

Food and nutrition for young children



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Health promotion and development

Types of foods which should be avoided by young children

Salt even in small quantities can prove dangerous for babies because at their young age their kidneys are unable to process the salt in the way that an adult's kidneys can. Salt is one of the United Kingdom's most overly consumed. The importance of home cooking for babies and children is highlighted by the guidelines. Pre-packaged convenience foods contain high levels of salt and fat and should not be given to children they are potentially harmful to a baby's or young child's developing internal organs.

The guidelines provided by the Food Standards Agency for salt consumption for children are as follows:

Age	Guideline salt intake (g/d)
0-6 months	Less than 1
7-12 months	1

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1-3
years 2

4-6
years 3

7-10
years 5

11
years 6

+

Sugar should not be given to young children such as sugary drinks give them juice or milk as a treat but try to give them lots of water. This will give them more energy rather than a sugar rush it is a healthier choice which they will learn to love. By doing so this will reduce the risk of obesity and tooth decay.

Nuts particularly whole nuts should not be given to children under the age of 5, as they can be a potentially fatal choking hazard. Peanuts are included in this category however if there is no history of peanut allergy in the family, they can be given to young children in the form of peanut butter or crushed and added to yoghurts or cereals. According to information released by the NHS the percentage of the population affected by peanut allergy is 1%.

Children that have a sibling affected by a peanut allergy are at a greater risk of suffering from it themselves, and unlike other allergies, such as milk and

egg allergies, which children usually grow out of, peanut allergy seems to persist in eighty per cent of people into adulthood.

Low fat foods

Children derive essential nutrients and energy from foods containing fat and this is something which is not present in the low fat variety of foods. Until the age of 2 years children should be given whole milk, cheese, yoghurt and oily fish. After the age of 2 years, the amount of fat in a child's diet can be gradually decreased.

Eggs should not be given to babies up to the age of 6 months especially if a sibling or family member has an egg allergy. Babies delicate intestinal system can react to the protein found in eggs up until the age of 6 months, but after this time well cooked eggs can be given. Yolks and whites should be well cooked to reduce the risk of salmonella infection in eggs, which can be dangerous for young children. The main symptoms of salmonella are diarrhoea, vomiting and nausea. In children, this can usually be treated at home with frequent fluids and rehydration but should be checked with a GP if any worrying symptoms persist.

Fish is an excellent source of protein for growing babies and children, swordfish, shark and marlin contain levels of mercury which can have a detrimental effect on the development of a baby's nervous system. These fish contain higher levels of mercury in their systems as they tend to be larger in size than other fish, and have fewer predators. This increases their lifespan, and allows the toxic mercury to accumulate within their bodies over a greater period of time. Mercury is cleared and eliminated through the

body, but regular consumption above the recommended limits allows a toxic build up to occur, and in children, more so than adults, this can have a devastating effect on the central nervous system and can cause impairments in movements and cognitive brain function by displacement of essential neurons.

Shellfish, as with nuts and eggs, are considered to be potentially allergenic foods along with harbourers of the salmonella bacteria, which causes food poisoning. Therefore this food group should be avoided in young children and delayed until they are older.

Special dietary requirements should be put in place for children who have allergies to certain foods to ensure their correct needs are fully met.

Food allergy

Food allergy is a true allergic response to a food once noticed by the body's immune system. It usually results in a profound reaction, such as a swelling to the throat or mouth and in some cases can actually produce a topical burn on the skin. An example of this is in some children with a cows' milk allergy drinking a few sips of milk can result in swelling of the airways that can prove fatal if adrenaline is not administered swiftly.

Food intolerance

Food intolerance is caused by a reaction to a type of food which displays less severe symptoms in the sufferer. For example, many people suffer from food intolerances to wheat, dairy and yeast which can cause gastrointestinal symptoms such as cramping, vomiting, diarrhoea, and constipation. These

symptoms are very uncomfortable but are rarely life threatening and usually improve when the offending food item is withdrawn from the diet. In the child care setting, it is therefore important to consider not only the particular food that the child is allergic to, but also the food consumed by other children, as this could potentially prove to be hazardous.

Also cultural requirements should be in place such as Muslim children may not be able to eat meat so at dinner time a vegetarian option should be available for them. Also with having different cultures it will be good for the other children to try the different foods which they eat.

