

Health eating for children

A healthy body weight is important for your child's health, both now and in the future. The cause of overweight is usually an imbalance of energy intake (from food and drinks) and energy use (activity, exercise and play). Reducing the amount of energy your child takes in, and increasing the amount they use, will help them achieve a healthy body weight. Positive eating and lifestyle habits your child develops now are likely to stay with them for life.

Your child does not need to 'diet'. Instead, the focus should be on health and fitness. This means eating from each of the food groups, and being physically active. For most children, the goal is to maintain weight, so that with normal increases in height, weight falls back into the healthy weight range.

To achieve this, there are lots of things you can do. Set manageable goals, and involve the whole family in any changes. Goals may include:

- Controlling portion size
- Choosing healthy snacks
- Limiting extra/treat foods
- Eating take away foods less often
- Increasing physical activity
- Limiting screen time
- Learning to eat only when hungry/ avoid non-hungry eating
- Not using food as a reward



Portions

The table below shows how many serves of each food group your child should aim for, and how much food is in a serve. Compare these recommendations to what your child is having.

Food Group	Age Group					Serve Sizes
	2 – 3 yrs	4 – 8 yrs	9 – 11 yrs	12 – 13 yrs	14 – 18 yrs	
Breads and Cereals	4	4	4-5	5-6	7	1 serve = 1 slice of bread or ½ medium bread roll or flat bread = 2/3 cup breakfast cereal or ½ cup cooked oats = ½ cup cooked rice, pasta or noodles = 3 crispbreads (35g) = 1 crumpet, small English muffin or plain scone
Fruit	1	1 ½	2	2	2	1 serve = 1 medium piece eg. apple, banana, orange = 2 small pieces eg. apricots, kiwi fruit, plums = 1 cup diced pieces or canned fruit = 1 ½ tablespoons sultanas or dried fruit
Vegetables	2 ½	4 ½	5	5	5	1 serve = ½ cup cooked orange or cruciferous vegetables/ legumes = 1 cup green leafy vegetables = 1 small-medium tomato = 1 small or ½ medium potato/sweet potato/corn
Meat and Alternatives	1	1 ½	2 ½	2 ½	2 ½	1 serve = 65 g cooked lean red meat (90-100g raw meat) = 80 g poultry (100g raw weight) = 100 g cooked fish (115g raw weight) or a small can = 2 large eggs = 1 cup cooked/canned beans or lentils
Milk Group	1 ½	2	3	3 ½	3 ½	1 serve = 1 cup milk (250 ml) cow's or calcium fortified soy milk = 2 cheese slices (40 g) = ½ cup ricotta cheese = 1 small 200 g yoghurt or 1 cup of custard

