



High Energy Diet for Children

This information leaflet is designed for families of children who need to gain weight. Some children need help to gain weight for a variety of reasons, for example having a small appetite or increased energy requirements due to illness. Not taking in enough energy, protein, vitamins and minerals may make your child more prone to illness, or delay the healing process.

How do I help my child to gain weight?

Children who are underweight need to increase their energy (calorie) intake to promote weight gain. However, they still need a balanced and nutritious diet containing carbohydrates, protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals to ensure healthy growth and development.

If you are worried about your child's weight or their food intake, you can speak to your health visitor, school nurse or GP, who can measure your child's height and weight. They may also consider referring your child to see a dietitian.

What is a healthy balanced diet?



The Eatwell Guide shows us the different food groups, and the proportion of our food intake which should come from each of the groups. Note that in a child of a healthy weight, the smallest proportion of their food intake should be made up of foods high in fat and/or sugar. In children who need to gain weight, this proportion will be increased. Though it can be tempting for children to fill up on these foods, try to use them to enrich the energy content of nutritionally balanced meals, rather than replacing them.

Tips for a balanced diet:

- Offer your child at least 5 portions of fruits and vegetables every day
- Provide a source of starchy carbohydrate at every mealtime
- Offer 3 portions of dairy foods/dairy alternatives every day to ensure adequate calcium intake (1 portion is 150 ml milk/1-2 slices of cheese/125g pot of yogurt)
- Provide a source of protein at least twice per day – such as meat/ fish/ eggs/ tofu/ pulses/beans
- Include sources of iron in your child's diet regularly – e.g. red meat, pork, chicken, pulses and beans, eggs and fortified breakfast cereals. Milks fortified with iron are also available. Small amounts of iron are found in green leafy vegetables. Iron is better absorbed when eaten alongside foods rich in vitamin C – such as oranges and tomatoes
- Limit salty foods
- To avoid constipation, include regular sources of fibre in your child's diet, as well as 6-8 glasses of fluid per day. However, too many high fibre foods may fill your child up if they have a small appetite. It is important to find a balance – include a portion of fruit or vegetables at each meal; and offer a mixture of wholemeal/white bread and low/high fibre breakfast cereals

Tips to boost your child's energy intake

- Aim for a minimum of 3 meals and 2-3 snacks per day. Snacks are very important for meeting a child's nutritional requirements, especially if their appetite is small. Some children may find it easier to manage smaller but more frequent meals.
- Offer high calorie meals and snacks – allowing your child to get the maximum amount of energy if their portions are small
- Avoid overfilling your child's plate as large amounts of food can put them off eating; you can offer a second helping if your child finishes their meal
- Offer a pudding after lunch and evening meal
- Avoid 'low fat' or 'reduced fat' varieties of foods
- Choose fattier cuts of meat and leave the skin on chicken/turkey
- Try frying foods rather than grilling – if you do grill, drizzle the food with oil
- Some children may find meat difficult to chew – try slow cooked, soft/minced meat
- Cooked pasta could be topped with milk, butter or cheese to boost the calorie content
- Add butter/cheese/cream to mashed potatoes
- Add cream or coconut milk to soups and sauces
- Add milk/cheese/cream to risottos
- Use paneer cheese in curries or add full fat yogurt/cream to the sauce
- Boost the energy content of sandwiches by adding mayonnaise, sour cream or avocado
- Add high calorie dressings to salads – such as olive oil/mayonnaise/salad cream
- Top vegetables with cheese sauce or butter, or try roasting vegetables in olive oil
- Aim to eat with your child and make mealtimes interesting - try cutting foods into fun shapes. Do not let your child become distracted by the television while eating

- Try to keep mealtimes stress-free and never force your child to eat – this can make the situation worse

Ideas for high energy breakfasts

- Breakfast cereal with full fat milk and cream
- Porridge made with full fat milk and cream – add jam, honey, or fresh/tinned fruit
- Crumpet with a thick spreading of butter or cream cheese
- Toast with peanut butter
- English muffin spread with butter; served with scrambled egg (made with extra milk, butter and grated cheese) and tomatoes

Ideas for high energy lunches

- Sandwich spread thickly with butter, plus a filling of ham, cheese, tuna mayonnaise, egg mayonnaise, nut butter, hummus or full fat cream cheese. Try adding more than one filling, e.g. ham and cheese
- Cheese on toast
- Soup with a swirl of cream and buttered toast
- Baked beans on buttered toast (add extra butter to the beans)
- Pasta with pesto sauce, chicken pieces and vegetables
- Fried rice with chicken or Quorn pieces and vegetables
- Jacket potato with butter, cheese and baked beans, tuna mayonnaise, or chilli and sour cream.

Ideas for high energy evening meals

- Macaroni cheese
- Spaghetti bolognaise made with minced beef, topped with grated cheese
- Mild curry with chapati or rice – topped with full fat yogurt
- Fish in a white sauce with creamy mashed potatoes and buttered vegetables
- Roast beef with Yorkshire pudding, roast potatoes, cauliflower cheese and buttered vegetables
- Cottage pie topped with cheesy mashed potato, served with vegetables roasted in olive oil
- Lentil curry with added cream and chapatti topped with butter

Ideas for high energy puddings

- Ice cream with strawberries
- Thick and creamy yogurts or custard pots
- Rice pudding with added cream and jam
- Chocolate mousse
- Trifle
- Fruit crumble or fruit pie with custard or cream
- Pancake topped with full fat yogurt and berries, or chocolate spread
- Fruit dipped in chocolate sauce

Ideas for energy-boosting snacks

- Plain or chocolate biscuits
- Malt loaf spread with butter
- Cheese and crackers
- Toasted teacake/scone spread with butter and jam
- Breadsticks or vegetable sticks dipped in hummus/full fat cream cheese/guacamole/nut butter
- Rice cakes topped with cream cheese
- Slices of apple dipped in nut butter

Nourishing drinks

Offering nourishing drinks throughout the day is a good way to boost your child's energy intake further. It is best to avoid your child drinking for 1 hour before eating as this might fill them up – offer drinks in between meals and snacks

- Milk is a very nutritious drink – offer jersey gold top milk or full-fat rather than semi-skimmed or skimmed. Aim for your child to drink around 1 pint (600 ml) of milk every day
- Milk can be given a further energy boost by adding cream or semi skimmed milk powder – offer this as a drink and use on cereal/in cooking
- Try homemade milkshakes made with ice cream, or smoothies made with your child's favourite fruit, full fat yogurt and milk
- Offer hot chocolate topped with whipped cream
- Fruit juice is nutritious, but it is better to give this in moderation at mealtimes – if drunk between meals it is more likely to damage teeth
- Avoid fizzy drinks and sugary squashes as they can cause tooth decay

Sugar and teeth brushing

While foods high in sugar can help increase your child's energy intake, they can also damage teeth. To reduce the risk of tooth decay:

- Offer sugary foods as part of a meal rather than as a snack between meals
- Ensure your child brushes their teeth twice every day
- Visit the dentist on a regular basis

Vitamins and Minerals

- It is recommended that all children under the age of 5 years take a daily multivitamin supplement containing vitamins A, C and D
- You may be eligible for free Healthy Start vitamins – for more information see: www.healthystart.nhs.uk
- If your child is older than 5 years but has a restrictive diet, it is a good idea that they also take a suitable daily multivitamin
- Avoid using more than one supplement at a time, as you may give your child more than the recommended daily allowance of vitamins/minerals

Accessibility

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