

# DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR MALTESE CHILDREN

the Mediterranean Way!

This guide aims to support parents, grandparents and guardians to provide a healthy lifestyle for children aged 3 to 12 years.



# INTRODUCTION

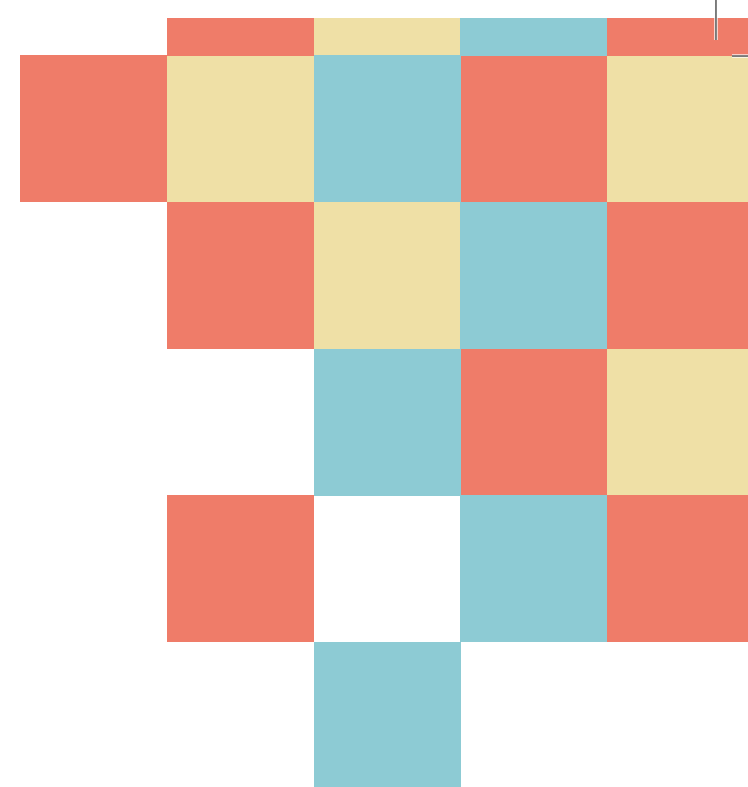
This guide is based on the Dietary Guidelines for Maltese adults, and is further supported by the 'Healthy Plate' pictorial guide which encourages a Mediterranean diet. This is a mainly plant-based diet with low intakes of 'free sugars'\* and unhealthy fats.

By adopting a healthy lifestyle yourself, you can be a role model for your child and help him/her to also acquire healthy eating and lifestyle habits.

Enjoying nutritious food is an important aspect of a child's potential to attain good health, growth and optimal development. Encourage your child to eat three regular meals (breakfast, lunch and supper) a day with snacks in between, if necessary.

*\*free sugars are sugars added to food and beverages by the manufacturer, cook or consumer and sugars naturally present in natural syrups, fruit juices and fruit juice concentrate (WHO, 2015)<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>WHO Guideline: Sugars intake for adults and children:  
[http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/149782/1/9789241549028\\_eng.pdf?ua=1](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/149782/1/9789241549028_eng.pdf?ua=1)



# THE HEALTHY PLATE



Select a variety of nutritious foods from each food group every day.  
 Drink plenty of water. Keep active. Reduce sitting time. Enjoy your meals with family and friends.

