

Towards a healthy lifestyle....

When I used to go shopping with my Mum as a child, she would always say at the end, "Let's go and get some nice doughnuts to have with a cup of tea". Shopping became synonymous with having a doughnut. And my Mum's use of the word "nice" in front of it endorsed doughnuts as a good thing. As a mother myself, I would always buy my son a "nice doughnut" or something similar to nibble in the car on the way home from the supermarket. It has taken me about 15 years of conscious effort and a move to internet supermarket shopping to stop me thinking that a shopping trip is not complete without a doughnut. And I still feel that I'm betraying my late mother in some way by categorising doughnuts in a different way nowadays! A healthy lifestyle is as much about psychology as it is about diet, sleep, mindfulness and exercise.

I have drawn from many excellent websites and other resources for the information here and the full list of references appears at the bottom of the handout if you want to read more. I do mention some commercial companies by name but have tried not to favour one above another. There are many free resources available through the NHS, the Department of Health, Public Health England, your local authority, children's centres and schools. Use them all and let's live longer, healthier and happier lives together!

Dr Julia Thomson, Paediatric Consultant, Homerton University Hospital, London, UK

Getting it right from the start:

Young children should eat three child-size healthy meals (see <https://www.firststepsnutrition.org/> links under references below and www.infantandtoddlerforum.org) and two to three healthy snacks per day (see suggestions at <https://www.nhs.uk/change4life/food-facts/healthier-snacks-for-kids/100-calorie-snacks>).

Children (and adults actually) should not add extra salt to their food.

Try to keep foods containing refined sugar to one small portion per day at the most and combine with fruit. Only have sugary foods after meals to minimise damage to teeth.

Being a part of family meal times helps children to observe and learn more about healthy food. Involve them in preparing lunchboxes, meals and snacks. Let them make ice lollies out of sugar free squash or diluted fruit juice. Grow cress, bean sprouts, strawberries, chillies and tomatoes together.

Try not to eat in front of the television; as well as inhibiting family communication, people tend to eat too much when they are absent-mindedly snacking on the sofa!

Increase the amount of physical activity in your normal day; when you take a picnic to the park, take a frisbee or a ball too, take the stairs instead of the lift, dance to music with the kids while getting ready for work and school, walk to school instead of taking the bus.

Swim as a family, plan a weekly family walk (it's amazing how much talking children will do while walking – yes, even the teenagers).

Be a healthy role model for your children by sticking to a regular, balanced diet yourself; avoid linking food with emotions, avoid making negative comments on your own or others' weight or shape.

Bad habits are hard to break. The earlier children begin to enjoy regular physical activity and healthy food, the more likely they are to stick with good habits as they grow up!

ACTIVE KIDS ARE HAPPY KIDS

There are no medical guidelines as to how much or how far children should run or from what age and it is a hotly debated subject in running clubs and on blogs. Plenty of 8 year olds run 5 kilometres (3.1 miles) quite happily so make it fun and aim to get out as a family for a 30 minute run 3 times a week. "What?!" I hear you say. I said the same 7 weeks ago plus a whole lot more about weak knees and dodgy hips. The NHS app, Couch to 5K, is free to download and is a very gentle programme that starts with mainly walking. It can get the whole family from couch potatoes eating crisps in front of the TV to 5K runners in 9 weeks. But if you're going to make your kids do it, you know who has to set the example, don't you?



Available free on the AppStore and Google Play

Lots of us get a bit heavier as parents, spread out a bit around the middle. Whilst the goal of weight management in young children is to remain static whilst they get taller and "grow into their weight", teenagers and adults may need to lose a bit. The Couch to 5K programme coupled with small changes to what you eat could help you lose up to 1kg a week. 9kgs in 9 weeks – worth giving it a go?

*If you struggle to run for 60 seconds at a time, think of the programme as 9 **stages** rather than 9 **weeks**. Move on to the next stage when you and your children feel able. No pressure.*

Did you know?

