

Helping children (6-12 year olds) make the most of what they eat and drink

This leaflet gives dietary advice to the parents and carers of children who need extra help to meet their nutritional needs.

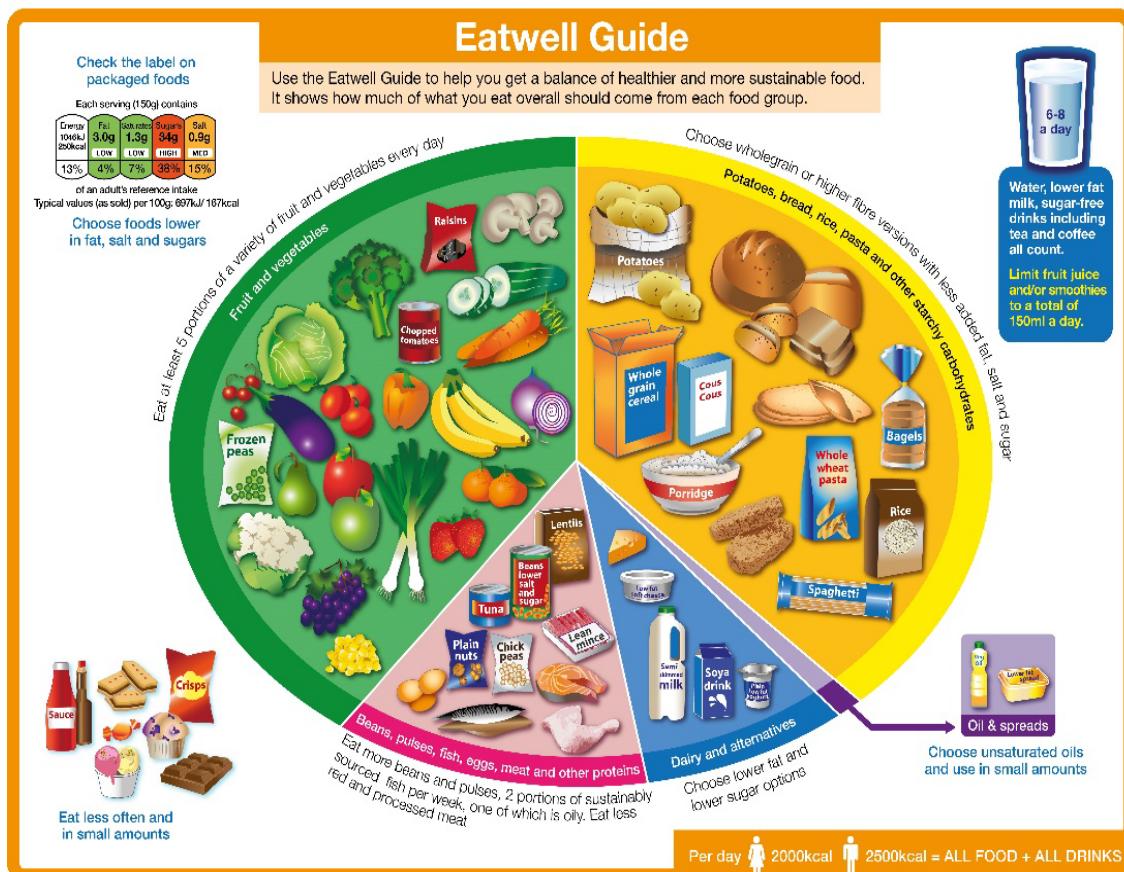
**This leaflet is not suitable for children on a milk free diet, if your child is unable to tolerate dairy, please ask to be referred to a dietitian.*

Why does my child need extra help with their diet?

There are many reasons why children may not grow or gain weight as expected. They may not be able to eat enough food because of feeding difficulties or a poor appetite; or they may have higher energy needs because of a medical condition. At these times, children can benefit from having more energy dense (high calorie) foods and drinks to provide the extra nourishment they need.

The Eatwell Guide

This shows the groups of foods that are needed for a 'healthy diet', providing you with the mix of nutrients that your body needs. It is important to try to eat foods from each group, every day to stay healthy.



Eatwell Guide food groups

- **Starchy carbohydrate foods** help provide energy and are needed at each meal. Base each meal on starchy carbohydrates. Breakfast is an important meal – choose breakfast cereals with added vitamins and minerals. Other carbohydrate foods include bread, chapattis, potatoes, pasta, noodles and rice.
- **Protein foods** are required for growth, development and are good sources of iron. Include good sources of protein twice a day; these are beans, pulses, fish, eggs and meat.
- **Dairy foods** are a good source of calcium, needed for strong bones and teeth. Aim for 3 servings a day, e.g. 150ml glass of milk, a small pot of yogurt (125g), 25g cheese or fortified plant based dairy alternatives.
- **Fruit and vegetables** provide essential vitamins, minerals and fibre. Encourage your child to eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables every day (these can be fresh, tinned, frozen or dried).
- **Oils and spreads** provide lots of calories and will help to boost your child's intake. Healthy fats include unsaturated fat such as olive oil and rapeseed oil.

How do I help my child gain weight?

