

☆ ☆  
**Your Child's  
Weight...**

**A Guide to Preventing  
Childhood Obesity**



*Make being active fun*



*Child-sized portions*



*A good night's sleep*



**1 in 4 children** on  
the island of Ireland  
is overweight

# Don't worry - Help is at hand!



Healthy habits for life

We all want our **children to grow up to be happy, healthy adults**. But it can sometimes be hard to know how. Unfortunately, **more and more of our children are carrying extra weight** – which is increasing their risk of health conditions like heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, and even cancer later in their life.

It doesn't have to be like this. Making **small changes to your children's diet and physical activity** could make big differences to their future health. As a parent, you can teach them habits and skills to last them a lifetime. Habits they will hopefully pass on to their children.

If you're reading this, you might be thinking about making changes to your family's lifestyle. You may be wondering where to begin. And if so, this booklet is for you. It's not a complete guide but it's a good starting point – to help you get going.

**Our Healthy Habits Quiz**  
can help...

# Healthy Habits Quiz

This quiz will help you **find out if your child is at risk of becoming overweight**. Better still, it will help you take the small steps that can make a big difference.

☆ <i>My child eats the same size portion at mealtime as me.</i>	Yes	No
☆ <i>My child eats sugary snacks such as biscuits, cakes and sweets everyday.</i>	Yes	No
☆ <i>My child has a sugary drink at least once a day.</i>	Yes	No
☆ <i>My child gets less than 60 minutes of physical activity a day.</i>	Yes	No
☆ <i>My child spends at least 2 hours a day looking at a screen (TV/ computer/video games).</i>	Yes	No
☆ <i>My child gets less than 10 hours sleep most nights.</i>	Yes	No

If you answered yes to three or more of above, then your child may be at risk. But don't worry – you are not alone! Starting today, you can take one small step at a time to give your children healthy habits for life.

**Children don't need the same amount of food as adults** – after all, they are much smaller than us.



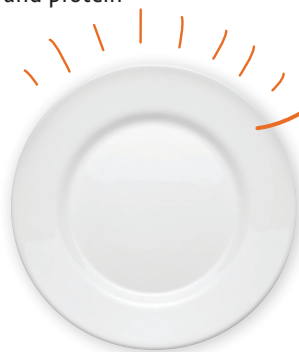
## Portion Sizes

Children's portion sizes have got bigger over the last 20 or 30 years.

### Tips

1. Give them **smaller portions of food** on their plates to start with, and if they want more food, then give it to them.
2. If they say they're hungry, **offer them something nutritious** like fruit and vegetables (for example, an apple or handful of grapes).
3. **Avoid having fatty and sugary snack foods freely** available between and after meals.
4. **Don't pressure them to eat all the food on their plate** allow them to stop when they say "I've had enough".
5. Use **plates and cutlery that match their size**.
6. Look at the **proportions of food** you offer during the day. They should be roughly:
  - ☆ One-third **fruit and veg**
  - ☆ One-third starchy foods like **bread and potatoes**
  - ☆ One-third dairy (**milk, cheese and yogurt**) and protein (**meat and fish**).

*Use plates and cutlery that match their size, not yours.*



Foods and drinks that are **high in sugar, fat and salt** include sweets, chocolate, crisps, biscuits, cakes and fizzy drinks.



Say no to treat foods,  
choose healthy instead!

## Managing foods that 'should' be treats

Treat foods are foods high in sugar, fat and salt.

### Tips

1. **Cut down on treat foods**, but don't ban them. Banning them can make them more appealing.
2. **Shopping is a danger time** – just buy treats sometimes and don't have a supply at home. If they're not in the house, they can't be eaten.
3. **Keep the sweets' cupboard or cookie jar out of sight** – and out of mind.
4. **Tell family and friends you're making changes** so they know about the new routine.
5. When you have **sugary foods, eat them with a meal**. It's better for their teeth and means they won't fill up on treats between meals.
6. Say the **kitchen is closed when mealtimes are over**, but allow them access to fruit, chopped vegetables and water and then send them off to play.
7. In the long run, **it's kinder to say no** – don't be afraid to say it!
8. **Praise them and offer non-food treats**, like a game of football, a trip to the playground or disco-dancing at home.
9. **Limit the amount of treats by:**
  - ☆ Getting into the **habit of having them occasionally**
  - ☆ Keeping **portions small** – choose mini or snack versions
  - ☆ **Offering healthy alternatives**, such as water instead of sugary drinks or juice and fruit instead of sweets or chocolate.