Cereals, cereal products (preferably wholegrain) and potatoes

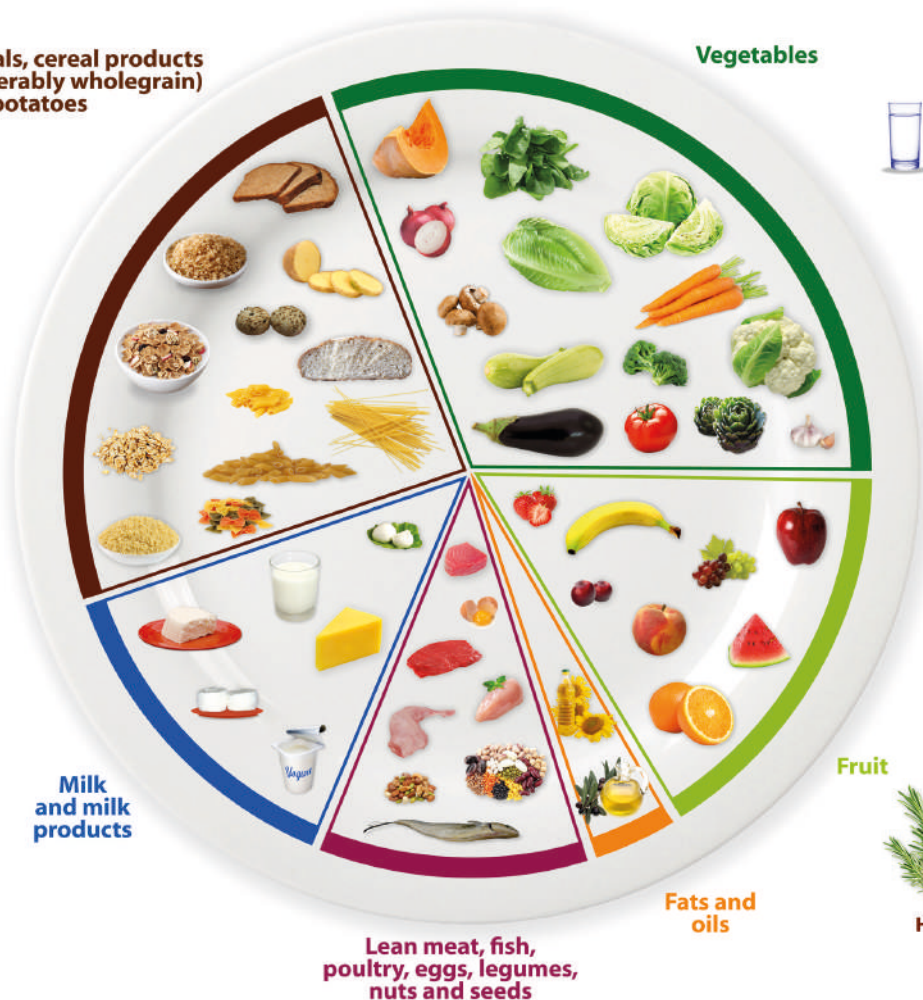
Vegetables



LIMIT YOUR INTAKE



Children should not be allowed to drink alcohol



Milk and milk products

Fruit

Fats and oils

Lean meat, fish, poultry, eggs, legumes, nuts and seeds



The Healthy Plate shows the approximate proportions of the different food groups you and your child should consume over a period of time (day/week).

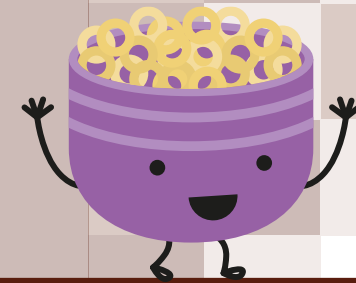
The daily dietary needs of your child are based on several factors, such as age, gender, weight and height as well as activity levels. The older and more active your child becomes, the more energy and nutrients he/she needs. Energy is best obtained from complex carbohydrates\*\*. In general, boys have a higher energy intake from foods than girls, and older children need more energy than younger children (less than 10 years of age).

\*\*Complex carbohydrates are whole plant foods that are rich in fibre. These include foods such as: whole grains (oatmeal, pasta, and whole-grain breads), green vegetables, pumpkin, beans, peas and lentils, potatoes and sweet potatoes.

# THE HAND GUIDE

A child's hand is a good measure to use when calculating how much food to give your child. As your child grows older, his/her hand grows proportionately and therefore corresponds to how much food your child needs.

Below is a guide to serving sizes for your child.



## CEREALS

and cereal products  
(preferably  
wholegrain/holemeal)  
and potatoes



It is important to vary the type of cereal and/or cereal product given to your child over a day. E.g. breakfast cereal or toasted bread in the morning, couscous salad for lunch and barley soup for supper.

## FOOD GROUP

This includes: bread, rice, pasta, couscous, bulgur wheat, quinoa and barley.