Children should do at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day as a baseline. In short bursts is fine eg. a 15 minute brisk walk to and from school and a 30 minute run around at lunch time. Try getting off the bus a couple of stops early. Allow more time to get to nursery so toddlers can get out of the buggy and walk. Pick up leaves together, watch a digger or a squirrel. Make being outdoors together fun.

On at least 3 occasions per week the Department of Health suggests that children should *also* do more vigorous exercise (where they get out of breath and raise their heart rate). Eg. swimming club, football, running, playing hard on the outdoor gym or playground equipment. This is often harder to achieve; see what services are available for your children's age group in the local leisure and community centres. Many councils have women only exercise or dance sessions. How about a bit of Zumba or Bollywood dancing as a Mum and daughter activity?

The Eatwell Guide (formerly Eatwell Plate) was updated by Public Health England in 2016. Children learn about it at school yet very few parents who are responsible for what is served up at home have heard of it.



The main dietary messages of the Eatwell Guide:

Eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day. Fresh orange juice counts as only one I'm afraid, regardless of the number of glasses your child has! Fill at least a third of your and your children's plates with fruit and veg (see plate diagram). Kids refusing to eat vegetables? Try blending veg into sauces and curries to "hide" them or serve raw with hummus dip.

Base meals on potatoes, bread, rice, pasta or other starchy carbohydrates; choosing wholegrain versions where possible. A good portion of these foods (another third of the plate) stops your child getting hungry between meals and gives them good energy levels for both studying and physical activity. Be careful about putting oil, ghee, salt or butter with them though.

Have some dairy or dairy alternatives; choosing lower fat and lower sugar options. Eg. unsweetened soya or almond drinks. Growing children need calcium but > 1 pint of milk per day once they are > 1 year old can stop them eating other foods and lead to iron deficiency anaemia. Green vegetables and fish with bones eg. sardines are also good sources of calcium. Teenage boys need 1000mg calcium per day; 1 pint of milk has 600mg.

Eat some beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins (including 2 portions of fish every week, one of which should be oily). Protein is important for healthy bones, teeth, muscles and hair. It also takes longer to digest and stops the snacking! Try to grill or poach though, not fry.

Choose unsaturated oils and spreads and eat in small amounts. We all need some fat to help us absorb some of our vitamins but most of us eat far too much of it. Try swapping butter, ghee and animal-based fats for olive oil and sunflower spread. Try a "1 cal" oil spray if your family is trying to lose weight.

Recommended daily calorie intakes from total food and drink: women 2000kcal, men 2500kcal, children aged 7-10 1500 to 2000kcal, teenagers 2200 (girls) to 3000kcal (boys) depending on levels of activity. More on this at <https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/childrens-health/how-many-calories-do-teenagers-need/>.

Get this picture in a legible form and read more about the science and history of this plate at <https://www.nutrition.org.uk/healthyiving/healthydiet/eatwell.html>.

Drink 6-8 cups/glasses of fluid a day. Water is the best. Avoid fizzy and energy drinks or choose the sugar free options. 1 glass of fresh fruit juice (not squash) per day will count towards your child's "5-a-day" fruit and vegetables but watch the sugar content if they are having more than that. Keep milk to a maximum of around a pint a day in the over 1s. Use semi-skimmed milk from the age of 2.

Keep any favoured foods high in fat, salt or sugar for occasional treats such as birthday parties. Don't keep them in the house - you will give in too easily and children will keep asking if they know they are there. Try not to use sweets, biscuits, cakes and chocolate as rewards for good behaviour. Tell the grandparents too!

Did you know?

There is disagreement over whether breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Healthy people tend to eat breakfast but not eating breakfast does not necessarily cause you to be unhealthy. It does stop snacking. Try the "overnight oats" recipe below for a healthy, filling breakfast that'll see them (and you) through till lunch time.

The Department of Health's emphasis on weight management schemes over the last few years, whilst understandable because of the risk to health of being overweight, has led to more angst in children and young people about their body image and has led to an increased referral rate to Eating Disorder Teams.