*Keep treats exactly that  
– treats! Not every day  
and not always food!*



Give **water**  
**instead** of  
sugary drinks.



## Replacing sugary drinks

Sugary drinks are linked with excess weight in children. Sugary drinks include fizzy drinks, squashes, cordials and juice drinks.

### Tips

1. If your family loves soft drinks or other sweetened drinks, **reduce them gradually**.
2. **Start by adding plenty of water** to cordials and squashes.
3. **Add extra water each time to squashes and cordials** to reduce your child's taste for sweetness.
4. Keep **sweetened drinks for the weekend**.
5. Make **water freely available** between meals.
6. **Water is tastier when it's cold:**
  - ☆ Put a jug of water in the fridge
  - ☆ Add a slice of lime, lemon or orange to give it flavour and colour.

*Use bendy or coloured straws to make water more fun for younger children.*





Being active  
**doesn't have to  
be sport.**

## Make being active fun!

All physical activity counts towards your kids' 60 minutes a day of exercise. And you don't have to do it all at once.

### Tips

1. If your children have not been active at all, **start slowly with bursts of 15 to 30 minutes** – and build it into your daily routine.
2. Add activities over time until they reach the goal of at **least 60 minutes a day**.
3. **Free play is just as important as structured sports.** Running around, playing in the garden or local park and having fun ALL count.
4. **Kids love a challenge** – setting them a task is a great way to get them active and keep them focused. For example, ask them: **'How many times can you throw and catch a ball between you without dropping it?'** or **'How many skips can you do in a minute?'**
5. **Check out activities in your area** so your child can make local friends. Then you won't have to drive them around. It can also help them to explore and develop confidence and social skills.
6. If you have **safety concerns**, get together with other parents and **agree to patrol the area**. You get a walk and chat while they get to play.
7. **Get more active as a family** and find out what's going on in your community via **[www.getirelandactive.ie](http://www.getirelandactive.ie)**







Try family walks

Start slowly and build to 60 minutes a day.



8. **Don't let the rain interfere.** Have rain gear (jacket, leggings and wellies) to hand. In very bad weather, swap outdoor activities for indoor ones (e.g. hide and seek, disco dancing in the kitchen, short bursts of house clean-up followed by a trip to the swimming pool or sports club).
9. **Join in!** Adults need to be active for at least 30 minutes a day. **Take a family walk.** To add fun, you can **challenge your kids to:**
  - ☆ Walk backwards or sideways
  - ☆ Skip or hop on one foot
  - ☆ Take giant steps.



Dancing at home counts!

Aim for **less than 2 hours of screen time** (TV or computer) a day.

## Less screen time

Zero screen time is recommended for children under 2 years.



## Tips

1. Figure out how much screen time is typical for your family and **aim to cut it in half**.
2. Don't make too many strict rules at once. **Start gradually** and **reduce by 30 minutes a day** or every second day.
3. **Remove screens from your children's rooms.**
4. **Explain to family and friends that you are reducing screen time** and make sure that TV watched outside the home is part of their daily allowance or goal.
5. **Make meal-times a technology-free zone** – no phones, TV, computers etc.
6. **Don't forget to practise what you preach** – if you're attached to your device for long periods of time, your children will expect to be as well.
7. Have a **'no tech day'** once a week and plan some active time with your family. **Turn off:**
  - ★ TV
  - ★ Video games
  - ★ Computers
  - ★ DVDs.

*Gradually reduce by 30 minutes a day or every second day*





Children need sleep to **grow and develop.**

## Encouraging more sleep

Children who don't get enough sleep may be at increased risk of becoming overweight.

### Tips

1. **Regular bedtime routine** can help children get the right amount of sleep.
2. **Encourage children to be active** in the evenings to tire them out.
3. **Finish eating 2 or 3 hours before bedtime.**
4. Create a **sleep-friendly environment** that is dark, quiet, comfortable and cool.
5. **Keep your child's bedroom a TV-free zone** and get them to charge their phones and other devices downstairs.
6. **The recommended hours of sleep per night are:**
  - ☆ 11 hours for under 5 year olds
  - ☆ 10 hours+ for over 5 year olds
  - ☆ 9 hours for over 10 year olds.

*Make bedrooms a tech-free zone.*



# Meal Planner

Children require three regular meals – breakfast, lunch and dinner – and two snacks every day.

