

## NUTRITION FOR THE UNDER 5's

What can be more important than a healthy diet for young children? There is a huge amount of advice on nutrition available to parents and people working with children, but much of the advice is conflicting and it is very hard to know which advice you should be following.

Healthy eating and physical activity are essential for growth and development in childhood. To help children develop healthy eating patterns from an early age, it is important that the food eating patterns that they are exposed to - both at home and outside the home - are those which promote positive attitudes to good nutrition.

Women throughout Ireland and the UK have significantly changed their eating habits and it is widely recognised that women have a low vegetable intake and have relatively low folic acid intakes before and after conception.

A survey by the Scottish office in 1993 revealed drastically low rates of breastfeeding. In parts of Scotland less than 10% of mothers are breastfeeding one day after delivery and they also found that Scottish infants are weaned too soon, they are often introduced to cereals and cow's milk too early and transferred on to an inappropriate diet within the first two years of life as they acquire their family's unhealthy eating patterns. Some of these dietary practices may explain the high rates of iron deficiency in infants and young children which is a cause for concern in relation to brain development as well as anaemia.

- It is recommended that all children over the age of 2 years should be eating 3-4 portions of fruit and vegetables per day
- Whole grain or granary bread and cereals should be eaten twice daily
- Children over the age of two years should drink semi-skimmed milk
- Children should be eating fish twice a week
- Children should be eating meat products no more than twice a week
- ... and confectionery should be strictly limited

Babies and toddlers are often looked after by someone other than their parents for all or some of the day and for clarification we are using the term "carer" in relation to everyone involved in the feeding of young children.

### **Infant nutrition (up to one year)**

Children in the first year of life are following individual feeding and sleeping patterns. It is recommended that these are not disrupted but wherever possible integrated into the carer's timetable for the day.

### **Breast v. bottle milk**

Breast milk is the best food for infants. Carers should support breastfeeding mothers and encourage them to continue providing breast milk. Mothers who are breastfeeding and who may wish to feed their baby in the childcare setting should have warm, private facilities made available to them. Other mothers will usually provide expressed breast milk in a bottle for the carer to give to the infant. Breast fed babies should not be given any other milks or drinks, except cooled boiled water, without the permission of the baby's mother, as this can interfere with successful breastfeeding.

If expressed breast milk is not provided in a bottle, infants should be given an appropriate infant milk or formula in a bottle. This should be made up with cooled boiled water according to the manufacturers' instructions on the package.

Bottled drinking water may be used to make up feeds in situations where the water may be unsafe or difficult to obtain, for example when travelling. Only certain bottled waters are suitable. They must be still, not carbonated, and have a sodium (Na) level of less than 150mg/litre. (Scottish Executive, 2001). The label on the bottle should give this information. Bottled water must still be boiled and then cooled before making up the feed.

Babies who are bottle fed should be held and have warm physical contact with an alternative adult while being fed. In day care centres, day school, residential care centres, hospitals etc It is best that babies are fed by the same person at each feed.

Babies should never be left propped up with bottles, as this is both dangerous and inappropriate to babies' emotional needs.

From 6 months of age, infants should be introduced to drinking from a cup or a beaker, and from the age of 12 months, they should be discouraged from drinking from a bottle.

Babies receive all their nutritional requirements from milk up to 4 - 6 months of age. Cow's milk is not suitable as a main drink for infants under 12 months. However, from 4 - 6 months, whole cow's milk can be used as an ingredient in weaning foods - for example to moisten mashed potato.

No drinks other than breast or infant milk, or cooled boiled water are necessary.

However we know that people will continue to use flavoured drinks in the mistaken belief that infants need them. If drinks other than milk or water are ever given - for example baby juices or baby drinks - these should be diluted with at least 8 parts water and should be confined to mealtimes. Because of the risk to dental health, children over

6 months should never be given these drinks in a feeding bottle. Water given to children under 9 months, either directly or in a diluted drink should be boiled and cooled first.

" Carers and parents should be reminded regularly that infants do not need any other fluids other than appropriate milk and cooled, boiled water.

Adult-type soft drinks or 'diet' drinks, tea and coffee are never recommended for infants.

