

Dietary factors 0-5 year olds

Milk Consumption

From 12 months old, toddlers can have whole milk as their main milk drink. Whole milk contains very little iron and should be limited to a maximum of three drinks of 100-120ml per day, or less if toddlers are eating cheese and yogurt (which also provide calcium but are low in iron).

Other Sugary Drinks

Sugary drinks are not recommended as part of a healthy and balanced diet. Water is the best drink for toddlers. Milk or fruit juice in suitable portion sizes are also fine. Sugar free squashes, squashes, sugary tea, fizzy drinks, flavoured water and large quantities of milk or fruit juice are not needed in a toddler's diet. It is best to encourage toddlers to drink water. This can be flavoured with a small amount of fruit juice or sugar free squash and diluted gradually until water is accepted as the main drink. It is recommended to dilute fruit juice using 1 part fruit juice to 6 - 10 parts water. Tea contains tannin, which inhibits the absorption of iron and should not be given to young children at mealtimes. Tea and coffee also contain caffeine and should be discouraged in young children.

Snacks

2 or 3 planned snacks throughout the day will provide additional nutrients. Ensure that at least 2 out of 3 snacks are healthy. Plan snacks half way between meals and ensure that they are not too big so that the infant has an appetite for the next meal. Unplanned snacks tend to be high in calories and fat. You can find [snack ideas](#) on the Infant and Toddler Forum's website.

Portion Sizes

Parents instinctively feed their infants so that they grow into healthy and strong children and adults. For this reason, parents can be worried about reducing portion sizes if their child is overweight. Until the age of 5 years old, children have the ability to naturally regulate their food intake to ensure that they get adequate nutrients without overeating. However, encouraging infants to overeat by 'clearing their plate' or having large snacks between meals can override this natural ability to regulate appetite. Some parents need reassurance that their child is still getting enough energy and nutrients from smaller food portions.

There are more guidance and tips for parents on the Infant & Toddler Forum website, [Toddler Meals: How much do they need?](#)

'Handy' Measures for Portion Sizes



The image above is a guide of 'handy' measures for portion sizes. This is a really useful tool as parents and children always have their hands with them as a guide for portion sizes.

- A child's fist is generally an appropriate portion size for a bread roll, potatoes, rice or pasta. This should be included at each meal i.e. a fist sized portion of cereal at breakfast, a fist sized bread roll at lunch and a fist sized portion of pasta at evening meal.
- A child's palm (the thickness of the little finger) is an appropriate portion size for meat, fish, eggs or beans. This should be included at 2 meals of the day i.e. a palm sized portion of ham at lunch and a palm sized portion of chicken at evening meal.
- A handful of vegetables or salad is an appropriate portion size at lunch and evening meal.
- A fist sized portion of fruit is an appropriate portion size for a snack between meals or for a pudding after lunch or evening meal. 2 to 3 servings of fruit daily are appropriate.



The above pictures show a roast chicken dinner with a serving appropriate for a 4-6 year old boy. The meal is exactly the same, but it is served on 2 different sized plates. The portion size appears to be larger on the smaller plate as the plate is full. Switching to smaller plates can help to reduce portion sizes. Encourage parents not to pile food upwards on the plate, such as having Yorkshire puddings, stuffing or other extras on top of meat or other foods on the plate.



The 2 images above show appropriate portion sizes of shredded wheat bitesize for a 4-6 year old boy. The portion is exactly the same in both images, but one is served in a child's bowl and the other is served in an adult's bowl.



This image above shows an appropriate portion size of museli for a 4-6 year old boy. Be aware that some cereals such as muesli are heavier and therefore an appropriate portion will look smaller in the bowl compared to a bowl of lighter cereal such as rice pops or corn flakes.

Lack of Physical Activity/Excess Screen Time

Children may need to be encouraged to move more. Be enthusiastic about going to the park, or putting wellies on and splashing in puddles. Some parents find it helpful to limit screen time. This includes time watching television, playing on computers, tablets, phones, games consoles or other electronic devices.