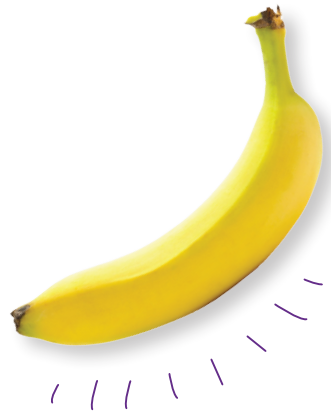
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
<b>Breakfast at Home</b>	1 or 2 cereal wheat biscuits with low-fat fortified (added vitamins) milk. Add some fruit like berries, banana or raisins for variety	A bowl of cereal oat biscuits with low-fat fortified milk. Add some fruit like berries, banana or raisins for variety	A bowl of oat cereal with a teaspoon of nutmeg or cinnamon	A bowl of flake-type cereal with low-fat fortified milk. Add banana for variety
<b>Breakfast on the run</b>	Banana or a handful of raisins with a slice of toast and a low-fat yogurt drink	Banana, cereal bar and a glass of low-fat fortified milk	Breakfast milkshake: 200ml low-fat fortified milk or a low-fat yogurt blended with fruit	Apple, a handful of dry cereal and a low-fat yogurt drink
<b>Snack (Little Break)</b>	Low-fat yogurt	Orange segments	Banana	Cheese
<b>Lunch</b>	2 slices of wholemeal bread with a low-fat cheese slice and tomato	Pitta bread with cooked ham, low-fat mayonnaise, lettuce and cucumber	Tortilla wrap with a slice of chicken, relish and lettuce and a sliced apple	Pasta with tuna, sweetcorn, spring onion and tomato sauce
<b>Snack</b>	Fresh fruit	1 thin slice of fruit brack or banana bread	2 rice cakes	Packet of plain popcorn
<b>Dinner</b>	Shepherd's pie with sweetcorn and green beans	Lamb curry with vegetables and boiled rice	Spaghetti bolognaise	Baked fish with vegetables and pasta

**Breakfast** is the most important meal of the day, **don't skip it.**

Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Try a bowl of porridge and add honey or low fat yogurt	Slice of wholemeal toast with baked beans or scrambled egg	Omelette with lots of vegetables
Slice of wholemeal toast thinly spread with jam or reduced-fat spread		
Carrot sticks	Low-fat yogurt	Chopped apple
Brown roll with mashed hard-boiled egg, lettuce, peppers and tomato	1 wholemeal bap with a lean grilled rasher, tomato and avocado	Cooked rice, lettuce, tomato, low-fat cheese or tuna
Sugar-free jelly	Small bowl of homemade soup	Low-fat yogurt
Roast breast of chicken (remove the skin), carrot, parsnip and broccoli with a baked potato	Stir-fried pork with peppers, mushrooms, onions and noodles	Chicken casserole with vegetables and boiled potatoes

## Tips

1. **Eat together whenever you can.** Children copy parents, brothers, sisters and friends. When they see you eating lots of different, healthy foods, they are more likely to do the same.
2. **Involve your child in planning and preparing meals.** They are more likely to eat foods they've helped prepare.



# The Food Swap

Find some healthier alternatives. There are lots of ways to change what you eat.

## Try Swapping...

Fats and oils	For a healthier option, why not choose...
Butter	<b>Half the amount</b> of a low-fat spread or reduced-fat spread
Mayonnaise	<b>Low-fat</b> mayonnaise or relish or chutney
Salad dressing	<b>Reduced-fat</b> dressing
Vegetable oil	<b>Small amount</b> of olive/canola/rapeseed oil

Meat, poultry and fish	For a healthier option, why not choose...
Beef or lamb or bacon or pork	Cuts with little visible fat and <b>trim any remaining fat or remove all skin</b>
Chicken or turkey	<b>Remove</b> all skin
Tuna	Tuna <b>in brine</b> instead of in oil
Sausages	<b>Reduced-fat</b> or vegetarian options

Milk, yogurt and cheese	For a healthier option, why not choose...
Yogurts	<b>Plain</b> or fruit <b>low-fat</b> yogurt
Cheese	<b>Reduced-fat</b> cheeses or small amounts of lower-fat cheese (e.g. Edam, Mozzarella, Brie)
Milk	<b>Low-fat, skimmed or fortified</b> milk

**Important** – fizzy drinks, including the no-added-sugar versions, can damage teeth and bones.

Drinks	For a healthier option, why not choose...
All day	<b>Water or milk</b>
At meal times only	<b>Fresh fruit juice</b> (100ml once a day). Well-diluted cordials (for example with 5 parts water to 1 part cordial)

