



Good Nutrition for Children

Nutrition guidelines recommended for adults are inappropriate for most children under the age of five. This is because young children have small stomachs and so need plenty of calories and nutrients in a small amount of food to ensure they grow properly.

While low-fat diets are recommended for older children and adults, under-fives need diets that contain good amounts of fat.

This fat should come from foods that contain plenty of other nutrients like meat, oily fish and whole milk (semi-skimmed milk is unsuitable for children under the age of two, and skimmed unsuitable for under-five year olds), rather than from high-fat foods that contain few vitamins and minerals like cakes, cookies and chocolate.

Meanwhile, young children shouldn't eat too many fiber-rich foods, either, as these may fill them up so much they can't eat enough to provide them with adequate calories and nutrients.

However, as kids approach school age, they should gradually move towards a diet that's lower in fat and higher in fiber. And by the age of five, their diet should be low in fat, sugar and salt and high in fiber with five fruit and vegetables a day – just like adults.

Fortunately, whatever their age, children can easily get a balanced diet – and lower their risk of becoming overweight or obese – by eating a variety of foods from four main food groups:

Bread, other cereals and potatoes – these starchy foods, which also include pasta and rice, provide energy, fiber, vitamins and minerals

Fruit and vegetables – these provide fiber, vitamins and minerals and are a source of antioxidants.

Milk and dairy foods – these provide calcium for healthy bones and teeth, protein for growth, plus vitamins and minerals.

Meat, fish and alternatives – these foods, which include eggs and pulses, provide protein and vitamins and minerals, especially iron. Pulses also contain fiber.

In contrast, foods from a fifth food group that includes fatty and sugary foods like cookies, cakes, soft drinks, chocolate, sweets, chips and pastries, that add little nutritional value, should be limited.

Although obesity is a major problem, children and teenagers still need enough calories to grow and develop into healthy adults. This chart gives a rough guideline to the daily calorie needs of boys and girls at different ages. Kids who are really active may need more; those who are inactive may need less.

Calorie Intake for Children

Age	Calories per day	
	Boys	Girls
1–3	1,230	1,165
4–6	1,715	1,545
7–10	1,970	1,740
11–14	2,220	1,845
15–18	2,755	2,110
Adults	2,550	1,940

Children's Vitamin and Mineral Intake

Choosing foods from each of the four main food groups will help to ensure that kids receive all the vitamins and minerals they need for good nutrition and health.

Figures from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey of Young People reveals that many children have inadequate intakes of many nutrients, including vitamin A, riboflavin (vitamin B2), zinc, potassium, magnesium, calcium and iron, particularly once they reach the teenage years and have more control over what they eat.

In contrast, the survey showed these poor intakes of vitamins and minerals were combined with too much salt, sugar and saturated fat.

It's particularly important that children and teenagers eat a diet that's packed with vitamins and minerals.