When working in a child care setting you must ensure documentation is carried out correctly if anything was to happen but before a child comes into the setting a form must be filled out by the parent/guardian to inform the staff if their child is allergic to anything.

When recording special dietary requirements, there are various types of information that should be documented. Child's name, dietary requirements, consequence of the dietary requirement not being followed, emergency instructions should ingestion of an allergic food occur, necessary medications, emergency contact information and parental and child care provider signature.

This information should be documented safely and correctly encase anything was to happen to the child they would be able to access this information straight away.

There are various chronic diseases which children suffer from that have an effect on their physical and mental development. Some chronic diseases are more disabling than others but all can have similar effects on children and their families depending on the severity of the disease.

Asthma

Asthma is a chronic common respiratory condition which affects the airways. Asthma typically appears in childhood with approximately 1 in 10 children being affected. During an asthma attack the airways become inflamed and narrow which constricts the child's breathing making them wheezy. There are not always reasons for an asthma flare up but with some children there are food and environmental triggers or allergies, such as pet hair and pollen. Asthma is treated with various medications the most common being a preventer and reliever inhaled, and steroid medication. Asthma may also affect a child emotionally as the attacks may be frightening, especially in young children who may become distressed if they cannot breathe properly. This may lead to undue anxiety and distress and may impact upon a child's life emotionally as they grow up.

Diabetes

Diabetes is caused by having too much glucose in the blood and comes in two types which are. Type 1 is usually diagnosed in adolescence and is controlled by insulin injections and type 2 is usually diagnosed in adulthood and is controlled through diet and tablets.

Developing diabetes in children there are complications that can change their development such as damage can occur to the blood vessels in the retina which can impair a child's vision this may have a knock-on effect on their development both physically and intellectually, as a result of sight loss or damage.

Cystic Fibrosis

Cystic fibrosis is inherited and a life-threatening condition. The effects of cystic fibrosis are that a child's internal organs particularly the lungs, become congested with sticky mucus which makes the digestion of food and breathing problematic. Children with cystic fibrosis often suffer with pancreatic problems, which in turn cause poor digestion of food. When looking at developmental consequences of chronic diseases poor digestion may lead to inadequate growth as a result of malnutrition.

Cerebral Palsy

Cerebral palsy is a term used to describe a group of neurological conditions, muscle problems, speech impairment and stiffness on one side of the body. This is caused by brain damage that can occur just after birth or in the womb. The severity of cerebral palsy varies from child to child with some children encountering mobility problems others requiring lifelong care. Cerebral palsy affects development in a number of ways and many children are affected physically and may suffer visual and hearing impairment, whereas others may have learning difficulties and delayed growth.

Government guidelines on food and nutrition

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The UK government sets out guidelines for babies and children's food consumption to ensure the required vitamins and minerals are given to keep them healthy and develop at the correct rate.

In the first 6 months of life the only food that a child needs is breast milk or an infant formula. After the 6 month milestone has passed than solid foods can offered in the form of specialist baby cereals and pureed fruits and vegetables. If you have a hungry baby it may be necessary to start the weaning process earlier and there are various types of foods that should be avoided such as, shellfish, eggs, fish, liver, nuts, wheat and gluten based foods, seeds, nuts, unpasteurised and soft cheese.

At 6-9 months of age when weaning is started a baby's diet should include, milk and dairy products, fruit and vegetables, meat, fish, eggs, beans, pasta, rice, bread, potatoes and starchy foods. There are prepared baby foods and cereals available to buy that have been specially made for a young baby's consumption but these foods can easily be prepared and pureed at home with the use of a food blender or potato ricer. They also can be frozen if large meals are made.

For a baby over the age of 9 months the recommended amount to be given is, 2 servings per day of meat, fish, eggs or pulses, 3 to 4 servings per day of fruit and vegetables, 3 to 4 servings per day of potatoes, bread and rice. Also formula or breast milk can still be given along with healthy fruit and cereal snacks.

Vitamins can also be given as children tend to lack in vitamins A, C and D, which can be supplemented in the form of vitamin drops.

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Vitamin A helps children to see in dim light supports and strengthens the immune system and ensures healthy skin is maintained.

Vitamin C helps with the absorption of iron and supports the immune system.

Vitamin D helps to strengthen bones and assists with the absorption of calcium.