

# FOOD AND FITNESS FOR CHILDREN



Active, growing children require good nutrition to build healthy bodies and be the best they can be – at school, sport and play. Not only are children constantly growing, but many attitudes towards food are shaped during early school years – so this period forms the basis of healthy growth and future eating habits. As parents we can help our children grow and build healthy foundations by encouraging a love of good food and good nutrition throughout these crucial years.

## A healthy eating pattern

An eating pattern with a variety of foods from across the five food groups will provide children with the range of nutrients and fuel they need. This should include:

- plenty of vegetables and legumes/beans
- fruit
- grain (cereal) foods (mostly wholegrain), including bread, rice, pasta, and noodles
- lean meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts and seeds and/or alternatives
- milk, cheese and yoghurt (reduced-fat varieties are not suitable for children under 2 years).

Junk foods such as lollies, chips and takeaway foods should be chosen only occasionally and in small amounts. If eaten too much they may contribute to tooth decay and weight gain and can replace more nutritious foods from the five food groups.

To be their best, children also need to be well hydrated. Children should be encouraged to drink water or milk. Try to limit sweetened drinks such as soft drinks, cordials and fruit drinks. If consumed in large amounts they too can contribute to weight gain and tooth decay.

## The importance of dairy foods

As one of the five food groups, dairy foods have an important role to play in a healthy diet. Dairy foods such as milk, cheese and yoghurt contain at least 10 essential nutrients, including protein, carbohydrate, vitamins (A, B12 and riboflavin) and minerals (calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium and zinc).

## Bone health

Dairy foods are probably best known for calcium and the role it plays in building strong bones. Along with the rest of their body, children's bones grow rapidly. A calcium-rich diet during childhood helps maximise peak bone mass and helps reduce the risk of osteoporosis and fractures in later life.

## Dental health

Despite being largely preventable, tooth decay is still a very common health problem in Australian children with almost half of 5-6 year olds having had dental caries.

In addition to good oral hygiene (regular brushing), good nutrition and our eating habits play an important role in preventing dental disease. Dairy foods have a specific role to play in dental health as they contain a unique combination of special anti-decay nutrients such as calcium, phosphorus and the milk protein, casein.

**BE ACTIVE WITH YOUR CHILDREN AND INCLUDE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN FAMILY OUTINGS AND AS PART OF YOUR DAILY LIFE.**

## Get moving!

Being physically active is important for growing bodies too. In Australia, one in four children are overweight or obese. Encouraging an active lifestyle along with a balanced diet is the best way to ensure a healthy weight. Australia's Physical Activity Guidelines for 5 to 12 year olds recommend:

- At least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day. This could be running, swimming, dancing, organised sport such as football or netball, or simply active play..
- Not more than two hours of screen time (television, computer or electronic games) a day.

As children grow, their dairy requirements grow too. The table below indicates how many serves of dairy foods school-aged children need each day.

### Minimum recommended number of serves from the dairy food group

	Age (years)	No. of serves per day
Boys	4-8	2
	9-11	2 ½
	12-13	3 ½
Girls	4-8	1 ½
	9-11	3
	12-13	3 ½

*Adapted from: 2013 Australian Dietary Guidelines. The dairy food group includes milk, cheese, yoghurt and/or alternatives.\**



\*Alternatives include: 250ml soy, rice or other cereal drink with at least 100mg of added calcium per 100ml.

## Encouraging healthy habits

Primary school is a time when children are exposed to many influences outside of the family. Their social life increases and peers can play a large part in forming attitudes towards foods. They become more aware of food advertising and trends in the media and while shopping. At school, the canteen offers the opportunity for children to make their own food selections and food and nutrition will also be discussed by teachers as part of the school curriculum.

The best way to encourage children to be active and healthy is to be a good role model. Help them sift through all the information on food they are receiving and lead by example. Also remember that food is much more than simply fuel and nutrients. Food should taste good, food should be fun, food should be social – it should be enjoyed!

- Sitting down as a family to eat is a great way to lead by example – it makes food social and fun too!
- Primary school years are a time of exploration and learning. Offer children the opportunity to experience a wide range of foods with different tastes and textures.
- Children love being involved. Ask them to help with the shopping and food preparation.
- Helping children grow food is also great. It teaches them about how food gets to our table and is a good way to encourage eating vegetables!

## Serves of dairy foods

In Australia, we have a wide range of dairy foods to choose from. There is a product to suit every taste and occasion. Yet despite this, almost 60% of 2-16 year old children are missing out on their recommendations from the dairy food group every day.

Here are some ideas to help include milk, cheese and yoghurt in your child's daily diet.

### Breakfast

- A steaming milky porridge is a great winter warmer or in the summer months pour some ice cold milk over cereal.
- Grilled cheese and baked beans on toast.
- Pour yoghurt over seasonal fruit.

### Lunch

- Sandwiches/wraps with cheese and choice of salad.
- Try mini quiches with cheese for kids who don't like sandwiches.
- Freeze a yoghurt tub or a flavoured UHT milk the night before. Helps keep the rest of the lunch box cool too.

### Snacks

- An ice cold milkshake or smoothie. Let your imagination run wild with flavour combinations.
- A yoghurt-based dip, like tzatziki, with crackers and vegetable sticks.
- A cheese toastie with other favourite fillings.

### Evening meal

- Serve curries with a generous dollop of yoghurt.
- Substitute ¼ of the stock for milk when making risotto for a creamier result.
- Add a generous splash of milk to creamy vegetable soups after puréeing for richness.
- Use cream cheese mixed with milk as a creamy based sauce for pasta.

An extensive collection of family recipes can be found on Dairy Australia's website [dairy.com.au/health](http://dairy.com.au/health)