Parents are right to be concerned about the risk of pushing their children into anorexia or bulimia if they try to address the weight issue with them. But no parent, health professional, teacher or youth leader can ignore the fact that we are seeing life expectancy drop in the UK for the first time in years. Being overweight increases the risk of life limiting conditions such as type 2 diabetes, cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure and therefore stroke.

How can we get the balance right?

BODY MASS INDEX (BMI)

The BMI is a ratio of weight to height. It is not a perfect tool as many athletes have a high BMI because of muscle bulk and many inactive, thin people have a perfect BMI but are not very fit or healthy. However, most of us are not athletes and so it can give us an idea of whether we and our children are roughly the right weight for height.

The BMI in a child will not be in the same range as an adult's and it changes throughout childhood. Thus a normal 6 year old will have a BMI of around 15 which would be severely underweight in a teenager. If you want to look at the detailed BMI charts, they are at https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018-03/boys_and_girls_bmi_chart.pdf.

However, the easiest way to see if you and your children have a normal BMI is to plug your/their age, gender, height and weight into the NHS app at <https://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Healthyweightcalculator.aspx>. You can also find out on this site all about healthy eating and healthy activity levels for children of all ages.

Don't diet, don't calorie count, don't make yourself hungry, energy-less and bad-tempered!

This is the message coming through loud and clear from the two main commercial weight-loss programmes, Slimming World and WW (previously Weight Watchers). They urge us to move away from thinking what we *can't* eat and concentrate on all the things that we *can* eat. Their nutritionists have worked out which foods are more likely to make us put on weight and which may actually help us lose weight and - best of all - no calorie counting is required. There are subtle differences between the 2 programmes but the underlying theories are the same. Psychology is as important as diet and that's why these plans work. Add a bit more physical activity to your plan (eg. the Couch to 5K programme) and watch your mood improve as the weight drops off. Faddy diets, strict fasting and over-controlling our intake makes the body go into starvation mode – we slow right down, can't think straight, become a bit obsessive, have no energy, look unhealthy and often have a big sugar binge after a while to make ourselves feel better. Sound familiar? Many women and some men will know what I am talking about. Do we really want that for our own children?

SLIMMING WORLD'S FOOD GROUPS

- 1** Free foods – eat as much of them as you / your child wants. Fill at least one third of your plate with “speed foods”. This correlates with the fruit and veg bit of the Eatwell Guide above. Boiled eggs, lean meat, fish, pulses and many carbohydrates such as rice, pasta, quinoa, couscous and even potatoes are all “free” as long as you don't put oil or butter with or in them.
- 2** Healthy Extras – eat one measured portion from group A per day (dairy items) and one from group B (mainly cereals) if the family is trying to lose weight. Increase these healthy extras in order to maintain weight on a healthy diet for both children and adults. See <https://www.slimmingworld.co.uk/downloads/slimmingworldonline-canada-healthy-extras.pdf>
- 3** Syns – eat 5-15 “syns” per day. Best to stick to this to keep the diet healthy, whether you or your child are trying to lose weight or not. Most foods not listed as free foods or healthy extras have a syn value. Many supermarkets list their products' individual syn values on their websites. Two small vegetable samosas = 7.5 syns and a jam doughnut is a disappointing 9.5 syns. I am not convinced that calling these high fat and sugar foods “syns” is a good idea for children but the principles behind these 3 types of food groups work for children as well as adults.
WW uses a point system with the same underlying nutritional science and sense.

It is not free to join WW or Slimming World but some people benefit from being part of a club and sometimes paying to be a member makes you work harder at it! Young people are welcome to join either of them.

Children from the age of 13 can join Weight Watchers but need a doctor's permission. More information at <https://www.weightwatchers.com/uk/how-it-works>.

Like Slimming World, they have a list of zero point foods which your child can eat unlimited amounts of. This and an explanation of how Weight Watchers' freestyle programme works is available at <https://drizzlemeskinny.com/welcome-weight-watchers-freestyle/> if you want to get to grips with it before committing to be a fully paid up member!