**Parents leaflets about Breastfeeding and Bottle feeding are available from your Health Visitor or from the local pharmacist.**

### **Weaning (from 4-6 months)**

Weaning should not begin before four months of age. Up to four months of age babies receive all their nutritional requirements from breast milk, infant milk or formula. No food should ever be added to a baby's bottle.

First solids should be pureed vegetables or fruits, or rice (you can use flaked rice as it is softer when cooked). It is important to offer very small amounts of a variety of flavours and pureed or soft textures at first.

Pureed cooked meat, fish and pulses (for example peas, beans and lentils) are suitable foods to begin to include in the diet a couple of weeks after weaning has begun. Between 6 and 12 months, food should be given which allows the infant to learn to chew and accept a wide variety of food textures. The texture can very gradually be changed after six months, from pureed to mashed, then to chopped up small.

Eggs can also be introduced from 6 months of age. Eggs given to babies or toddlers should always be cooked until both the yolk and the white are solid.

Naturally sweet fruits (such as bananas) can be used to sweeten foods rather than adding sugar. Sugars, honey and artificial sweeteners should not be added to foods for infants.

Foods containing gluten (such as bread, porridge, pasta or chapattis) should not be given to infants under 6 months.

Salt should not be added to food for infants.

Commercial baby foods are available for appropriate ages and stages. These are particularly useful for days out and when travelling. If using commercial weaning foods, follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully.

### Normal fluid requirements

Age	Fluid requirements (metric)	Fluid requirements (imperial)
0 - 6 months	150 mls per kg of body weight per day	2.5 fl.oz. per lb. of body weight per day
7 - 12 months	120 mls/kg/day	2 fl.oz / lb /day

### Which milks are suitable to give infants as a main drink?

(Infants = children under 12 months.)

#### Breast milk

Breast Milk From birth onwards

Breast milk provides the best source of nourishment for the early months of life.

#### Infant Milk Birth to 12 months

Cow's milk specially modified for infants is labelled as such.

Follow the instructions given on the packet or tin when choosing and preparing infant formula.

#### Soya Infant Formula Birth to 5 years

Not suitable for general use. This has been developed for infants with proven lactose intolerance or cow's milk protein intolerance. It may be given from birth, if advised by a doctor. These formulae contain sugar in the form of glucose which is more harmful to teeth than the lactose in infant milk based on cow's milk. Care should be taken that infants are not left with bottles for long periods and children should be given soya infant formula in cups, preferably with meals.

#### Follow-on infant milk

Follow-on Infant Milk Suitable from 6 months onwards

No reason to change to this from infant milk or formula if less than 12 months old.

#### Whole Cow's Milk\* Not Suitable for infants

It can be used in cooking but not as a main drink until over 12 months old.

Semi-Skinned Milk, Skimmed Cow's Milk, Evaporated Milk, Condensed Milk, Soya drinks, Oat drinks and Rice drinks are not suitable for infants.

**Goat's Milk\*** Not suitable for infants unless recommended by a paediatrician

\*Milks used for under fives must always be pasteurised.

### Nutrition for children aged 1 to 5 years

After weaning on to a variety of food tastes, children should be encouraged to eat a variety of foods from each of the four main food groups every day.



**The four main food groups are:**

**1. Fruit and vegetables.**

Number of servings per day: 2 vegetables and 2 fruits

Fruit and vegetables are also useful as snacks. Try some raw vegetables and offer vegetable soups.

You can use a wide variety including fresh, frozen, canned or dried.

**2. Bread, cereals and potatoes**

Number of servings per day: 4 or more

Try to include some at each meal. They are also useful as snacks. It's best to include some wholemeal and whole grain varieties.

**3. Milk and dairy foods**

Number of servings per day: 3

Children aged one to five need about one pint of whole milk a day.

Drinking more than a pint may spoil the appetite for other foods.

Semi-skimmed milk may be given from the age of 2 years provided the child is eating a wide variety of foods and is growing and gaining weight normally. Cheese, yoghurt, fromage frais and milk puddings are useful alternatives.

**4. Meat, fish and alternatives**

Number of servings per day: 2

Encourage children to try different foods from this group, e.g. beef, pork, lamb, chicken, turkey, fish, eggs, baked beans, lentils and other types of pulses. (Nuts should not be given to children under five because of the risk of choking).

***The fifth food group, the fats and sugars, should be restricted to special occasion foods only***