

Nutrition for Kids

If you worry about your children's diet you're not alone. In 2004, the NSW Health Department conducted the Schools Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (SPANS). The study surveyed 5500 school children between the ages of 5-16 across NSW. The survey found:

- Around 25% of boys and girls in year 6 ate 1 or less pieces of fruit per day;
- Around 25% of boys and 30% of girls in year 6 ate 1 or less servings of vegetables per day;
- Almost 40% of boys and 60% of girls in year 6 drank 1 cup or more of soft drink per day;
- Around 25% of all children surveyed ate confectionary at least 4 times per week;
- 30-40% of high school students surveyed reported not eating breakfast everyday;
- 30% of high school students did not eat lunch everyday;
- 10-15% of all students surveyed did not eat dinner every day;
- Of those who ate dinner regularly, 30% ate in front of the television.

Interestingly, Boys spent 18-22 hours/week and girls spent 13-18 hours/week engaged in small screen activities including watching TV. Sedentary behaviours coupled with poor eating habits increases our children's risk of developing chronic diseases later in life, including type-two diabetes, heart and vascular diseases.

So what does a healthy diet for children look like?

The Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia recommends:

Food Group	Serve size	Number of serves for age		
		4-7 years	8-11 years	12-18 years
Breads & cereals	2 slices bread 1 bread roll 1 cup cooked rice/pasta/noodles 1 cup cereal 2 weet-bix	3 - 4	4 - 6	6 or more
Fruit	1 medium piece of fruit, Eg; apple	2	2	3 or more
Vegetables	1cup salad ½ cup cooked vegetables 1 small potato	4	4 - 5	5 or more
Dairy foods	250ml milk 200g yoghurt 40g cheese 250ml custard	3	3	3
Meat & poultry	65-100g cooked lean meat/ poultry 80-120g cooked fish 2 eggs ½ cup baked beans or other legumes 1/3 cup nuts	½ - 1	1 - 1 ½	2

Tips to encourage your children to eat well

- Choose all meals and snacks from the five food groups
- Involve your children in meal planning, shopping and cooking
- Aim for regular meal times
- Avoid distractions when eating, and incorporate 'family' time at meals times by turning off the TV
- Praise your children when they eat well
- Avoid conflict at mealtimes
- Avoid buying energy dense/nutrient poor snack foods such as chips & lollies – if you don't buy them, the children won't eat them at home
- Offer whole fruits such as mandarins, bananas, apples & grapes for treats

Additional tips for the fussy eaters:

- Establish a routine, meals at the same time, eaten at the table
- Try to ignore food refusal
- Offer a range of nutritious foods
- Avoid using food as a reward or bribe
- Offer drinks after the meal
- Add grated low fat cheese to mashed potato and other mashed vegetables for extra nutrition
- Add vegetables to sauces, diced carrots, zucchini, capsicum, mushrooms to your child's favourite pasta sauce
- Grate carrots, zucchini and other vegetables into minced meat to create healthier rissoles and burger patties.

Above all other advice – be a good role model for your child by eating from the five food groups everyday.

Some useful websites to encourage your children to eat well:

- www.gofor2and5.com.au
- www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au
- www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au

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References:

SPANS: Booth M, Okely AD, Denney-Wilson E, Hardy L, Yang B, Dobbins T (2006). *NSW Schools Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (SPANS) 2004: Summary Report*. Sydney: NSW Department of Health.