

Breakfast



A good breakfast gets children off to a great start, providing valuable nutrients to fuel them through the day. Choose a breakfast cereal that is high in complex carbohydrates such as **Ready Brek, Weetabix, Shredded Wheat** or porridge. These will provide a slow and steady release of energy throughout the morning.

Watch out for other children's cereals because many are high in simple carbohydrates (sugar and processed starches) which quickly release their energy. This rapid release of energy means that children can be running low on fuel by mid-morning, leaving them less able to concentrate and hungry for another sugary snack. Highly sugared cereals can also play havoc with young teeth.



Cereals like Sugar Puffs claim to be 'nutritious' and display lots of reassuring information about added vitamins and minerals. But this cereal is an amazing 49% sugar!

Tip When buying cereals, check the Nutrition Information panel on the side or back of the packet. If the cereal contains 10g or more of sugar per 100g then it is a **high sugar** product.

Better breakfasts

Choose breakfast cereals like the ones mentioned above. Skip the sugar and sprinkle with raisins and sultanas, sliced fresh fruit such as strawberries, apples or bananas, or tangy chopped, dried apricots.

Provide plenty of milk, and if you can, a glass of orange juice (cheap 'economy' orange juice is just as good as more expensive brands).

Wholemeal or granary bread makes healthier toast than white bread. For a really nutritious breakfast, top the toast with scrambled or poached eggs, grilled cheese or sliced tomatoes and cheese.

Watch out for children's cereal bars like these Coco Pops and Nesquik Cereal & Milk Bars. These are high in unhealthy saturated fats and contain over one third sugar. Bars like these are a poor substitute for a healthy breakfast.



Fake foods

Instead of using wholesome ingredients many manufacturers use the cheapest possible ingredients when making children's foods. They rely on an arsenal of colourings, flavourings and sweeteners, and bulk foods out using low nutrition starches and added water.



These eye-catching DairyLea Lunchables contain 'turkey' that is only 55% meat, and cheese that is only 80% cheese. They claim to be a 'good source of calcium' but don't point out that they are also a good source of unhealthy saturated fats and contain a whopping 2.75g of salt.

Tip Fake foods can look convincing, but they can't hide from a careful eye. Checking out the ingredients list will quickly reveal if a food contains starch (to bulk it out), extra water, or added sugar, fats or salt. And watch out for the cosmetic additives such as colourings and flavourings, which disguise low quality ingredients.

Companies in the classroom

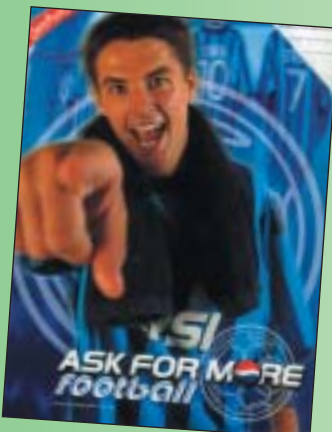


Companies will try almost anything to get children's attention (and pocket money), and school walls don't always provide children with the protection they deserve.

Cadbury has recently launched a *Get Active* campaign in which Cadbury provides 'free' sports equipment to schools in return for children collecting thousands of chocolate wrappers. Many people think chocolate is 'just a harmless treat', but to earn a single £10 basketball, primary school children and their families must spend over £70 on chocolate, consuming over two kilograms of fat and over 38,000 calories. A junior basketball team would need to play for 18 hours just to burn off all the calories consumed to get one basketball!

Tesco tried a similar approach, targeting parents' purses in exchange for 'free computers for schools'. The Consumer's Association pointed out that parents would have to spend about £45,000 at Tesco in return for a single graphic scanner, worth about £80. To get a computer worth less than £700, mums and dads had to spend nearly £220,000 in Tesco's stores!

JazzyBooks have infiltrated schools to an even greater degree, by providing free, sponsored exercise books like the one pictured. As children work, they are constantly exposed to adverts for soft drinks such as Pepsi, 7up and Vimto.



Tip Many schools are short of cash and welcome initiatives that bring in extra resources. But schools and parents should be suspicious of any scheme that encourages children to purchase and consume high fat, high sugar or high salt foods.

The Food Commission Guide to

Children's Food

Children deserve the best food and drink we can provide, but research shows that most children are eating too much saturated fat, sugar and salt, and not enough fruit and vegetables.

More than one in five children are now overweight, and one third of children have tooth decay before they even start primary school. A poor diet can mean poor concentration at school, and increases the risk of heart disease, cancer, obesity and diabetes in later life.

Children understand healthy eating messages, but few can resist the lure of junk foods and

soft drinks. After all, sugar, salt and fat all taste good – especially if manufacturers throw in artificial sweeteners and flavourings.