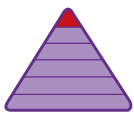
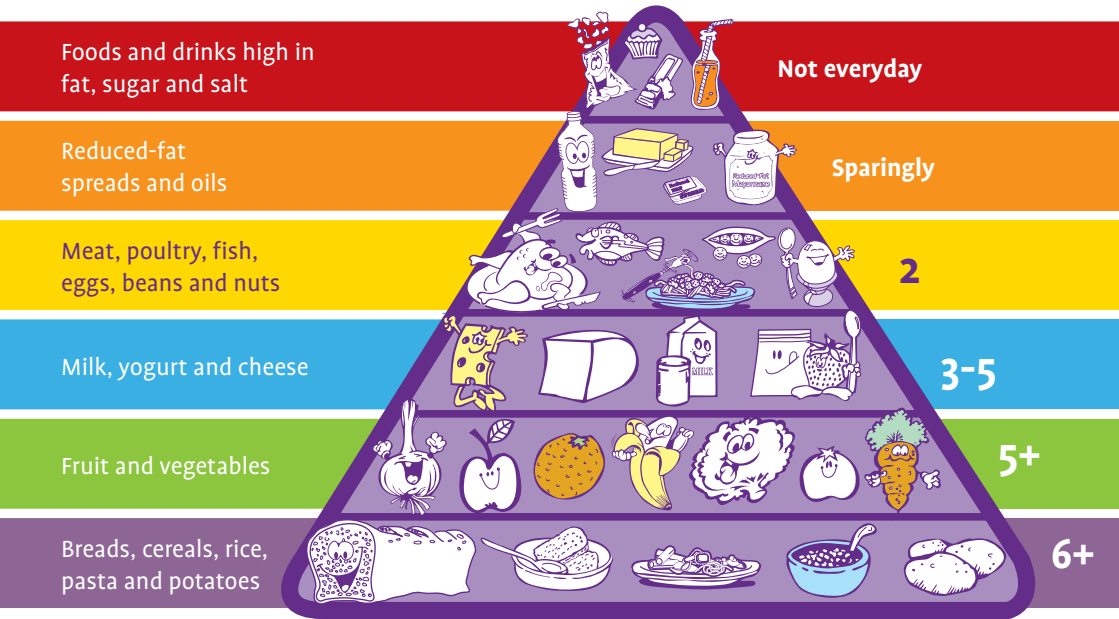
Foods high in fat, sugar or salt	For a healthier option, why not choose...
Crisps	<b>Low-fat</b> crisps, rice cakes or popcorn
Chocolate	<b>Fun-sized</b> chocolate bars
Biscuits	<b>Low-fat</b> or plain biscuits
Hot chocolate	<b>Low-calorie</b> hot chocolate or cocoa
Chips	<b>Oven chips</b>
Ice-cream	<b>Low-fat</b> frozen yogurt/ice-cream/ice-pops
Cream	<b>Low-fat</b> natural yogurt

*Remember not every day!*



# Food Pyramid

Use the Food Pyramid as a guide for choosing the right foods in the right amount for your child. Applies to children over 5 years of age.



## Foods and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt

Limit them to now and again, not every day.

### Servings equivalent to approximately 100 calories:

- 4 squares of chocolate, 1 chocolate biscuit or 2 plain biscuits
- 1 small cup cake (no icing), ½ or 1 cereal bar (check the label)
- ½ can or 200ml sugary drink, 1 bag lower-fat crisps
- 1 scoop of vanilla ice-cream, 1 plain mini-muffin



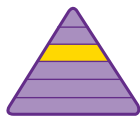
## Reduced-fat spreads and oils

Use as little as possible. Choose reduced-fat or light spreads.  
Choose rapeseed, olive or canola oils.

### One serving equals:

- 1 portion pack of reduced-fat spread for 2 or 3 slices of bread
  - 1 teaspoon of oil per person when cooking
- (Remember that mayonnaise and salad dressing also contain oil)





### **Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans and nuts**

Choose lean meat and low-fat cooking methods (grilling, baking, steaming or boiling). Choose fish twice a week – oily fish like mackerel or salmon is best.

#### **One serving equals:**

The palm of child's hand – width and depth without fingers and thumb – shows how much meat, poultry or fish is needed in a day. 2 to 3 dessertspoons of peas, beans or lentils, 1 egg



### **Milk, yogurt and cheese**

Reduced-fat or low-fat varieties are best.