## NUMBER OF SERVINGS

**3-4 per day**

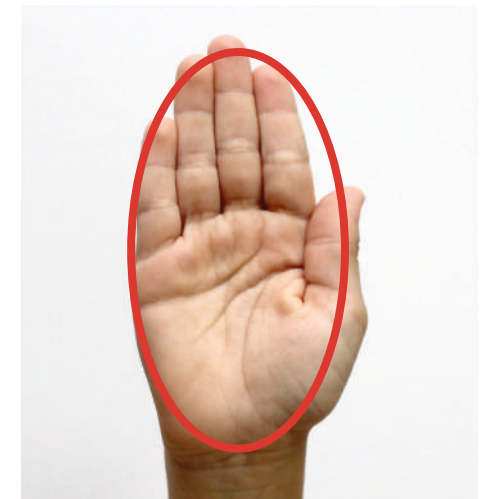
A serving with every meal, according to appetite

*\*Potato (preferably with skin): 3 or fewer servings per week*

## SERVING SIZE



One serving of uncooked pasta, rice or potato\* = the size of your child's fist



One serving of bread (preferably wholegrain) = the size of your child's hand (including the fingers)

## VEGETABLES



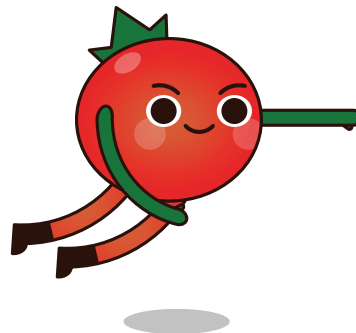
Vary the type of vegetables and fruit in your child's diet throughout the day (i.e. at breakfast, lunch, and between meals). Encourage your child to eat whole and different coloured vegetables and fruit to help him/her feel fuller. These protect your child's overall health and help to overcome illness.

## FOOD GROUP

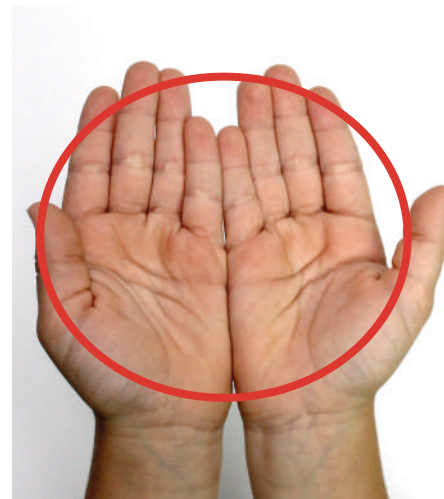
e.g. baby spinach, kale, broccoli, tomatoes, carrots, pumpkin, kohlrabi, cabbage, celery, leeks, aubergines, artichokes, coloured onions and coloured bell peppers.

## NUMBER OF SERVINGS

**3-5 per day**



## SERVING SIZE



One serving of leafy vegetables = the size of both your child's palms (e.g. baby spinach)



One serving of raw vegetables = the size of your child's fist (e.g. carrots)

## FRUIT



## FOOD GROUP

e.g. grapes, tangerines, banana, apple, kiwi, strawberries and watermelon

## NUMBER OF SERVINGS

**2-3 per day**



## SERVING SIZE



One serving of fruit or berries = the size of both your child's cupped hands

# MILK AND MILK PRODUCTS



Offer your child two to three servings of milk products with no added sugar, preferably those lower in fat throughout the day, e.g. a serving of milk at breakfast, plain white yoghurt as a snack. You may wish to also offer a serving of cheese at either lunch or supper.

## FOOD GROUP

e.g. yoghurt, cottage cheese, cheeselet and other lower fat cheeses

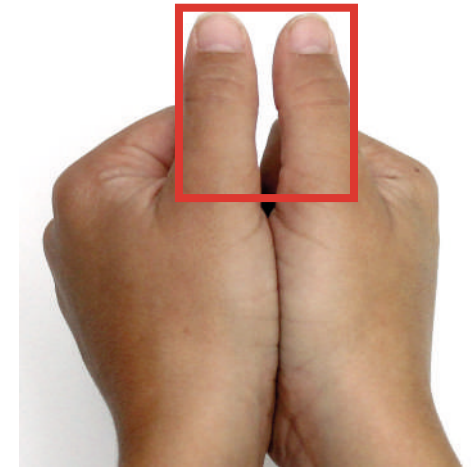
## NUMBER OF SERVINGS

**2-3 per day**

## SERVING SIZE



One serving of lower fat milk (2.5%) or plain white yoghurt = the size of your child's fist



One serving of cheese = the size of two of your child's whole thumb.