So what can parents and others who care for children do? We can't stop manufacturers and retailers targeting children with poor quality foods, but you can learn what to watch out for. This poster aims to help you understand the tricks of the trade and to sort the good from the bad.

When you know what to look out for you'll find it's much easier to fight (and win) the battle for our children's hearts, minds and stomachs!

Judge the junk

To judge the quality of the food which you buy for your children, take a close look at the Nutrition Information panel which many foods display. You can then use the guide below to work out if the product contains unhealthy amounts of fat, sugar or salt (sodium).

	Amount per 100g (or per serving if larger than 100g)	
	This is a lot	This is a little
Total fat	20g	3g
Saturated fat	5g	1g
Sugar	10g	2g
Sodium	0.5g	0.1g

Tip Not all foods will have a Nutrition Information panel (although we think they should). But the ingredients list can also be a guide, because ingredients are listed in order of weight. For example, if sugar comes near the top of an ingredients list, then the food is very likely to contain a lot of sugar.

Additives

After advertising and packaging food to give it child-appeal, manufacturers have one further trick to make their products attractive: additives. Colours, flavours, flavour-boosters, thickeners, gums, starches, emulsifiers... There are over 3,000 chemical compounds available to food manufacturers to give their products more appeal than they might otherwise have.

The Food Commission found that over two-thirds of children's foods contained added colouring and/or flavouring. The foods with the worst nutritional profiles (high in fat, sugar or salt) tended to be the ones that used the most additives.

Tip If you want to avoid additives when buying food simply check the ingredients list. If you see a list of E-numbers or an ingredient you do not like the look of, choose another product instead.

Tip For most children additives are safe, but for a few children they are a definite hazard and can provoke allergic or behavioural reactions. If in doubt, cut the additives out and see if things improve.

Government research has revealed that four food colourings and a preservative used in many popular children's foods can cause temper tantrums and disruptive behaviour in up to a quarter of toddlers. The suspect additives are: Tartrazine (E102), Sunset Yellow (E110), Carmoisine (E122), Ponceau 4R (E124) and Sodium Benzoate (E211). At present these additives are still legal and can be found in numerous children's foods and drinks.

Parent power - what you can do

Tactics

- 1 Encourage your child to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables per day. **Tip:** a portion is about a handful.
- 1 No room for junk: throw out pastries, pies and biscuits, fill your cupboards and your fridge with healthier snacks
- 1 Put out a healthy snack just before they come in from school. Put another next to them while they watch TV
- 1 At meal time, serve a healthy starter – a bowl of fresh fruit chopped up small
- 1 Disguise the health: add a little frozen spinach to a Bolognese sauce, blend vegetables into a tasty soup
- 1 Hide the salt cellar, and don't use salt in cooking – use more spices, herbs, onion, garlic, lemon and vinegar products.
- 1 Keep sweet drinks for special occasions.

Drinks

- 1 Juice pop: 1/3 fruit juice, 2/3 sparkling water, ice and a slice – a quick, healthy soft drink.
- 1 Nutty smoothie: 1 banana, 1 teaspoon peanut butter, 1/2 pint milk, handful of ice – all whizzed in the blender.

Nutrients

A balanced intake of nutrients is essential to children's health and growth, so it's natural to reach for foods and drinks which make nutritional claims. But watch out, many of these claims can be very misleading.

Here are some of the claims you will see on children's food and drink products. All these claims were found on foods high in fat, sugar or salt.

*'Rich in vitamin C'
'A good source of calcium'
'Fortified with vitamins and iron'
'Added vitamins and minerals'*

Tip Although vitamins and minerals are essential to good health, consuming them in high fat, high sugar, high salt foods is not the best way to get them. The major, diet-related diseases which threaten our children in later life, such as obesity, coronary heart disease and cancer, are linked to a diet which is high in fat, sugar and salt, with **not enough** fruit and vegetables.

So next time you're tempted by a flashy nutrient claim - turn the packet over and check the sugar, fat and salt content – because that's where the real health dangers are hidden.

Spot the hidden sugar

Sugar can be hard to spot in children's food, as it is called many different things. All of the following are forms of sugar, and all can be harmful to teeth!

*sucrose fructose apple juice maltose
dextrose glucose grape juice honey*

Tip Some soft drinks and foods pretend their high sugar content is good for us. This bottle of Lucozade contains roughly 12 teaspoons of sugar! It boasts that 'Lucozade ENERGY provides GLUCOSE, the brain and body's NATURALLY PREFERRED ENERGY source'.