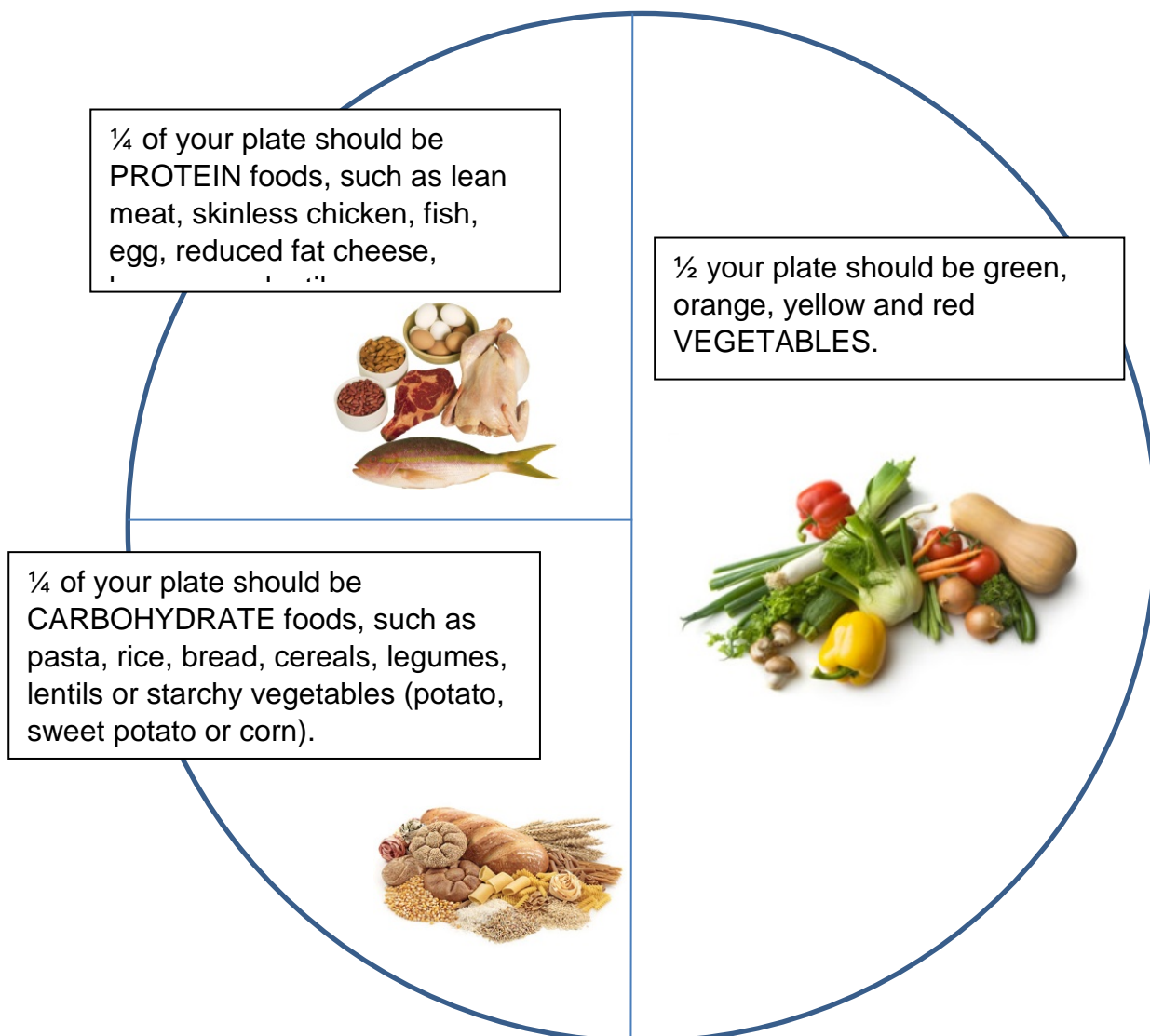
Source: Australian Dietary Guidelines

Extra / treat foods

In the table above there is no category for treat foods such as chips, crisps, pies, sausage rolls, lollies, chocolate, biscuits, icecream or cakes. These foods are called 'extra' foods, because they provide a lot of energy, fat and sugar, but very little nutrition. These foods should be considered a treat or sometimes food, not an everyday food. Limit these to a small serve 1-2 times per week.

Balancing it out

A useful and simple way to control portion sizes is to use the plate below.



Snack ideas

Offer your child healthy snacks. The following snacks are nutritious choices:

- 1 slice raisin bread or toast, wholemeal crumpet or English muffin
- Low fat dip with vegetable sticks or ½ slice of Lebanese bread
- Celery stick with low fat cream cheese
- Low fat yoghurt with frozen berries
- Low fat frozen yoghurt
- Wholemeal crackers topped with low fat cottage cheese, low fat cream cheese, tomatoes, hommus or vegemite
- 1 slice low fat cheese and (4) crackers
- 1 slice rye bread with ricotta cheese and cinnamon
- Diet jelly
- Tetra pack of low fat soy milk
- Small handful low salt pretzels
- Plain air popped popcorn
- Fruit and jelly cups
- Fruit smoothie made with low fat milk and fresh fruit
- Rice crackers (6), plain or with salsa dip
- Lettuce wrap filled with veg sticks
- Sushi (2 large pieces or 3 small pieces) or ½ handroll
- Fresh fruit
- Small handful dried fruit
- Mixed fruit and 10 nuts (not all the time!)
- Tinned fruit in natural juice (drained)
- Fruit kebabs (fruit on a skewer)
- ¼ cup baked beans and 1 slice of toast
- Mini pizza made on an English muffin
- Small piece of zucchini or vegetable slice
- Low fat banana bread
- 4 corn/rice thins with low fat spread
- Frozen watermelon, orange or other fruit
- Pappadums made in the microwave

No sweet drinks

Soft drink, fruit juice, flavoured milks, sports drinks, flavoured mineral water, nutrient water and cordial are all high in sugar and low in nutrition. These drinks do not have a place in your child's diet. Water is the best drink for children. You can also offer your child low fat (aged 2-5 years) or skim milk (5 years and older), but limit this to no more than 600mL (3 glasses) per day.

Physical activity

Physical activity is very important for children. It is important for weight management, and also for developing motor skills, coordination, and social skills. Physical activity does not only mean team sports. Any activity that raises your child's heart rate counts. Try to find activities your child enjoys, and that can be done as a family.

The current recommendations for daily physical activity are:

Age	Time	Type
1 - 5 years	3 hours per day	Active play
5 – 12 years	1 hour per day	Moderate to vigorous For example dancing, netball, soccer, swimming, riding a bike, jumping on the trampoline, brisk walking or running.
	In addition to this children should aim for several hours of active play each day	
13 – 17 years	1 hour per day	Moderate to vigorous (see examples above)
18+ years	150+ minutes per week	Moderate to vigorous (see examples above)

Screen time

To help your child achieve a healthy weight, limit screen time. Time spent watching television, playing computer games, or on tablets and phones means less time being active.

The recommendations for maximum screen time each day are:

Age	Time
Less than 2 years	No screen time
2 – 5 years	1 hour per day
5 – 12 years	2 hours per day
12 – 17 years	2 hours per day
18+ years	Minimise the time spent sitting

Where to go for more help and information

Better Health Program

The Better Health Program is a free healthy living program for children above a healthy weight aged 7-13 and their families. It is offered at various locations across the Perth

metropolitan area. For more information or to register, visit the website at www.betterhealthprogram.org.

Useful websites

www.eatforhealth.gov.au

www.shapeup.gov.au

www.health.gov.au

<https://bakeridi.edu.au/health-hub/fact-sheets> (the Portion Guide is a particularly useful resource)

References

National Health and Medical Research Council (2013), *Australian Dietary Guidelines*. Canberra: National Health and Medical Research Council.

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Department of Endocrinology and Diabetes (2014), *Weight Management: A guide to managing overweight and obesity in children and teenagers*. Melbourne: The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne.



Government of **Western Australia**
Child and Adolescent Health Service

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

Child and Adolescent Health Service

15 Hospital Avenue, Nedlands, WA, 6009

Telephone: (08) 6456 2222

Produced by Nutrition & Dietetics

Ref: 970 © CAHS 2017

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Contact a qualified healthcare professional for any medical advice needed.

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