

# HEALTH, NUTRITION AND WEIGHT MANAGEMENT FOR CHILDREN 2-5 YEARS OLD

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- 2) Parent tips for nutrition and weight control.
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## **1. WHY (OR HOW) IS IT SO IMPORTANT TO EDUCATE CHILDREN (AND THEIR PARENTS) EARLY?**

Our eating habits as adults are affected by many factors. From early on, our eating environment and early education around food and exercise behaviours, strongly influences our eating and exercise habits and/or taste and food preferences as adults.

It is widely known that following a diet high in fat, sugar and kilojoules, coupled with little exercise can increase the risk of becoming overweight.

From the age children are introduced to solids, we should be focussing on exposing them to many and varied tastes and textures of healthy foods.

## **2. DIET TIPS FOR PARENTS WITH CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 5, TO INCREASE THE CHANCE THEIR CHILDREN EAT HEALTHY AND CONTROL THEIR WEIGHT.**

- Take them shopping and let them 'help'.
- Involve them in cooking. Simple things to begin with, to appreciate all aspects of food. Eg pita pizza using vegies (make a face), lean ham and cheese; wholemeal pancakes, popcorn, fruit jelly, yoghurt and banana-yoghurt smoothie.
- Let them have their own vegetable patch (or even a pot with tiny tomatoes)
- Educate them on immediate positive aspects of eating healthy eg higher energy, better for their body, jump higher, run faster rather than talk about weight loss.
- Do not limit altogether, fast food or high fat food or sugar snacks like chocolate, cakes, chips or lollies. Call them 'sometimes' foods - otherwise they may binge when they're out of sight or when they get older and can buy their own. Tell them when and how much they can have.
- Make available at home, a tasty variety of nutritious food choices and make less available high in kilojoule, fat or sugar or convenience snack foods.
- Don't just rely on unhealthy snack foods to 'pacify' or 'entertain' kids when shopping or out, or when you don't want interruptions at home. Find suitable activities, then make them available for children to become involved in at a moments notice.
- Make water their primary fluid. Milk and juice are fine, but again, the amount needs to be limited. Children between the ages of 2 and 5 can have reduced fat milk, as long as they are not underweight. Restrict (or avoid) cordials and soft drinks.
- Learn to prepare quick, easy and healthy meals that all the family likes. Do 'cooking marathons' and freeze meals in advance, if you are short of time - rather than driving through the take away outlet or flipping a lid or opening a packet, when you get home. This way you can have a variety of tasty, healthy foods prepared in advance. Most spaghetti sauces, casseroles and soups freeze well.
- Set a good example, be a role model for your child and lay a good foundation for their future habits early on. Let them see you eating healthy meals and snacks, and see you eating when you are hungry rather than when you feel sad or 'uptight'. This way you will help them develop healthy eating habits and not 'turn to food' when feeling a certain way or 'triggered' by an environmental trigger eg time of day, an activity like tv or the sight of food advertising. If your children are watching you order takeaways or open a tin or a packet to prepare a meal every night, or snack on high fat or sugar snacks while watching television, then odds on, they will eventually do it too. In addition, if they don't have access to fresh fruit and vegetables, lean protein foods, dairy foods and wholegrains they will not learn to appreciate the natural flavours of these foods. In

fact, their taste buds may become 'numb' to these flavours and only end up demanding, overly processed, salty, sweet and (or) fatty foods.

- If your child doesn't like a food straight away reintroduce it at another time, perhaps in a slightly different way with a food (or like a food) they already enjoy. eg tomato slices on a pizza (if they like pizza, but don't like salad) or pumpkin, sliced and 'sprayed' with oil, then baked and eaten as 'yellow baked chips' instead of mashed, if they usually like fried potato chips. Reintroduce it several times, and reward them when a small amount is consumed. Remember, taste buds take a while to adapt.
- Do not 'punish' children for bad eating behaviour or when they refuse food. Set up instead, a star or award chart for healthy eating behaviours and agree on non food rewards as an incentive.
- If your child refuses a meal, put it in the fridge for later and reoffer the next time when they are hungry - they won't starve, so be persistent. If children know that they will get what they want if they don't eat their meal, then they often won't eat the meal. Be firm and don't give in. After a while they will learn. Children rarely starve.
- Child Care Centres  
If your child is at child care, check out their menus and recipes and philosophy with healthy eating. There are some better than others. When some children are in child care for up to 50 hours a week, you don't want to be leaving your child's future health (and weight) up to chance! Look for child care centres that have received the Start Right Eat Right Award. These centres have had their menus assessed to ensure that they are nutritionally adequate. Staff have also been trained in nutrition, food hygiene and how to provide a supportive and enjoyable eating environment for children.
- Make sure they have a healthy breakfast.
- Make sure most of their snacks are healthy eg fruits (dried, fresh or tinned), raw vegies, yoghurt, yoghurt and fruit smoothie, wholemeal breads/crackers with tasty toppings, healthy, low fat muffins eg Marvellous Muffins® (available from Caron Milham & Associates), wholemeal pancakes or popcorn, wholegrain cereal with fruit.
- Ensure that the food you are giving your children is safe for their age group. Children under four years of age have usually not developed the back teeth needed to chew and grind food well. The following guidelines should be followed:
  - Cook or grate raw carrot, apple and celery pieces.
  - Remove skin from sausages or frankfurts.
  - Avoid popcorn, nuts, corn chips, hard lollies and similar foods.
  - Ensure children are seated and supervised whilst eating.