LEAN MEAT,  
FISH, EGGS,  
POULTRY,  
LEGUMES,  
NUTS AND  
SEEDS



Offer your child a serving at least at lunchtime e.g. an egg or a serving of hummus in their school lunch and possibly another one during suppertime e.g. a homemade bean patty or a serving of fish.

## FOOD GROUP

e.g. tenderloin, sirloin meats; poultry such as chicken and turkey; legumes, fish such as tuna and salmon; eggs; nuts such as walnuts and almonds; seeds such as flaxseeds and sesame seeds.

## NUMBER OF SERVINGS

### 1-2 per day from a selection of the following

Red meat: Fewer than 2 servings per week.

Poultry: 2 servings per week

Legumes (peas, beans, chickpeas and lentils): 2 or more servings per week.

Fish: 2 or more servings per week, one of which should be oily.

Examples of white fish: dolphin fish, Sea Bass, Sea Bream, Saddled-Bream;

Example of an oily fish: Blue-fin tuna, salmon, Amberjack, European Scad, mackerel, herring

Eggs: 2-4 servings per week

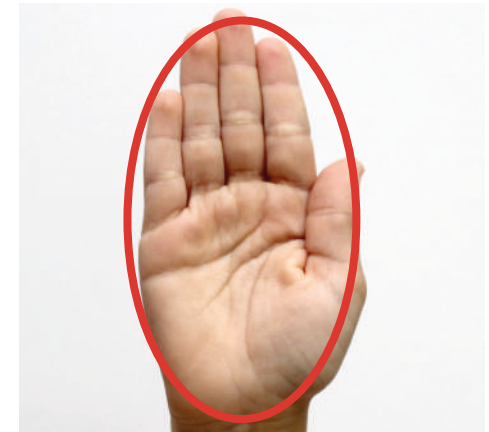
Nuts and seeds: 1-2 servings per week. (Provide only unsweetened/unsalted nuts and seeds. Seeds are best consumed milled)

**\*Children less than 5 years: Provide only finely ground nuts and seeds to avoid the risk of choking. Add ground nuts as a powder to soft food.**

## SERVING SIZE



One serving of lean meat, poultry or legumes = the size of your child's palm



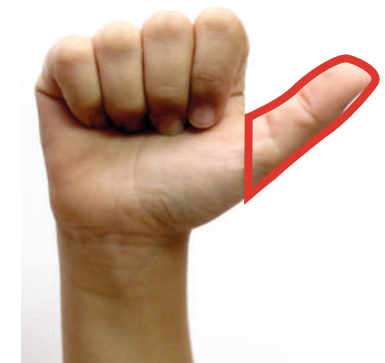
One serving of white fish = the size of your child's whole hand



One serving of oily fish = the size of your child's palm



One serving of an egg = one medium sized egg



One serving of nuts and seeds\* = the size of your child's whole thumb

## FATS



Reduce your child's intake of hidden unhealthy fats e.g. hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated vegetable oils (saturated and trans fats).

## FOOD GROUP

## NUMBER OF SERVINGS

**1-2 per day**

\*The use of fats high in saturated fats such as butter, hard margarines, and hydrogenated vegetable oils should be kept to a minimum.

## SERVING SIZE



One serving of healthy fats (olive oil, canola oil and sunflower oil) = the size of your child's whole thumb