#### **One serving equals:**

1 glass of milk (200ml) (skimmed milk is suitable for children aged 5 upwards)  
1 carton of yogurt (125g) or 1 yogurt drink (200ml)  
1 matchbox-size (25g) hard or semi-hard cheese such as Cheddar or Edam  
50g of soft cheese such as Brie or Camembert



### **Fruit and vegetables**

More is better.

#### **One serving equals:**

1 apple, orange, pear or banana  
2 small fruits – plums, kiwis, mandarin oranges – or a handful of grapes  
½ cup or 4 dessertspoons of cooked vegetables  
1 bowl of salad – lettuce, tomato, cucumber  
100ml of unsweetened fruit juice



### **Breads, cereals, rice, pasta and potatoes**

Include in each meal. Brown (high fibre) bread and brown rice are best.

#### **One serving equals:**

1 thin slice of bread, 2 breakfast cereal wheat or oat biscuits  
3 dessertspoons of porridge oats or muesli  
4 dessertspoons of flake-type breakfast cereal  
3 dessertspoons of cooked pasta, rice or noodles  
1 medium or 2 small potatoes

# Food Labels

To understand what you and your family are eating, you need to be able to make sense of food labels.

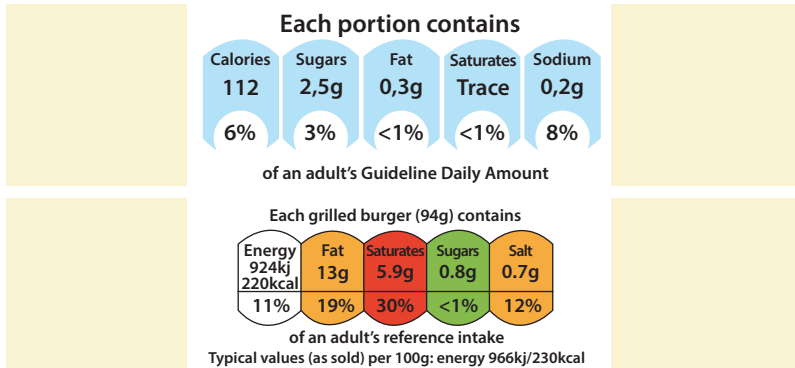
**Healthy foods are low in fat, low in sugar, low in salt but high in fibre.**

## Nutritional Information

Under EU Food Law, when nutritional information is given it must be stated as per 100g of a food or drink.

Nutritional Information	Typical value per 100g	30g serving with 125ml skimmed milk
<b>Energy</b>	1580 kJ 372 kcal	725 kJ 171 kcal
<b>Protein</b>	7g	7g
<b>Carbohydrate</b> of which sugars starch	84g 8g 76g	31g 8g 23g
<b>Fat</b> of which saturates	0.9g 0.2g	2.5g 1.5g
<b>Fibre</b>	3g	0.9g
<b>Sodium</b>	0.7g	0.25g
<b>Salt</b>	1.8g	0.7g

## Many foods will display a Front of Pack nutrition label



Check the label and **avoid foods that are high in sugar, salt or fat.** Foods that are high in fibre may also be high in sugar and salt.



Check the sugar, fat and salt

100g of some foods may be more or less than a typical serving

**Sugar** Low-sugar – less than 5g per 100g  
Sugar-free – contains naturally occurring sugar or no extra sugar added  
No added sugar – no extra sugar added

**Fat** Low-fat – less than 3g per 100g  
Low-saturates – less than 1.5g

**Fibre** High-fibre – 6g or more per 100g

**Salt** Low-salt – 0.3g

Many companies choose to display Guideline Daily Amounts. These outline the approximate amount of nutrients needed by healthy adults and children every day. The nutrition information is given per serving

Other companies choose to display adult's reference intakes. Look for products with lowest reference nutrient intakes. This information is given per serving. It will be displayed as a percentage for each nutrient

● **Green** means low in that nutrient and is the healthier choice

● **Amber** means medium

● **Red** means high

Place a star in the food or activity boxes for each day that the **goal is achieved.**



Praise and reward

## My Reward Chart

Encourage your child to set food and activity goals each week.



Name:

My goal is:

To achieve my goal, I will:

My reward is:



Agree goals with all the family and decide a suitable weekly reward if they and you achieve the goals. Remember teamwork is best and a lot more fun!

Food	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun

Activity	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun

Visit [www.safefood.eu](http://www.safefood.eu) to print further copies of this Reward Chart.



*Tips and great ideas*

For more handy tips and  
great ideas for you and  
your family, visit  
**[www.safefood.eu](http://www.safefood.eu)**

**Childhood Obesity**  
Let's take it on, one small step at a time





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