### **3. DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN ON A DAILY BASIS:**

- Encourage children to daily:
  - Enjoy a wide variety of foods
  - Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables
  - Eat plenty of cereals (including breads, rice, pasta and noodles) preferably wholegrain
  - Include lean meat, fish, poultry and/or alternatives such as legumes and nuts
  - Include dairy products (preferably reduced fat and/or alternatives)
  - Choose water as a drink.
- Aim to:
  - Limit saturated fat intake and moderate total fat intake.
  - Choose foods low in salt.
  - Consume only moderate amounts of sugars and foods containing sugar.

## 4. FOODS TO RESTRICT AND ALTERNATIVE IDEAS.

The following foods can be included occasionally however they should not be used as an everyday snack item as they provide a lot of calories with very little nutritional value. For more detailed information on selecting the healthiest supermarket products, lower in fat, sugar and salt and higher in nutrients and fibre, consult the Australian Healthy Shopping Guide (available at all good bookshops).

- Confectionary and sandwich fillings such as hundreds and thousands or jam.
- Cakes, cream filled biscuits or chocolate biscuits  
Better alternatives:
  - Freedom foods® 97% fat free cookies
  - Arnott's® Snack Right fruit slice, Full O' Fruit biscuits and Spicy fruit rolls
  - Paradise® Lites
  - Weight Watchers® Fruit Slice
  - Fruit slice, raisin toast
  - English muffins with fruit or light cream cheese
- Lollies and chocolate
- Many muesli and snack bars (check food label for fat and sugar content)  
Better alternatives: Many of these choices still contain some added sugar, but are healthier options for variety
  - Freedom Foods® Hi-Lite breakfast bars
  - Weight Watchers® Real fruit cereal bars
  - Uncle Toby's® Oven Baked Muesli bars - crunchy and chewy range
  - Freedom Foods® Super Berry breakfast bar
  - Kellogg's® 97% Fat Free K-time bars
  - Kellogg's® Mini Wheats
  - Sanitarium® Fruity Bix cereal
  - Norganic® Crunchola breakfast bars
  - Coles Oven baked fruit bars
  - Sanitarium® Up & Go milk and cereal bars
- Sticky fruit bars  
Better alternatives; includes the following fruit bars/strips
  - Go Natural® strips (not yoghurt or carob) or 100% fruit bar
  - Sunripe® School Strips
  - Angas Park® 100% fruit straps
  - Fruit Wise® 100% fruit straps
  - Freedom foods 100% fruit strips
  - Sun Valley 100% fruit strips
- Potato chips, corn chips and cheese-flavoured snack foods and high fat savoury biscuits  
Better alternatives:
  - Fantastic® or Sakata® rice crackers
  - Low fat Pretzels e.g. Parkers® 97% fat free pretzels
  - Rice or corn thins (eg. Sun Rice or Real Foods)
- Hot chips, pies, pasties, sausage rolls and chiko rolls  
Better alternatives:
  - Home-made oven baked wedges
  - Use filo pastry
- Cordials and soft drinks  
Other commercial alternatives for drinks:
  - Sanitarium® So Good Soyacchino
  - Bulla® drinking yoghurt
  - So Natural® Soy drink
  - Jarrah® choc-o-lait varieties
  - Ovaltine® Light Break
  - Cadbury® Hi-Lights
- Fruit juice drinks if used in excess (more than 1 small fruit box/day) - choose 100% fruit juice

## 5. MENU IDEAS AND RECIPES

### Breakfast:

Breakfast refuels the body and gives children the energy they need to start the day. Children who eat breakfast tend to be more eager and alert than those who skip this meal. It has also been shown that children who eat breakfast consume more fibre and less sugar throughout the day.

