

A Guide to the Five Main Food Types

Highlights

The key to a balanced diet is to eat a variety of nutritious foods from each of the five food groups.

Eating a variety of foods from each of these groups helps your body receive the range of nutrients and vitamins it needs to function well.

Your child does not need to eat from each food group at every meal - check what they are eating over the course of a day or a week to decide if they are getting a good balance of nutrients.

As well as the five food groups, it's important to drink plenty of water.

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Why Variety in the Five Food Groups Matters

Understanding the Five Food Groups

vegetables, legumes and beans

fruit

lean meat, poultry, fish and meat alternatives

grains and cereals

milk, cheese, yoghurt and dairy alternatives

Vegetables, Legumes and Beans

green - beans, peas, broccoli, spinach

red, orange or yellow - capsicums, tomatoes, carrots, sweet potato, pumpkin

purple - red cabbage, eggplant

white - cauliflower, mushrooms, potatoes

What are legumes?

By age 2: 2-3 serves daily

From age 4: 4 ½ serves daily

From age 9 onward: 5 serves daily

Tips for serving vegetables

"Eat the rainbow": offer vegetables in a variety of colours.

Lead by example by choosing vegetable-based snacks yourself.

Add vegetables to mixed dishes such as pasta sauces or stir-fries.

Fruit and Its Benefits

What fruit should children eat?

green - apples, kiwi fruit

orange - oranges, mangoes

yellow - bananas

red - strawberries

purple - blueberries, grapes

How much fruit does my child need?

Ages 2-3: 1 serve daily

Ages 4-8: 1 ½ serves daily

Age 9 and older: 2 serves daily

1 medium apple, banana, orange or pear

2 small apricots, kiwi fruit or plums

1 cup diced or canned fruit

Tips for serving fruit

Make a fruit salad.

Serve fruit with yoghurt.

Add fruit slices to breakfast cereal.

Protein Sources: Meat, Fish, Poultry and Alternatives

Examples include:

lean meat - beef, lamb, pork, veal, lean sausages

poultry - chicken, turkey, duck

seafood - fish, prawns, crabs, mussels, scallops

Alternatives to meat

eggs

legumes: beans, lentils, chickpeas, tofu

nuts: almonds, peanuts, hazelnuts, walnuts

seeds: pumpkin, sesame, sunflower

How much protein does my child need?

Ages 2-3: 1 serve daily

Ages 4-8: 1 ½ serves daily

Ages 9+: 2 ½ serves daily

Tips for serving protein

Add lentils to pasta or stir-fries.

Use lean meats in soups, stews, or baked dishes.

Offer eggs any time of day.

Use nut pieces or spreads in meals (avoid whole nuts for children under 5).

Grains and Cereals for Energy

How much grain should my child be eating?

From age 2: 4 serves daily

Age 9+: 5 serves, increasing up to 7 serves by age 18

1 slice of bread or ½ medium roll

1 crumpet or small English muffin

½ cup cooked rice, pasta, oats or other grains

3 crispbreads

½ cup cereal flakes or ¼ cup muesli

Tips for serving grains

baked beans on toast

peanut butter on muffins

cereal with milk

sandwiches, wraps or wholegrain crackers

wholemeal rice in mixed bowls

Dairy and Calcium-Rich Alternatives

Alternatives to dairy

100 g almonds

100 g firm tofu

60 g sardines

½ cup canned salmon with bones

How much dairy does my child need?

Ages 2-3: 1 ½ serves daily

Ages 4-5: 1 ½-2 serves daily

1 serve =

1 cup milk (or fortified plant-based alternative with at least 100 mg calcium per 100 mL)

2 slices (40 g) hard cheese

1 tub yoghurt

Tips for serving dairy

Melted cheese on vegetables or pasta

Yoghurt with cereal or fruit

Cottage or ricotta cheese on wholegrain toast

Smoothies with milk or yoghurt

Tools And Assistance

Healthy eating charts and food pyramids: visual tools to help children understand balanced meals.

Weekly meal planners: ensure a mix of foods across all food groups.

Child food diary: helps identify nutrient gaps or patterns.

Serving size guides: useful for portioning meals based on age.

Creative recipe ideas: inspire colourful, appealing meals that encourage children to try new foods.