If accompanying a fully paid up adult family member, 11-15 year olds can join Slimming World free. They must be with an adult who is responsible for the food shopping in the household. If the adult is not a member themselves or the young person is 16 or 17 years old, there is a reduced weekly fee: <https://www.slimmingworld.co.uk/our-members/free2go.aspx>.

Did you know?

It takes most people about 12 weeks to change a habit and the same time for taste buds to alter. Change the family's diet and sugar and salt cravings should lessen after just a few weeks.

Ingredients for Slimming World's Overnight Oats (1 adult portion):

- 40g porridge oats
 - 200g fat free natural yoghurt
 - Mixed blueberries, strawberries and raspberries
1. Layer the porridge oats, yoghurt and fruit in a jar, large pint glass or bowl. Cover and put in the refrigerator overnight so the porridge absorbs all the yoghurt.
 2. In the morning stir so all the layers are mixed together and top with more fruit.

Tip: Swap the berries for different fruits - pear and blackberry, orange and peach, or apple and cinnamon. Fresh or frozen fruit is good. Pureed and cooked fruit is not quite as good because it loses its filling power and it is easy to eat too much of it (same goes for smoothies by the way). Tinned fruit, even if it says “no added sugar” might still have a lot of added fructose.



Kim is 13 and when I asked her how to get her age group moving more she asked whether I'd heard of Sweatcoin. Its developers describe it as a new breed of step counter and activity tracker app that pays you digital currency - sweat coin – for your steps to spend on gadgets, sports kit, fitness training, healthy nutrition and much, much more. What do young people think?



Kim thinks it's better than a Fitbit: "it's an app that pays you to walk and do exercise. It uses GPS so you can't cheat and it only counts outdoor steps. With a Fitbit, if you wave your arms up and down, your steps go up!"

It only counts outdoor steps to encourage people to go outside and exercise, instead of getting steps from walking around in the house. You have a goal that you are trying to reach which depends on which level you are on. You get one Sweatcoin per 1000 steps and you can't cheat! You can then use these coins to buy things from the shop on the app, when you have saved up enough coins. There is a thing called the "Sweatcoin Algorithm" which prevents cheating. The app works in the background so you don't have to worry about it not counting steps (as long as you've got your phone). This app is free on the App Store or the Play Store.

HEALTHY START VITAMINS AND VOUCHERS

Healthy Start is a national scheme which provides free food vouchers and vitamins to women and children who receive particular benefits or are teenage parents. The food vouchers can be exchanged at some shops and supermarkets for milk, fresh and frozen fruit and vegetables, and infant formula milk.

Who qualifies for Healthy Start?

You qualify for Healthy Start if you're at least 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under four years old and you or your family get:

- Income Support, or
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, or
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, or
- Child Tax Credit (with an annual family income of £16,190 or less)
- Universal Credit (with family take home pay of ≤ £408 per month)

You also qualify if you are under 18 and pregnant, even if you don't get any of the above benefits or tax credits.

How to apply?

Application forms are available from midwives and health visitors and can also be downloaded from the Healthy Start website (<https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/>). Applications for Healthy Start must be signed by a registered health professional – usually a midwife or health visitor (but it can be any registered nurse or doctor) and sent to:

**Freepost RRTR-SYAE-JKCR
Healthy Start Issuing Unit
PO Box 1067
Warrington, WA55 1EG**

Did you know?

All children from 6 months to 5 years of age should be on a multivitamin containing 10mcg (400 units) of vitamin D unless they are taking at least 500mls/day of formula milk.

In Hackney, all pregnant women, mothers of children up to the age of 1 and children from 4 weeks of age to 4 years can get free (non means-tested) vitamins from community pharmacies. Other boroughs may do likewise – ask your health visitor.

How much sleep do children need?

There's a very detailed guide at <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/how-much-sleep-do-kids-need/>:

6 months old	daytime 3 hours, night time 11 hours
2 year old	daytime 1.5 hours, night time 11.5 hours
5 year old	daytime 0 hours, night time 11 hours
11 year old	daytime 0 hours, night time 9.5 hours
15 year old	daytime 0 hours, night time 9 hours

What is good "sleep hygiene"?