### Breakfast ideas:

- High fibre breakfast cereal, chopped fruit and milk in a bowl
- Yoghurt with chopped or stewed fruit
- Porridge with milk and dried or fresh fruit
- Natural muesli with yoghurt and milk
- Toasted fruit loaf or a fruit muffin
- Rice cakes with peanut butter, cream cheese or banana
- Wrap a banana in fruit or wholemeal bread
- Wholemeal or wholegrain toast with cheese peanut butter, cream cheese, 100% fruit spread or cheese
- Breakfast bar (check sugar content) served with fruit
- Breakfast biscuits (such as fruity bix, mini wheats) with fresh chopped banana
- Fruit smoothie - blend milk, yoghurt and fresh fruit - can add muesli
- Flavoured milk or breakfast drink
- Yoghurt drink
- Baked beans on toast
- Eggs on toast, crumpets or English muffins - scrambled, poached dry fry
- Vegetable pikelets (refer to recipe)
- Wholemeal pancakes with banana or 100% fruit spread
- Omelette with tomato mushroom and cheese

### Snack ideas:

Snacks can provide between 25% and 50% of a child's total energy intake and hence should provide 25-50% of their nutrition. Try to choose a variety of snacks from all the food groups as listed below to ensure the best nutritional balance.

As a general guide a snack should:

- Provide some nutrition (e.g. protein and/or minerals & vitamins)
- Be low in fat, sugar and salt

### Breads and Cereals

- Bread/toast (add nutritious topping e.g. peanut paste/cheese)
- Sandwich/jaffle/toasted sandwich
- English muffin/crumpet with topping e.g. 100% fruit spread jam, and cream cheese or cheese and vegemite
- Home-made pizza muffin - topped with ham, cheese, capsicum, mushrooms etc
- Pikelet/pancake with fruche/100% fruit spread - refer to recipe at back of handout
- Noodles/pasta with tomato sauce and cheese



- Crackers/crispbread/rice cakes/corn cakes with low fat dips
- Pita bread/mountain bread made into pizza or turned up to serve low fat dip
- Raisin toast/fruit loaf/plain yeast bun
- Low sugar breakfast cereal with milk or dry (eg. Cheerios, Fruity-Bix or Mini Wheats)
- Plain fruit bun (without the icing)
- Home-made healthy sweet or savoury muffins (reduce sugar and fats, try wholemeal flour) - refer to recipe at back of handout
- Wraps or pita pockets with healthy fillings such as grated vegetables, reduced fat cheese and lean meat.
- Scone with margarine and 100% fruit spread

### Fruit and Vegetables

- Fresh fruit - try serving a variety of fruit wedges, fruit salad or threaded onto toothpicks to make mini kebabs
- Fruit juice - limit to 200ml per day
- Frozen fruit or fruit juice blocks
- Dried fruit - limit amounts as high in sugar
- 100% dried fruit slices or slabs (avoid added sugar varieties)
- Snack pack of fruit in natural juice
- Fruit smoothie (blend fruit, milk and yoghurt)
- Corn on cob
- Vegetable soups
- Home-made potato or pumpkin chips - boil potato (or pumpkin) slices until nearly cooked brush lightly with oil and bake in oven.
- Fresh or tinned fruit set in jelly

### Meat and Meat Alternatives

- Baked beans
- Tin of tuna or salmon with crackers and carrot sticks
- Rolled slices of lean meat
- Hard boiled eggs
- Wedges of omelette
- Peanut paste or hommos dip

### Milk and Milk Alternatives

- Milk - limit to 600ml per day
- Flavoured milk
- Frozen milk (flavoured or plain)
- Custard
- Yoghurt
- Fruche
- Low fat ice cream - serve with fruit (limit to 1 scoop per day)
- Cheese
- Calcium fortified soy milk and yoghurts

## Lunch ideas

### Sandwiches

To keep kids interested try a variety of bread types. Higher fibre breads such as wholemeal and wholegrain are desirable. However if your child only eats white bread, look for a white high fibre bread. *Try these breads:* pita, rye, mountain, lebanese, rolls, wholegrain, wholemeal, baguettes or bagels. Alternatively replace bread with wholegrain/wholemeal crispbreads or crackers.

*Spreads:* Spread the bread lightly with polyunsaturated or monounsaturated margarine or try ricotta cheese, cottage cheese, hommos, peanut butter or avocado.

*Sandwich fillings:* a sandwich should ultimately contain some lean protein and salad vegetables. (either in the sandwich or separate to the sandwich). Some children may eat cherry tomatoes and carrot sticks if they are separate (rather than included in the sandwich). Alternatively other children may eat carrot if it is grated and mixed with grated cheese, and included within the sandwich.

### Good protein choices:

- Tuna
- Lean ham, corned beef
- Chicken (skinless) or turkey
- Cheese (matured, cream, fetta, ricotta, cottage)
- Hommos
- Peanut paste and other nut butters
- Egg
- Baked beans/soy beans in tomato sauce
- Felafel balls (made with chick peas)

### Salad vegetables:

Fill sandwiches with a variety of different coloured vegetables. If your child is fussy about these foods introduce them slowly over time. Avoid salad vegetables which make the sandwich soggy!!!

