **Dairy products are a must**

Include dairy products in the foods your child eats every day. Milk, natural yoghurt, cottage cheese and cheese contain lots of calcium to assist bone formation and promote healthy teeth.

► **Few sweets and salty snacks**

Sweets and salty snacks should be enjoyed by your child only in small quantities. They contain lots of sugar and fat, but few nutrients.

► **Make time to eat together**

Take time to share meals together and enjoy eating and conversations with family members at the dining table. Allow your child to help with cooking, setting the table and clearing the table.

Obesity

Ideal eating behaviour and levels of physical activity will result in a healthy body weight. If more energy is taken in through food than is used during exercise, weight will be gained.

Should your child be obese, **then please talk to your paediatrician** and seek advice. A change in dietary and exercise habits will often involve the entire family and will require time and patience to succeed.



Recommendation

The general recommendations for the use of electronic media are:

Pre-school children
a maximum of 30 minutes per day

School children
a maximum of 1 hour per day

Healthy eating

Allowing children to enjoy foods with an awareness of what they are eating and to discover all of the different flavours will allow them to develop healthy eating patterns. This will also serve to promote an enjoyment of and an interest in food.

▶ Eating a varied diet

Children have a natural preference for sweet foods. They will only find other flavours such as saltiness, sourness and bitterness delicious and develop a liking for these at a later stage. That's why it's always good to repeatedly offer your child different foods that they are unfamiliar with. This will enable your child to get used to a wide range of foods and enjoy a varied diet.

▶ Eating slowly, with awareness and at meal times

Eating slowly and chewing thoroughly will enable your child to consciously enjoy meals and to become aware, at an early stage, when it has eaten enough. Accept when your child has had enough to eat and do not force it to continue eating. Do not allow your child to eat or snack continually between mealtimes to ensure that your child is also truly hungry at mealtimes.

▶ Do not use food as a means to modify behaviour

Foods and particularly sweets are frequently used on a daily basis to placate children. This may encourage them to develop the wrong associations with food. For this reason, do not reward, punish or comfort your child with sweets – give him or her your devoted attention instead.

Electronic media

Children currently spend lots of time in front of the television, at the computer or using other electronic media devices. When they are doing this they tend to be fairly inactive physically and frequently also eat.

▶ Compensate for sitting times with exercise

Discuss with your child how long electronic media devices are allowed to be used per day or week, and when they need to go outside to take some exercise.

▶ Screens and eating do not go together

Ensure that your child does not eat in front of a screen; also leave the television switched off during mealtimes.

▶ Plenty of time for other activities

The less time your child spends with electronic media the more time it will have for other exciting activities such as playing, meeting up with friends, reading, making music and daydreaming.