- ♦ Turn screens off at least one hour before bedtime, charge phones in the hall overnight and make children's bedrooms screen-free
- ♦ Have a warm bath in the evening, no caffeinated drinks after 6pm
- ♦ Keep lighting low and use blackout blinds on bright windows
- ♦ Teenagers sometimes believe what an app says more than their parents' well-meant advice. Try the inbuilt bedtime app on iPhones (<https://www.imore.com/how-use-bedtime-clock-iphone-ipad>) or a meditation app: <https://www.headspace.com/meditation/sleep>.

"I don't want to talk to my child about losing weight in case she gets an eating disorder. What should I look out for?"

An eating disorder represents an unhealthy attitude to food which can take over someone's life and make them ill. Men and women of any age can get an eating disorder, but they most commonly affect young women aged 13 to 17 years old.

Regardless of age, eating disorders are about underlying emotions, not food. Often the eating disorder develops as a way for a child to feel in control over what's happening in their life. It is therefore easy to see that an eating disorder may well develop in a young person who is teased, bullied or criticised for being overweight.

You can get more information about the different types of eating disorders at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/eating-disorders/>.

Warning signs to look out for in your child include:

- ☞ dramatic weight loss
- ☞ lying about how much and when they've eaten, or how much they weigh
- ☞ eating a lot of food very fast, going to the bathroom a lot after eating, often returning looking flushed
- ☞ excessively or obsessively exercising
- ☞ avoiding social gatherings where there might be food
- ☞ cutting food into small pieces or eating very slowly
- ☞ wearing loose or baggy clothes to hide their weight loss
- ☞ no longer having monthly periods
- ☞ a change in mood and energy levels

There is a very good Australian FAQ sheet for parents about promoting a positive body image available as a linked PDF from <https://www.eatingdisorders.org.au/eating-disorders/eating-disorders-children-teens-and-older-adults>

An idea for a ball game: "Categories" from the Hackney Active Kids Guide available at

<https://www.learningtrust.co.uk/sites/default/files/document/Hackney%20Active%20Kids%20Guide.pdf>

A ball can keep children occupied for hours. As well as netball, football and volleyball, there are lots of simple variations on catch games. For 'Categories' – get all the players standing in a circle and decide on a category for that round, for example colours, animals, countries. Each player must say the name of a colour/animal/country before they catch the ball. If they can't come up with a name, or if they miss the ball, they are out. The ball is thrown randomly. The last player remaining wins the game and a new category is chosen.

Healthy lunchboxes

Did you know?

The average office worker spends £10.59 on coffee, breakfast, lunch and snacks per day. That's £2500 per year. Get them into the habit of healthy lunchboxes early.

- 😊 Add spinach, lettuce or rocket to sandwiches, which is a great way to help to meet your five a day. Wholemeal or granary bread is best – go for thick slices. If your kids don't like this type of bread, have you tried half and half bread?
- 😊 Try a couscous, rice, quinoa or pasta salad as a source of carbohydrate as an alternative to sandwiches. Breadsticks and crunchy vegetable sticks like celery or carrots with a reduced fat hummus or beetroot dip can be a popular alternative and is also a good snack for the kids to come home to after school. Cheese and pineapple on sticks is a good source of calcium for growing children and fun to make and eat together.
- 😊 Nuts are a good source of protein and fibre but also have quite a lot of fat in them so allow them in moderation. They are also a choking hazard for young children. Schools may not allow nuts in lunchboxes but try seeds like sunflower or pumpkin seeds or plain popcorn instead of crisps.
- 😊 Swap sweets, chocolate or biscuits for fruit or baby tomatoes. Low fat yoghurt or fromage frais works well if your child has access to a spoon. A currant bun or teacake is a good idea as long as it is the only sugary food in a day.
- 😊 Try adding a slice of lemon, cucumber or strawberry to their bottle of water – it's fruity tasting without the added sugar.
- 😊 Older children and adults might do well with a flask of homemade vegetable soup for lunch, warming and nutritious (and uses up the leftovers...).