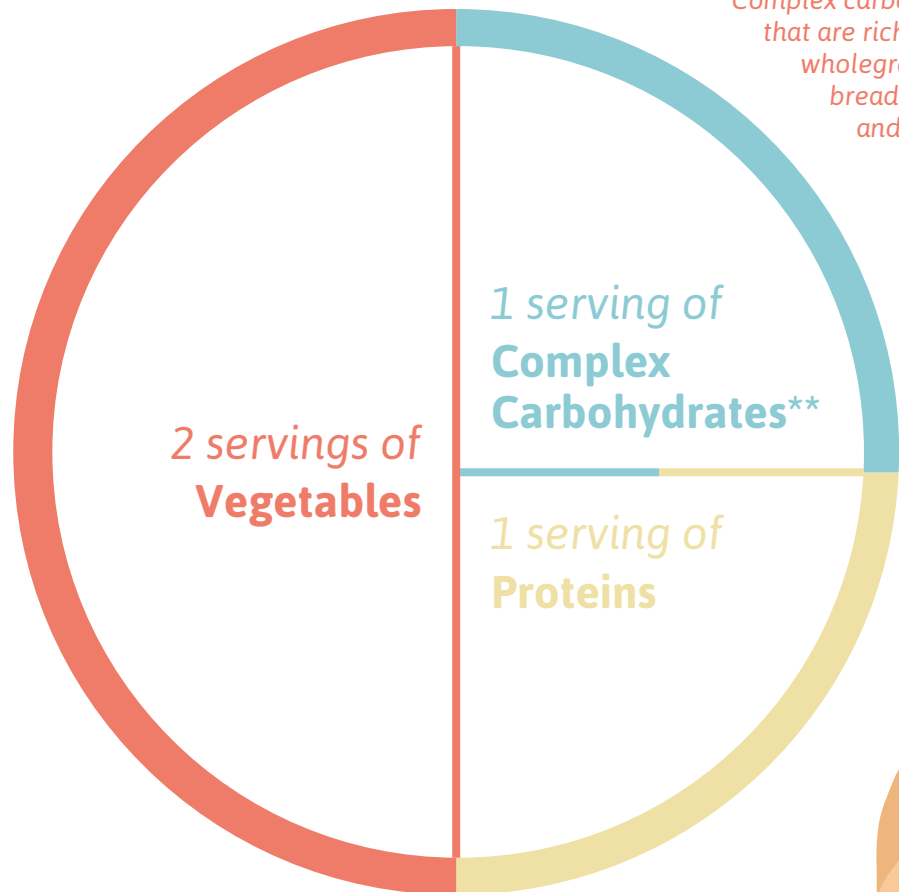


# OTHER TIPS

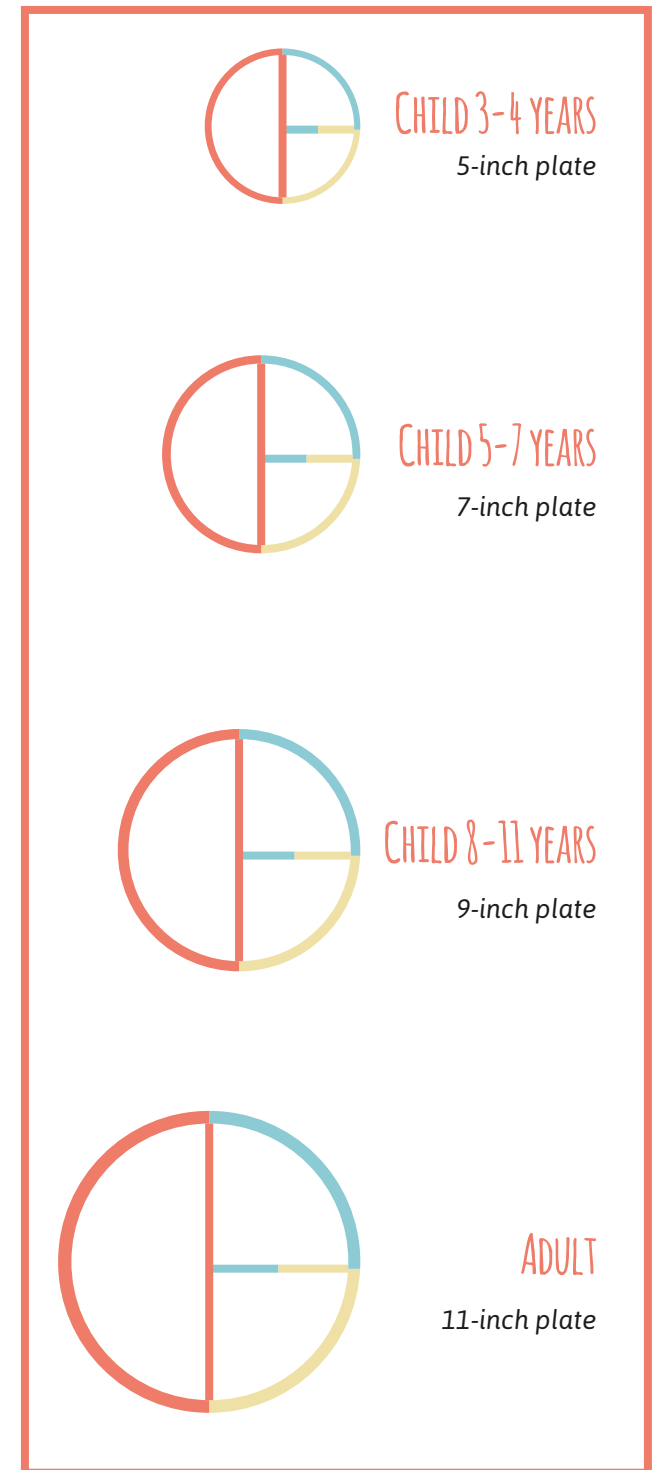
AS CHILDREN GROW – SO SHOULD THEIR PLATE!

