



Tiny Turns

A short guide to healthy eating for one-to-fives

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...and they're off!

What your little one eats plays an important part in keeping them happy and healthy, as well as growing and developing properly. Between the ages of one and five, children grow very quickly and become more active. By now they'll be joining in with family meals and it's a great time for them to learn about food.

*This little guide
will help get them
off to a good start.*

Go for variety

The best way to make sure your child gets all the nutrients and energy they need is to give them a wide variety of foods from **the four main food groups**.

Food group	Examples	Quantity	Key nutrients	Tips
Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates	Bread, breakfast cereals, potatoes, pasta, rice, couscous, quinoa, noodles, chapattis and yams	At least one serving with each meal and as some snacks	Carbohydrate B vitamins Fibre	Small portions of these foods make great snacks Give a mixture of white, brown and wholegrain varieties
Fruit and vegetables	All fresh, frozen and tinned fruit (in natural juice) and vegetables (in unsalted water) and dried fruit	Aim for 5 a day, offer with each meal and some snacks.	Vitamins - especially vitamins C and A Dark green vegetables provide some iron Fibre	Dried fruit should be kept to mealtimes only as it has higher concentration of sugar that can contribute to the development of tooth decay Vegetables can be easily added to soups and stews. Or some children prefer to eat their vegetables raw
Milk, cheese and yogurt	Milk, cheese, yogurt, fromage frais	3 portions of dairy a day: one portion is 100-120ml (small glass) milk, 125g pot of yogurt, 15g of cheese e.g 1 heaped tablespoon of grated cheese	Calcium Protein Phosphorus Iodine	Milk can be used in custard, milk puddings, sauces and soups Try yogurt as a pudding or snack
Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat, tofu and other proteins	Meat, poultry (e.g. chicken, turkey), fish (e.g. tuna, fish fingers), eggs, nuts*, pulses (e.g. peas, baked beans, chickpeas, lentils) and soya products such as tofu	Offer 2 servings each day for young children. Offer Vegetarian children 2-3 servings every day	Protein Iron (especially red meat and liver**) Other important vitamins and minerals including zinc and vitamin B ₆	Even small amounts of meat are useful to help keep iron levels topped up Lean meat, tinned salmon, tuna, peanut butter*, houmous and eggs all make ideal sandwich fillings

*Nuts

- Safety: children under five should not be given whole nuts because of the risk of inhaling and choking. Give them as crushed or finely ground nuts or nut butters.
- Peanut allergy: The risk of an allergy is reduced if children begin eating peanut butter during weaning. Speak to your healthcare professional if you are planning on

giving peanuts or foods containing peanuts for the first time when your child is already older than 12 months.

**Liver

- If you give liver or liver products to your child, they should be given no more than once a week.

Milky matters

Milk is an important food for young children. It contains many nutrients, providing:

- Calcium and protein for growth and development of children's bones
- Vitamins B2, B5 and B12
- Iodine, phosphorus and potassium

Try to give your child at least 350ml of milk a day or two servings of foods made from milk, such as cheese, yogurt or fromage frais.

Between the ages of one and two, you can offer your toddler whole or semi-skimmed milk to drink. 1% and skimmed milk don't provide enough fat soluble vitamins or energy for under 5s

You may choose to continue giving your baby breastmilk alongside family foods for as long as you and your baby want.

- If your child doesn't like milk, offer cheese, yogurt, or use milk in puddings, shakes, sauces, or soups.
- Plant-based drinks are not nutritionally equal to cow's milk and may lack protein and other nutrients.
- If your child has a cow's milk allergy, speak to a Registered Dietitian.
- Avoid rice drinks for under 5s due to the levels of arsenic they may contain - other plant drinks may be served from 1 year.
- Babies and young children should not be given unpasteurised milk due to the risk of food poisoning.

Milk allergy

Milk allergy is not as common as people think - affecting about 1 in 50 infants, and is much less common in older children (most children outgrow their allergy).

If you think your child is allergic to milk, you should consult your GP. If a milk allergy is diagnosed, the GP will refer you to a Registered Dietitian for specialist advice.

Vitamins and iron

Tiny turns need small, nutrient packed meals

One-to-fives need to get lots of nutrients and energy from their food because they grow and develop quickly. But small children only have tiny turns and can't usually cope with big meals. This means that the foods they eat have to provide energy and nutrients in a compact form.

Fibre

Fibre is an important nutrient that most of us aren't getting enough of - and that goes for children too. Encourage them to eat plenty of fruit and vegetables, and choose wholegrain starches where possible - think brown bread, and keep skins on potatoes. You could also try adding fresh fruit or milled seeds as a topping on yogurt.

