



# Healthy eating

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Healthy food and drinks for babies and young children is one of the key areas to discuss with Aboriginal parents and families.

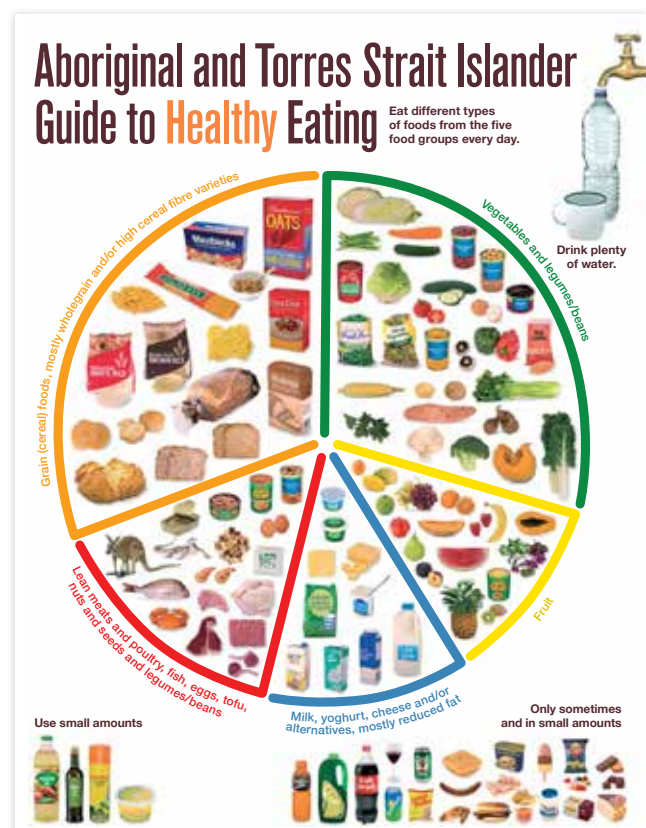
Good nutrition is important to help children grow up healthy and strong; to have energy to learn and play; to help prevent them becoming overweight; to help fight sickness and prevent other problems like constipation and tooth decay. If children start to eat a range of healthy food from 6 months, it will be easier for them to develop healthy eating habits into adulthood. Good nutrition has lasting benefits and is important for preventing chronic diseases such as obesity, heart disease and diabetes.

## Health messages

These health messages are based on The Australian Dietary Guidelines Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Guide to Healthy Eating and the Eat for Health Dietary Guidelines for All Australians (Indigenous)<sup>1</sup>.

- > Breastmilk is best for bub and provides all the nutrients and fluids a baby needs for around the first 6 months of life. If not breastfeeding use an infant formula.
- > From around 6 months, introduce solid foods such as iron-fortified infant cereals, pureed meats, tofu and legumes, followed by vegetable, fruits and other nutritious foods.
- > Until the age of 12 months, continue to provide breastmilk or infant formula.
- > Encourage children to eat a wide range of fruits and vegetables. Different coloured fruits and vegetables contain different and important vitamins and minerals necessary for optimum growth.
- > Provide reduced-fat milk and dairy products for children aged two years and up. Less than two years of age, provide full fat milk and dairy products.
- > Provide toddlers and young children with water as their main drink, and some milk. Avoid all other drinks including soft drinks, sports drinks, energy drinks and fruit juice that contain a lot of sugar.

- > Limit the intake of foods and drinks containing saturated fat, added salt and added sugar. These foods are called 'discretionary' choices. They may also be called 'sometimes foods'. Examples include potato chips, crisps and other fatty/salty snack foods; sweet biscuits, cakes, desserts and pastries; confectionary and chocolate; ice-cream and pastry goods; processed meat; and savoury pastries and pies. Save these discretionary choices for special occasions.



*The following health messages provide information about healthy eating behaviours for children and families.*

- > Children have smaller stomachs than adults and may need to eat more often than adults. Young children usually require three meals and two snacks throughout the day. Make sure snacks are healthy e.g. fruit, yoghurt, sandwiches, breakfast cereal and milk.
- > Young children are naturally 'neophobic' about food (they have natural fear of trying anything new). Research shows that it takes approximately ten tastes of a new food to learn to like it.
- > Children respond to role-modelling. Often children will try new foods if they see adults or other children enjoying this food. You may have heard, 'he/she would never eat this at home!' when the child eats it happily at child care or when visiting friends.
- > Eating meals together in a calm, pleasant environment is also important. This includes family meals and eating together with other children and carers in an early education setting. Sitting down away from other distractions (such as the television) can encourage enjoyment of healthy foods and promote social interaction.
- > Children can successfully regulate the amount of food they need from day to day. It is normal for children to eat quite a lot on one day and then much less for a day or two. Although this sometimes worries parents, this change is normal and doesn't mean your child is being difficult or is unwell. Appetite may vary because of spurts and plateaus in growth. It is best not to try too hard to encourage children to eat. Try to allow children to rely on their own appetites. A useful saying is 'parent/carer provides (healthy food choices), child decides (how much)'.
- > Avoid using food 'treats' or promises of food to encourage or reward good behaviour. Often such food 'treats' are high in sugar, salt or saturated fat (e.g. lollies, desserts, biscuits, hot chips and crisps). This approach has the unintended consequence of making children believe that these foods are nicer than healthier options. Words of praise for good behaviour are a better approach.

## Examples of practical actions

- > Organise staff training in healthy eating and good nutrition for families.
- > Familiarise yourself with The National Quality Standard (NQS) for early childhood education and care and outside school hours care services in Australia.
- > Run programs with parents/carers and children – e.g. Eat a Rainbow, FoodCents, The Healthy Eating Plate.
- > Link with SA Community Foodies – become a 'Foodie' (or link with someone who is).
- > Display and distribute healthy food ideas and recipes.



For more information

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