Use a small sized plate (e.g. a side plate) for young children (less than 10 years of age). The size of the plate increases as children grow into their teens.

According to the serving/hand sizes of the different age groups, the lunch and/or dinner plate should look like this:



*\*\*Complex carbohydrates: these are whole plant foods that are rich in fibre. These include foods like wholegrains (oatmeal, pasta, and whole-grain breads), green vegetables, pumpkin, beans, peas and lentils, potatoes and sweet potatoes.*



# WATER

One should drink plenty of fluids every day. To stay well hydrated, water should be the preferred drink since it is ideal for good health. Plain white lower fat (2.5%) milk consumed in moderation (refer to the recommended number of servings above) is also good for children. More fluids are needed during hot weather or during increased physical activity.



Encourage your child to drink water.

## More interesting drinks can be offered by:

Adding fresh fruit, vegetables and/or herbs to water in a glass pitcher and stirring well. The pitcher should be placed in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes before serving.

You can choose from a variety of fruit, vegetables and herbs such as oranges, lemons, cucumber and mint.

## AVOID

Soft drinks due to their high sugar and acid content.

Commercially prepared fruit juices and iced tea due to their high sugar content.

Energy drinks due to their high sugar and caffeine content.

Caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea and soft drinks.

Sweetened chocolate powder in hot/cold milk drinks due to its high sugar content.

**ALCOHOLIC DRINKS SHOULD NEVER BE OFFERED TO CHILDREN.**



# TIPS FOR A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

## GET PHYSICALLY ACTIVE

Make sure your child is active everyday for at least 60 minutes. This can be carried out in one session, or in several sessions of at least 10 minutes each. This activity should be of an intensity which makes your child breathe hard, such as cycling, running, football, basketball, swimming and dancing. At the same time, try to reduce sedentary time (i.e. use of TV, DVDs, internet use, video-games, mobile phones and tablets) to less than 2 hours per day.

LET YOUR CHILD PLAY IN AN UNSTRUCTURED AND VARIED WAY,  
AS WELL AS PRACTICE A SPECIFIC SPORT.



## HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE MY CHILD TO BE MORE ACTIVE?

- Walk or cycle together to a destination, instead of going by car.
- Use the stairs instead of the lift.
- Take your child to play outside with friends, instead of playing video games.

# ORAL HEALTH

Good oral health is important for children, because the negative health effects of dental caries are cumulative, tracking from infancy into adulthood. To minimise the lifelong risk of dental caries, the intake of free sugars should be as low as possible and teeth should be brushed at least twice a day with a fluoridated toothpaste.

Sweets should be an occasional treat and eaten in a small quantity. The best moment to give your child something sweet is during a meal as this minimises damage to the teeth.

Some products are marketed as healthy, but a few of these are actually very high in free sugars, such as honey, cereal bars, natural syrups, dried fruit and fruit juices.