It is true that the brain and body quickly metabolise simple sugars like glucose – but most of us already consume far more sugar than we need. Sugary drinks like this, often targeted at teenagers, undermine sensible health advice which is to **CUT BACK ON SUGAR**.

Tip Watch out for 'No added sugar' or 'Unsweetened' claims. Manufacturers often use concentrated, high sugar fruit juices instead of actual sugar. Such products can still be bad for your teeth!

Artificial sweeteners
Artificial sweeteners may not rot teeth, but they still encourage sweet tastes, so are best avoided. The government considers them safe, but they are **banned** from baby foods.

Nibbles

- 1 Fresh fruit: you can't have too much around the kitchen
- 1 Cereals: not just for breakfast – but go for the low sugar sorts
- 1 Nuts: some taste better lightly roasted (under the grill or in a hot oven)
- 1 Seeds: sunflower, sesame, pumpkin etc, also can be nice lightly roasted
- 1 Dried fruit, fruit and nut mixes – make up your own and keep a bowl or jar available
- 1 Fridge bait: let them graze on cold pizza, curries, noodles and rice with grated cheese
- 1 Have plenty of bread and rolls, for quick sandwiches or toast
- 1 Top with low fat soft cheese, mashed banana, peanut butter or savoury spreads

On standby

- 1 Canned sweetcorn, baked beans, tuna
- 1 Frozen peas, sweetcorn, broad beans, oven chips
- 1 Quick fillers: rice, pasta, noodles, tortillas, bread, pitta

Is children's food healthy?

We surveyed children's foods and found that only one in ten products aimed specifically at children could be regarded as healthy! And this was without looking at crisps, soft drinks and confectionery. The vast majority of products were deemed 'nutritional disasters', with high levels of fats, sugar, salt and additives.

These Kellogg's Screamin' Fruit Spurters certainly look fruity and healthy, but their main ingredient is tooth-rotting sugar. If you want children to get the goodness of fruit – give them real fruit, not high sugar snacks like this.



Children are encouraged to eat a poor diet by TV advertising, according to a series of surveys of what children watch. Typically, 95% of food advertising on children's prime-time television is for foods and drinks with high levels of fat, sugar and/or salt, with only a very few adverts for healthy foods.

Advertising helps to enhance what the industry calls pester power – the ability of children to nag their parents into buying products. It is no secret that pester power is big business.

Bernard Matthews boasts of 'successfully harnessing pester power' in this advert from a trade magazine.



Salt

A very small amount of salt is essential for our health, but almost all of us are consuming much more salt than is healthy. The problem is that salt contains sodium, and too much sodium is a major risk factor for high blood pressure, stroke and premature death from heart disease.

The government is so concerned about the salt intake of children that it has issued new guidelines just for them. Unfortunately, many children's foods are so high in salt that these guidelines are based on what is considered 'achievable' instead of 'ideal'. The recommended salt intake is thus **much** higher than is necessary for our health.

Recommended maximum daily salt intake for children and adults

	Salt	Sodium
0-6 months	no salt should be added to diet*	
7-12 months	1g	0.4g
1-3 year old	2g	0.8g
4-6 year old	3g	1.2g
7-10 year old	5g	2g
11 years - adult	6g	2.4g

* Breast or formula milk will supply all necessary sodium

High salt foods contain: 0.5g or more of sodium per 100g. 1.25g or more of salt per 100g. Remember – sodium is just a part of salt. 1.25g of salt contains 0.5g of sodium.

Tip High levels of salt are found in an incredible number of foods, including many which you wouldn't expect to be salty. For instance, many children's cereals are high in salt, even those that claim to be nutritious. Other high salt foods include bread, bacon, ready meals, burgers, sausages and baked beans.

To spot the salt, check the nutrition panel for either salt or sodium. If a product doesn't give this information, it may be hiding something.

How the salt adds up

A six year old child should eat a maximum of 3g of salt in a day, but many children's foods are so salty that this can be very hard to achieve.

If a six year old ate a bowl of Frosties for breakfast (0.6g salt), had a mid-morning snack of Hula Hoops (1g salt), a Cheestrings Attack-a-Snak for lunch (2.5g salt), and two Findus Crispy Pancakes (2g salt) with a can of Heinz Teletubbies Pasta Shapes in Tomato Sauce (2g salt) for tea, they would consume 8.1g of salt in a day. That's nearly three times their recommended maximum daily intake!



This poster was produced by The Food Commission, an independent watchdog which campaigns for safer, healthier food in the UK.

If you would like to know more about our work and publications, including books on children's food and our regular journal the *Food Magazine*, please contact us at the address below or visit www.foodcomm.org.uk Further copies of this and other posters are also available for £2.50 each.

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