

# Healthy packed lunch guidance for parents/ carers with young children (2-5 years old)

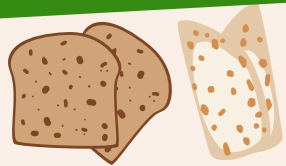
A healthy packed lunch will give young children the energy and nutrition they need to get the most from their day – helping them to grow and develop, learn and play, be healthy and happy.

Packed lunches for children aged 2-5 years old should be made up of foods from the main food groups in the Eatwell Guide [www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide) and portions should be appropriate for a child's age and size. This will ensure every young child has a healthy and

nutritionally-balanced lunch. NB. The Eatwell Guide does not apply to children under the age of 2 because they have different nutritional needs. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/weaning-and-feeding/babys-first-solid-foods/>

## What should I include in my child's healthy packed lunch?

Try to include a variety of different foods across the week to provide all the vitamins and minerals required and make sure content varies from day to day.

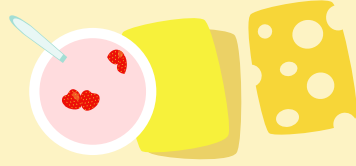


### STARCHY CARBOHYDRATE 1 or 2 portions per meal

- ✓ bread, wrap, pitta, bagel, rolls, baguette
- ✓ rice or cous cous, noodles, plain pasta – avoid flavoured instant packet products and limit canned pasta
- ✓ potatoes
- ✓ oatcakes, rice cakes or crackers

**Avoid very high fibre foods**

**Gives you energy for the day ahead!**



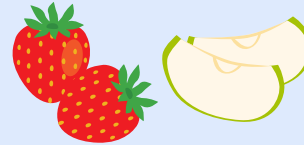
### DAIRY FOOD (or non-dairy alternative)

**At least 1 portion of milk or dairy foods, or alternatives per meal**

- ✓ cheese – hard, soft, spread (avoid blue cheese and mould-ripened cheese and cut cheese into strips not chunks)
- ✓ yoghurt or fromage frais
- ✓ milk (avoid unpasteurised). Whole milk is recommended
- ✓ custard
- ✓ non-dairy alternatives (use unsweetened options). **Children under the age of 5 should not be given rice drinks.**

**Avoid foods which are low fat, sweetened with artificial sweeteners (often labelled 'low sugar')**

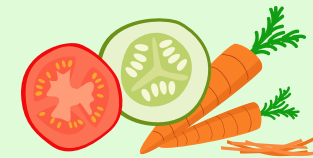
**Good for healthy bones and teeth!**



### FRUIT (fresh, frozen or tinned)

- ✓ apple
- ✓ banana
- ✓ satsuma
- ✓ pear
- ✓ plum
- ✓ cherry tomatoes (cut into quarters)
- ✓ handful of grapes (cut into quarters)
- ✓ dried fruit e.g. raisins, apricots, dates. Add to meals and not as a snack.
- ✓ melon (cut into slices not chunks)
- ✓ mango (cut into slices not chunks)

Remove any pips/stones before serving fruit.  
Wash fruit and vegetables prior to preparing.  
Ensure canned fruit is in juice not syrup.



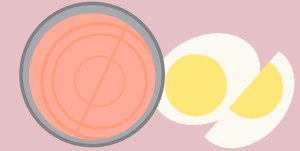
### VEGETABLES OR SALAD

- ✓ vegetable sticks (e.g. carrot, cucumber, pepper)
- ✓ salad in sandwiches
- ✓ vegetable soup
- ✓ Baked beans count as a vegetable but only once during a week. Ensure beans are reduced in salt and sugar

**If you are using canned products, choose those without added sugar and salt.**

**Fruit and vegetables give you vitamins, minerals and fibre to stay healthy. Part of your '5 a day'**

**How much?** A portion is one child-sized handful.



### PROTEIN

- ✓ meat e.g. sliced lean ham, chicken, or beef in a sandwich (cut sausages into strips and remove skins)
  - ✓ fish – preferably try to include oily fish e.g. tinned mackerel, sardines, pilchards, and salmon
  - ✓ eggs (ensure eggs are fully cooked)
  - ✓ lentils, beans, chickpeas
  - ✓ alternative meat free option
- Try to limit processed foods e.g. sausages, meatballs, fishfingers, fish cakes, sausage rolls

**Helps your body to grow and develop**

**DRINKS** – tap water is the best, especially for teeth. Fresh drinking water must be available and accessible to children at all times when attending an early years setting.

### Me-sized meals

Young children don't need as much food as teenagers and adults. When they eat more than they need, the excess energy is stored as fat in their bodies.





## Sugar

Limit foods that are high in sugar such as sweets, biscuits, cakes, chocolate, and soft drinks. Sugary foods damage teeth and provide calories but few nutrients. Use fruit to sweeten yoghurts and desserts.



## Salt

Make sure food for young children is low in salt. Avoid food designed for adults and foods that are high in salt including processed meat, salty snacks, take away and ready meals.

## What should I NOT include?

Please do **NOT** include the following items:

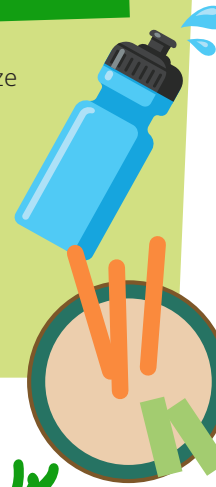
- ✗ Sweets and chocolate bars.
- ✗ Squash or fizzy drinks.

**Thank you!**



## Tips for your packed lunch

- Freezer packs can keep food cool. Freeze a (reusable) bottle of water which will be ready to drink by lunchtime.
- Get your child to help pack their lunch box – they are more likely to enjoy it.
- Love to dip? – cut up pitta bread or use veg sticks to have with a dip.



## Get more vegetables in your lunches!

Here are some GREAT ideas for upping the veg content in your lunchboxes

<https://ifour-vegpowers-uploads.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/06092830/Veg-Power-Lunchbox-Hacks-Sept-FINAL.pdf>

## Be safe!

- Please cut up food into small sizes for young children. Cut grapes and cherry tomatoes in quarters.
- Cut large fruits, like melon, into slices instead of small chunks.
- Remove any stones and pips before serving fruit and vegetables.
- Be aware of allergies – please check your early years provider guidance.
- Do not give whole nuts to children under 5.

## Healthy Start Scheme

With the NHS Healthy Start scheme, you could be entitled to weekly support towards:

- Vegetables
- Fruit
- Milk
- Infant Formula Milk
- Pulses
- Healthy Start vitamins

Could you be eligible? If you or your partner receive benefits and are currently expecting, or have a child under 4, you may be entitled to a weekly allowance of £4.25 to help buy healthy foods and milk.

Find out and apply online today:  
[www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk)

Here are some websites with more information to help your family to stay healthy, happy and well:

<https://healthyschoolsnorthyorks.org/healthy-food/>  
<https://www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/>  
<https://www.nhs.uk/start4life>

And some information on saving money, local food banks, financial support and eating well on a budget:

<https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/cost-living-support>



Leaflet developed by Public Health and Early Years teams (North Yorkshire Council) and the North Yorkshire Healthy Schools Programme.