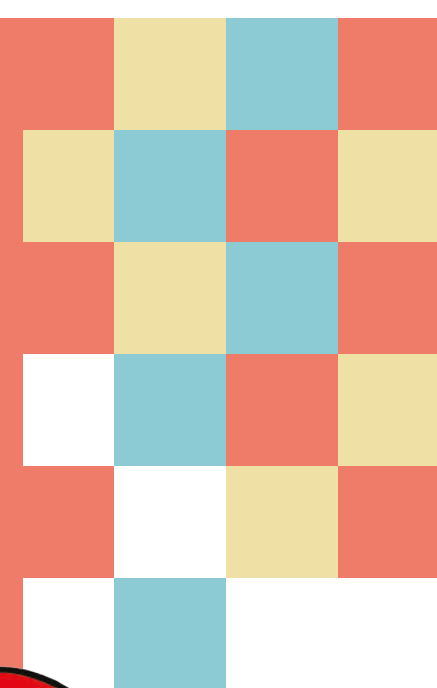
Remember to read food labels before buying food and drink products.

## SAFETY TIPS FOR PARENTS

Younger children and those with neurological disabilities should always be supervised when eating or drinking. In these special cases, it is always recommended that you seek expert advice.



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# HEALTHY EATING BEHAVIOURS

- Encourage your child to eat a variety of nutritious foods from early on in life so as to help them develop a taste for unsweetened, unsalted food.
- Engage your child in the preparation, cooking and serving of meals as part of a healthier family lifestyle.
- Plan your family dinners a week ahead. Think of what ingredients need to be bought and carry out your grocery shopping together with your child.
- Encourage your child to read food labels and then choose food products, preferably fresh, that are low in fats (especially saturated and trans fat), sugar and salt.
- Serve food in serving sizes that are appropriate for your child.
- Enjoy regular family meals and make it an enjoyable time for the family.
- Avoid distractions during mealtimes. Do not allow children to eat mindlessly whilst watching television or playing on a computer/ PlayStation.
- Do not force your child to eat. Remove the food when it is obvious that no more food will be eaten.
- Do not force your child to 'clean their plate'.
- Do allow your child to drink water during their meal.
- Do not worry if your child's appetite decreases briefly, especially if your child appears healthy and happy. Serve small portions of food frequently.
- Do not offer sweets as a treat for good behaviour. Instead offer non-food rewards.



# TEACH YOUR CHILD HEALTHY HABITS FOR LIFE!

## GENERAL TIPS

- **Offer** your child a varied menu.
- **Avoid** allowing your child to snack throughout the day.
- **Encourage** an interest in nutritious food by growing and/or cooking a variety of foods with your children.
- **Educate** your child about healthy choices. Guide and encourage them to choose nutritious foods and snacks.

## MILK AND MILK PRODUCTS

- **Add** chopped fresh fruit to plain yoghurt.
- **Add** chopped nuts to plain yoghurt.
- **Prepare** a tasty homemade drink with natural yoghurt, lower fat (2.5%) milk and some fresh fruit. You can also make healthy ice-pops by putting this mixture in the freezer!

## CEREALS

- **Add** oatmeal or wholegrain cereal to a small bowl of lower fat yoghurt to add more dietary fibre.
- **Buy** breakfast cereal products low in added sugars.
- **Choose** wholegrain/wholemeal bread, pasta and rice instead of white alternatives.

## LEAN MEAT, FISH, POULTRY, EGGS, LEGUMES, NUTS AND SEEDS

- **Prepare** home-made dips from legumes, such as red kidney bean dip and hummus dip. These dips can be eaten with slices of vegetables, such as cucumber or coloured peppers, or spread on toast for a healthy snack.
- **Use** legumes for salads (e.g. bean and chickpea salad), stews and vegetable soup (Minestra).
- **Consume** adequate amounts of meat, fish and eggs in line with these dietary guidelines for children.

## VEGETABLES

- **Offer** different kinds of vegetables, raw or cooked in different ways.
- **Give** small quantities when introducing new vegetables.

## FATS AND OILS

- **Use** only small amounts of vegetable oils, such as olive, canola and sunflower when preparing dishes.

## FRUIT

- **Make** a fresh fruit salad as a healthy dessert.
- **Use** colourful fresh fruit to garnish and decorate a dish.

## PROCESSED FOOD AND SWEETS

- Processed food and sweets are high in calories, total fats, added sugars or added salt (e.g. sweet desserts, confectionary foods, meat pies and pastries, burgers, savoury snacks). They can lead to health problems and weight gain and therefore they need to be avoided.
- **Educate** your child to avoid eating processed foods and sweets.