### Other lunch ideas:

- Left over home-made pizza
- Mini pizza muffins - (pre-grilled) with tomato, mushrooms, lean ham, pineapple and cheese
- Salads based on rice, pasta, couscous (add some lean protein and salad vegetables)
- Pasta with tomato based sauce
- Wedges of omelette or jaffle with salad
- Cracker biscuits with cheese/hommos/lean meat/tuna and vegetables (e.g. cruskits, rice cakes, cornthins, vitaweats)
- Jacket potato with lean meat and salad
- Corn fritters - refer to recipe
- Cold rolls - refer to recipe
- Vegetable soups
- Boiled egg and salad with cracker biscuits

### Fruit

Fresh fruit as well as tinned fruit (in natural juice) are both good choices, however fresh should be eaten every day. Offer fruits that your child commonly enjoys as well as new varieties such as tangerines, kiwi fruit and nectarines. Try to buy fruits in season to help with the cost.



## Drinks

Water is the best drink for your child. If your child refuses water try sending it in a special container or freezing it so it is icy cold. Milk and calcium -enriched soy beverages are good alternatives to provide some calcium and protein to the diet. However these should be limited to 600ml per day. Fruit juices are a good source of vitamins such as vitamin C. However they lack the fibre found in a piece of fresh fruit. Therefore these should only be offered in moderation (250ml per day).

## RECIPES

Nutritious and tasty recipes are essential for happy, healthy kids. Engaging children in the kitchen, garden and supermarket with cooking, growing and shopping will increase their interest in healthy food.

Here are a couple of recipes from the Australian Healthy Cooking Guide (available at all good bookshops). This great book has a "Children's Recipes" section that not only will your children enjoy eating, but they will enjoy helping to cook them too!

### Apricot Bran Loaf

12 slices

- ¾ cup dried apricots
- ¾ cup sultanas
- 1 cup *All-Bran*
- ½ cup *Splenda*
- 1 ½ cups skim milk
- 1 ½ cups wholemeal self-raising flour
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon

- 1 Put the apricots, sultanas, *All-Bran* and *Splenda* and milk into a bowl, cover and allow to stand overnight or for minimum 4 hours.
- 2 Preheat oven to 180°C. Lightly grease a 20 cm x 10cm loaf tin.
- 3 Sift the flour and cinnamon into a bowl, returning the husks to the bowl. Make a well in the centre. Add the soaked ingredients and mix well to combine.
- 4 Spoon the mixture into the prepared tin and bake for 45 minutes to 1 hour, or until a skewer comes out clean when inserted into the centre. Allow to cool in tin.

#### *chooz to looz Program*

1 serve = 1 fruit exchange  
and 1 bread exchange

#### PER SERVE

KJ (cal)	600 (143)	Protein	4.6g
Fat	0.7g	Sodium	158mg
Saturated Fat	0.1g	Fibre	4.9g
Carbohydrate	27.3g		

### Vegetable Pikelets

Serves 5

- 1 small zucchini
- 1 carrot
- 1 tablespoon orange juice
- ½ cup wholemeal self-raising flour
- ½ cup self-raising flour
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- ¾ cup skim milk
- 1 teaspoon canola margarine
- olive or canola oil cooking spray

- 1 Grate zucchini and carrot. Place vegetables and orange juice into pan and cook over a medium heat until the vegetables are soft.
- 2 Sift flour into a bowl, stir in sugar, egg and milk to form a smooth batter.
- 3 Stir the cooked vegetables into the batter.
- 4 Heat the margarine in a non-stick frypan, add 1 tablespoon of the batter, cook over a medium heat until bubbles appear and burst on the surface. Before cooking the other side, spray pan with spray oil to prevent second side from sticking. Cook the other side until golden.

#### *chooz to looz Program*

1 serve = 1½ bread exchanges  
and ½ meat exchange

#### PER SERVE

KJ (cal)	599 (143)	Protein	6.0g
Fat	1.9g	Sodium	228mg
Saturated Fat	0.9g	Fibre	2.6g
Carbohydrate	24.1g		

## 6. FURTHER INFORMATION AND ADVICE

The tips in this booklet will get you started with preventing and treating weight (and health) problems in children. For more hints and information, view our website [www.milhamdietitians.com](http://www.milhamdietitians.com) and consult the following books:

- [\*Australian Healthy Shopping Guide\*](#)
  - By Caron Milham
  - Available at all bookshops or through Caron Milham & Associates (329 Brighton Road, Brighton North)
  
- [\*The Australian Healthy Cooking Guide\*](#)
  - By Caron Milham
  - Available at all bookshops or through Caron Milham & Associates

For personalised menu planning advice for your child, please consult an Accredited Practicing Dietitian