- Eat little and often. Try to offer 3 meals a day plus 1 snack and nourishing drinks (see Milk and nourishing drinks on page 4) between each meal. Offering a variety of foods will help your child enjoy their food.
- Choose foods and drinks that are high in calories, such as whole milk and other full fat dairy foods. Avoid foods labelled reduced/low fat, healthy eating or sugar free.
- Offer 2 courses at each mealtime. If your child does not eat all the main course, then the dessert is an opportunity to provide a calorie top up.
- Big portions can be overwhelming for children, so try serving a smaller amount and serve meals on an age-appropriate plate. A second helping can always be offered.
- Cold foods can sometimes be more appetising if your child is put off by the smell of cooked foods. Try offering a sandwich, selection of finger foods or a chilled dessert.
- Take advantage of times of the day when your child's appetite is better. For example, if they are hungry when they come back from school. (See list of snack ideas below.)
- Try to keep mealtimes a relaxed and sociable occasion. Eating with your child will enable them to see you eating and enjoying a variety of foods.
- Try not to make a fuss if your child refuses foods and never force your child to eat as this may make things worse.
- Encourage your child to drink 6 to 8 cups of fluid each day to keep them well hydrated. So that your child doesn't fill up on fluids, offer drinks after meals rather than with a meal.
- If your child has fussy eating behaviour and only eats a limited number of foods, they may benefit from taking a multivitamin and mineral supplement.

Enriching food and drink:

Adding small amounts of high calorie foods to their normal food and drink will help boost the nutritional content without increasing the portion size. This is known as **food fortification**.

- **Add double or single cream** to porridge/cereals, sauces, soups, potato (boiled, mashed or jacket), puddings, fruit (fresh, tinned or stewed), hot milky drinks, smoothies, and milkshakes.
- **Add butter / olive oil spread and/or cheese** to potato (boiled, mashed, chips, fries, or jacket), pasta, crackers, crumpets, sandwiches, wraps, toast, soups, sauces, and vegetables.
- **Add olive, vegetable or sunflower oil** to pasta and salad dressings or use it for frying foods
- **Add full fat mayonnaise** to potato (boiled, mashed, chips or jacket) tuna, egg and chicken or add to sandwiches.
- **Add peanut butter*** to cereals, yogurts, porridge, puddings and toast.

***Not suitable for children with a nut allergy.** Whole nuts may cause choking in children under 5 years so it would be safer to offer ground nuts.

Snack ideas

Calorie dense snacks between meals will boost a child's energy intake. The list below gives some ideas on both sweet and savoury snacks. Try to keep 90 minutes or more between eating times. This helps children become hungry for their next meal.

Sweet snack ideas (*these can also be given as dessert at mealtimes*):

- Toasted bread fingers with butter and jam or honey, chocolate spread or **peanut butter***.
- Small sandwiches or crackers spread with any of the above.
- Mini muffin or small cake, flapjack, brownie or pastry.
- Crumpet, scone, brioche, or malt loaf spread with butter.
- Milk puddings such as custard, rice pudding or crème caramel.
- Full fat yoghurts, fromage frais or ice cream.
- Instant whip desserts made up with whole milk.
- Fruit pieces with cream, ice cream or custard.
- Dried fruit or **nuts*** coated with yogurt.

Savoury snack ideas:

- Hummus or mashed avocado dip with fingers of bread, toast, pitta bread or breadsticks.
- Small sandwiches spread with butter and filled with full fat cheese, cheese spread or cream cheese, egg, tuna or salmon mayonnaise, cold meats, or pâté, **peanut butter***.
- Crackers or rice cakes spread with any of the above.
- Crackers, cheese biscuits, or cheesy bread sticks, with slices or cubes of cheese, cheese spread, hummus or cheese triangles.
- Buttered toast or plain biscuits with **nut butters***, cream cheese or hummus.

Milk and nourishing drinks

Aim for your child to drink around 1 pint (600mls) of whole milk* every day.

Whole milk can be enriched further by adding cream or dried milk powder. You can then use this enriched milk whenever you would have used regular milk – such as in drinks, on cereals and in cooking.

Nourishing drinks. These can be hot or cold.

- **Hot drinks:** Add chocolate or malted drink powder to mug of hot milk. You can also add marshmallows, squirty cream or chocolate flake for extra nutrition.
- **Cold drinks:** Add milkshake powder, e.g. Nesquik or shop own brand to a glass of cold milk.
- **Smoothies:** Make with yogurt, fruit and cream.

**For children who cannot have dairy, plant-based milks and yogurts can be used in a similar way. If your child is unable to tolerate dairy, please ask to be referred to a dietitian.*

Meal ideas

Breakfast	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cereal with enriched milk, cream and sugar/honey.• Porridge made with enriched milk - add honey, double cream, fruit.• Pancakes/toast/crumpets/ with a thick layer of butter/spread/jam/marmalade/ chocolate spread/peanut butter.• Breakfast pastries such pain-au-chocolate, croissant.• Fruit juice or milky drink.
Lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sandwiches with cheese or meat fillings, tuna mayonnaise with sweetcorn or peanut butter*.• French toast or scrambled eggs with extra butter and grated cheese or cheese on toast. Jacket potatoes with beans and cheese and more butter.• Sweet course such as fruit yogurt, individual puddings, cakes, fruit with cream, fruit dipped in chocolate.
Evening meal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pasta/ spaghetti bolognaise with extra grated cheese on top.• Fish in creamy sauces with mashed/roast potatoes and buttered vegetables.• Fish fingers and chips and vegetables with grated cheese.• Meat with mashed potatoes with extra butter or chips and buttered vegetables.• Curries with rice/Naan bread, served with cream and/or whole yogurt.• Sweet course such as crème caramel, fruit with custard and cream, ice cream.

Monitoring growth

Continue to monitor your child's growth monthly. If they are still not gaining weight, talk to your GP for further guidance and support. Once your child achieves a healthy weight, start to reduce the fortified high calorie foods in their diet and encourage healthier eating.

Contact us

If you have any queries, please contact the branch of the Dietetic Department your child visits:

- Royal Berkshire Hospital Dietitians: 0118 322 7116
- East Berkshire Community Dietitians: 0118 904 3250
- West Berkshire Dietitians: 0118 904 3251
- CYPF Berkshire Dietitians: 0118 904 6777

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust and Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust Paediatric Dietitians, November 2025.

Next review due: November 2027.