References and other resources:

First Steps Nutrition on Good food choice and portion sizes for 1-4 year olds:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59f75004f09ca48694070f3b/t/5a926be4ec212d9451c595ce/1519545331398/Good_food_choices_and_portion_sizes_Jan2018.pdf. First Steps Nutrition on Snacks for 1-4 year olds:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59f75004f09ca48694070f3b/t/5afc5f01f950b7630a19e028/1526488846381/Eating_well_snacks_for_1-4_years_for_web.pdf. First Steps Nutrition on Packed lunches for 1-4 year olds:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59f75004f09ca48694070f3b/t/5a926d288165f549b5a68ca2/1519545646246/Packed_lunches_Dec17.pdf

First Steps Nutrition on Advice for families who want to bring up their under 5 as a vegan:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59f75004f09ca48694070f3b/t/5a5a4935ec212dd5067a0622/1515866446317/Eating_well_Vegans_Oct_2017_fin_al.pdf

<https://www.infantandtoddlerforum.org> houses evidence-based fact sheets on healthy eating for very young children. Topics include fussy eating, portion sizes, iron deficiency, early obesity and other common nutritional problems.

https://www.csp.org.uk/system/files/fit_for_the_future_kids_leaflet_scotland_0_0.pdf is put together by The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy and the British Dietetic Association and is packed full of practical tips for a healthy, active lifestyle for all children, particularly primary school age.

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/overweight-children-advice-for-parents/>. Overweight children don't need to do more exercise than slimmer children. Their extra body weight means they'll naturally burn more calories for the same activity.

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/healthy-eating-for-teens/> is a page written for teenagers with pointers to a healthier lifestyle.

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/> covers sleep, mindfulness, exercise and diet with lots of good practical advice and links to other sections. Try the mood zone at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/>.

HENRY (<https://www.henry.org.uk>) provides a wide range of free support for families with children 0-5 including workshops, programmes, resources and online help. The HENRY approach supports behaviour change which helps parents gain the confidence, knowledge and skills they need to help the whole family adopt a healthier, happier lifestyle. See if there's a group near you at <https://www.henry.org.uk/whatson>.

<http://www.everyonehealth.co.uk/our-services/children/alive-n-kicking/> is the equivalent free weight management service for 5 – 19 year olds. Everyone Health also runs free schemes for adults wanting to adopt a healthier lifestyle.

<https://www.webmd.com/parenting/guide/kids-exercise-tips#1> is a common-sense American parent/patient information site. Exercise looks different to kids. To you, working out might mean running on a treadmill for 30 minutes or burning a set number of calories but kids are active in a different way than adults. Children exercise in short bursts and use their bodies in different directions. "Think of yourself as a playmate -- not a personal trainer."

https://www.nutrition.org.uk/attachments/article/261/Nutrition%20Requirements_Revised%20Oct%202017.pdf for those of you who like numbers! This is the British Nutrition Foundation's 2017 guide to recommended intakes of calories, carbohydrates (50% of daily energy intake of which free sugars should be 5% max), protein, calcium, zinc, vitamins etc. in adults and children.

Eating healthily does not have to be more expensive. The BBC has a great series called "Eat well for less". Have a look at this clip entitled *Healthy Snacks for Fussy Eaters*: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05k6qsj>. Tips for reducing your food bill at https://www.bbc.com/food/diets/could_you_cut_your_food_bill_by_a_third.

Train like a Jedi at <https://www.nhs.uk/change4life/activities>. Change4life is an NHS site packed full of practical ideas to help families adopt a healthier lifestyle for life.

<http://www.parkrun.org.uk/> organise free, weekly, 5km timed runs around the world. They are open to everyone and are safe and easy to take part in. A good way to keep up the running once you've finished Couch to 5K.

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I hope you have found at least some of this handout helpful. Happy, sensible parents aim, not for perfection but to be "good enough". Have fun making your family's lifestyle "healthy enough"!