Vitamins

The Department of Health recommends that all children aged one to five should be given a daily vitamin supplement containing vitamins A, C and D. Vitamin supplements are available under the Healthy Start Scheme, ask your Health Visitor for details.

Iron

Young children need some iron-providing foods every day. Iron is important for making red blood cells, which carry oxygen around the body. A lack of iron can lead to iron deficiency anaemia.

Red meat and some oily fish provide iron to the diet. The iron in other foods such as eggs, pulses, nuts and bread is not as easy for the body to absorb. Foods which contain vitamin C (e.g. citrus fruits, peppers, tomatoes, onions and most fruits) can help increase absorption of iron from non-meat foods so it's a good idea to include these in the same meal. This is particularly important for vegetarian children. Tea and coffee may reduce iron absorption and are not suitable for young children.

Where can I get iron?

Red meat and meat products (e.g. beef, lamb, pork)

Liver*

Chicken and turkey (especially the dark meat)

Other foods that provide iron

Breakfast cereals with added iron

Bread with added iron

Pulses (e.g. baked beans and lentils)

Dried fruit like apricots and raisins

Dark green leafy vegetables

*It is recommended that liver or liver products are given to children no more than once a week.

Veggie kids



A **vegetarian diet** can be a healthy one for young children but it takes careful planning to make sure that the nutrients usually found in meat are provided from other foods.

As **red meat is a good source of iron**, it's particularly important to include plenty of alternatives such as pulses and fortified bread and breakfast cereals (along with vitamin C-rich foods to help absorption - see page 7 for examples). Meat also provides other minerals, vitamins and protein which is also good to be aware of.

A **veggie diet** can be quite filling for a small child, so low-fibre, nutritious choices such as eggs, cheese and milk will help meet your child's nutrient needs.

If your child is vegan, ask your GP to refer you to a Registered Dietitian for specialist advice.

Active kids



Under-fives should be physically active for three hours every day, and not be inactive for long periods, (except when they're sleeping, of course!).

Being inactive is not good for our health, including our little ones'. Encourage them to reduce their screen time (watching TV etc), and to walk and move more, and to not sit for too long.

For very little ones (under 2 years) include light activities such as:

- standing up
- moving around
- walking
- playing with toys

When your little one is more confident at walking, they can try more energetic activities. These types of activities should make kids "huff and puff" and can include organised activities, such as gymnastics. Other types of energetic activities include:

- active play
- swimming
- running around
- climbing frame
- dancing
- skipping rope

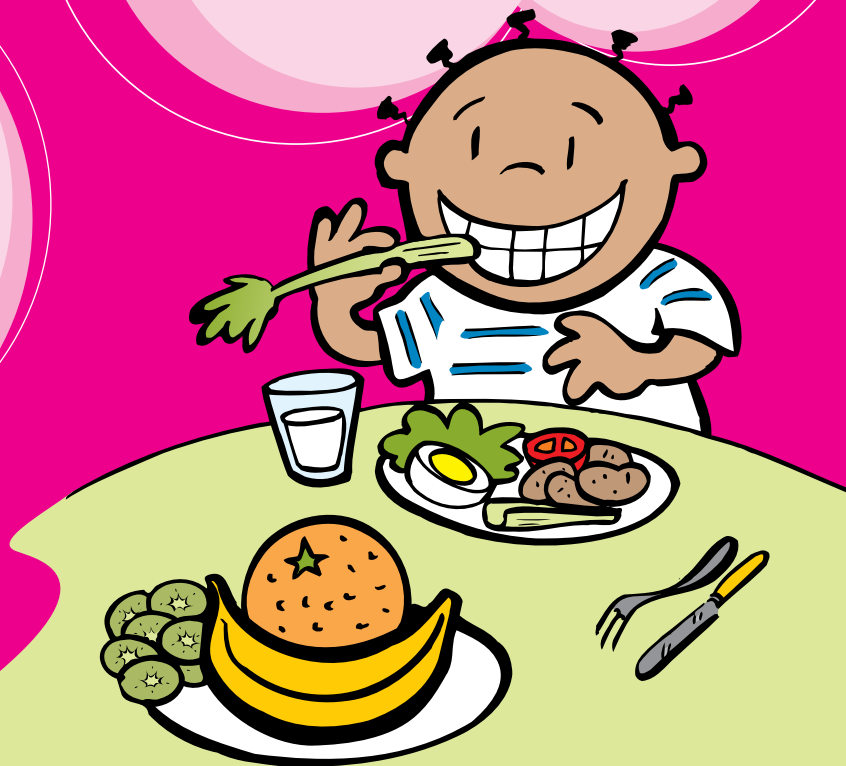
Nourishing nibbles

Between-meal snacks provide an important nutrient and energy top-up for small children. Nourishing nibbles include:

- Small sandwiches (filled with grated cheese, egg, tuna or lean meat)
- Fingers of toast with cheese spread or houmous
- Plain yogurt or fromage frais with added fruit
- Sliced or chopped fruit (e.g. apples, pears, bananas and grapes)
- Raw vegetables, sliced or cut into sticks (e.g. carrots, tomato and cucumber)
- Toasted muffin or bagel
- Sticks of cheese
- Rice cakes, bread sticks or oat cakes
- Small bowl of breakfast cereal and milk
- Scones, crumpets or pancakes

Make snacks tooth-friendly by keeping them sugar-free.

Limit snacks to twice a day, between meals.
Too many snacks may not leave enough room for main meals.



Drinks

Milk and **water** are good choices for young children. Milk provides key nutrients such as protein, calcium, iodine, potassium and several B vitamins.

New guidelines recommend that younger children should not be given drinks sweetened with sugar or sweeteners. Glycerol-containing slushie drinks are not suitable for children under 7 years old..



Squashes and other **soft drinks** are not recommended. Not only are they bad news for teeth (even the 'diet' versions), their nutrient content is very low too. Toddlers who drink them frequently can have less room to eat well at mealtimes. **Fizzy drinks should be avoided.**

It's also best not to give young children tea or coffee, especially with food, as this may interfere with iron absorption.

By the age of one, your child should be using an open or free-flow cup for their drinks. Prolonged bottle drinking is *not recommended*.

Magic mealtimes

- Use brightly coloured, child-sized cups, plates and cutlery.
- Present the food in an attractive, toddler-friendly way - make it interesting and colourful.
- Try to eat together - sit at the table with your child and have something yourself or with the whole family.
- Turn off all distractions, mealtime isn't screen time!
- Let your child help with simple food preparation or laying the table - they'll love feeling involved.
- Try not to get too wound up if your child makes a mess. It's all part of learning about food!
- Encourage new foods and don't worry if they are rejected, just try again another day.



Safe turns

Avoid

- Rice drinks (they may contain too much arsenic)
- Raw or partly cooked eggs that don't have the red lion mark
- Shark, marlin and swordfish
- Unwashed fruit and veg
- Raw fish



Fussy eaters

It's very common for young children to go through phases of being fussy about what they eat - sometimes eating very little, refusing to eat certain foods at all (even ones they previously liked) or wanting to eat the same thing day after day.

As stressful as this can be, it's rarely harmful. In fact, fussy eating is a normal part of growing up and showing independence.



How to cope

- Try to keep calm! Best not to make the dinner table a battleground.
- Eat together, the best way for children to learn to eat and enjoy new foods is to copy you.
- Keep portions small at first and praise your child for eating.
- If after gentle encouragement, your child refuses to eat something, just remove it without a fuss.
- Don't leave meals until your child is too hungry or too tired to eat or give too many snacks between meals.
- Try not to use food as a reward, it can lead to labelling foods as 'good' or 'bad'.
- Children sometimes get thirst and hunger mixed up and don't realise they are hungry.
- If your child has a friend who eats well, invite them round for tea; children can learn from the good example of their peers.
- Children's tastes change - over time they may learn to accept a food they once refused if you eat it yourself and say something positive about it. Try serving new foods on a separate plate, not on the same plate as their favourites.
- Offer foods in a way your child likes them such as plain dry foods only, with sauces offered on a separate plate. A child might refuse cooked veg but may love the raw, grated version.

Remember, these phases do pass! But if you are worried about your child's eating habits talk to your GP or Health Visitor.

Information sources [accessed 08/2025]

NHS Choices. Physical activity guidelines for children (under 5 years)

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-children-under-five-years/>

NHS Choices. Drinks and cups for babies and young children

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/weaning-and-feeding/drinks-and-cups-for-babies-and-young-children/>

NHS Choices. What to feed young children

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/weaning-and-feeding/what-to-feed-young-children/>

NHS Choices. Vitamins for children

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/weaning-and-feeding/vitamins-for-children/>

NHS Choices. Vegetarian and vegan diets Q&A

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/vegetarian-and-vegan-diets-q-and-a/>

BDA Healthy eating for Children: Food Fact Sheet

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/healthy-eating-for-children.html>

First Steps Nutrition Trust: Eating well in the early years

<https://www.firststepsnutrition.org/eating-well-early-years>

NHS: How to get more fibre into your diet

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/digestive-health/how-to-get-more-fibre-into-your-diet/>



For details on additional information sources please contact Dairy UK

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