

Background nutrition information for teachers

Why is it important for children to eat fruit and vegetables?

Fruit and vegetables are good sources of fibre, vitamins and minerals. To ensure these nutrients are included in the diet, children and adults alike are encouraged to eat a variety of fruit and vegetables.

Choose from these groups of vegetables every day:

- Dark-green, leafy vegetables – cabbage, spinach, broccoli, Brussels sprouts
- Orange-yellow vegetables – pumpkin, carrots, sweet potato
- Starch vegetables – potato, sweet potato, parsnip
- Other vegetables – beans, capsicum, cauliflower, celery, cucumber, lettuce, mushrooms, peas, sprouts, swedes, turnips, zucchini.

Fruits such as oranges, mandarins, grapefruit (citrus fruits), nectarines, pineapple, strawberries and kiwi fruit are particularly high in vitamin C, which is essential for healthy teeth and bones. Vitamin C also increases the iron absorbed from foods containing iron, and promotes wound healing. Vitamin A is found in fruits such as apricots, rockmelon and mango. Vitamin A keeps the skin and eyes healthy, and helps protect the body against infection. Vitamins C and A are anti-oxidants which help protect the body against cell damage.

A diet high in fruit and vegetables helps:

- prevent some vitamin deficiencies
- prevent obesity
- prevent constipation and other bowel disorders
- reduce the risk of some cancers
- reduce blood pressure
- reduce blood cholesterol levels
- improve diabetic control.

Therefore, it is important to introduce and reinforce good eating habits during childhood as a means of reducing the risk of diet-related diseases in adulthood.

How many fruit and vegetables are children eating?

The 1995 National Nutrition Survey found that on any given day:

- approximately a third of children aged 4 to 11 years had not eaten any fruit or fruit products
- more than 20% of children under 12 had not eaten any vegetables or vegetable products.

These figures indicate that children are not eating a healthy amount of fruit and vegetables. This raises concerns about their likelihood of developing diet-related diseases in adult life.

How many fruit and vegetables do children need to eat?

We are encouraged to *Go for 2 fruit and 5 vegetables* every day. The amount children should eat depends on their age and appetite. The amount adolescents should eat depends on their age, appetite and activity level.

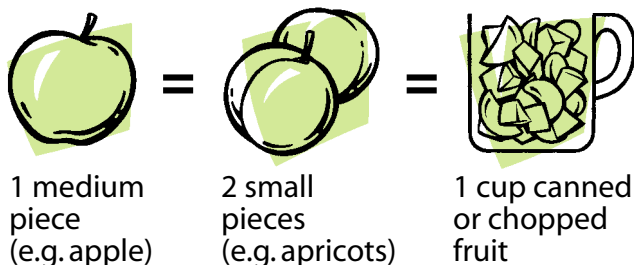
With the emphasis on “Go for” it is valuable if children learn they should be aiming to eat 2 serves of fruit and 5 serves of vegetables every day. The emphasis in education should be on variety with younger children – in terms of raw, cooked, and types.

Recommended serves of fruit and vegetables for children and adolescents from the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating*

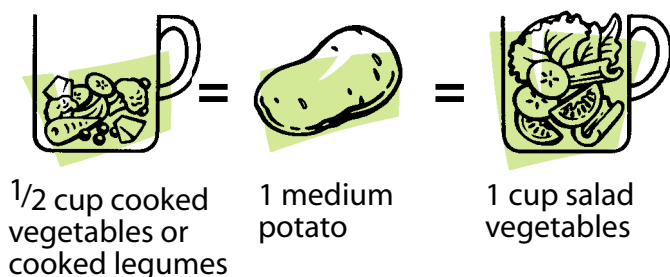
Age of Child	Fruit	Vegetables
4-7	1-2	2-4
8-11	1-2	3-5
12-18	3-4	4-9

*Amount depends on type of diet eaten, age, appetite and activity levels. The lower figures are for people who eat a diet predominantly high in cereal foods (rice, pasta, breads) the higher recommendation is for people who eat more from all food groups.

One serve of **FRUIT** is:



One serve of **VEGETABLES** is:



Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia

Encourage and support breastfeeding

Children and adolescents need sufficient nutritious foods to grow and develop normally

- Growth should be checked regularly for young children
- Physical activity is important for all children and adolescents

Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods

Children and adolescents should be encouraged to:

- Eat plenty of vegetables, legumes and fruits
- Eat plenty of cereals (including breads, rice, pasta and noodles), preferably wholegrain
- Include lean meat, fish, poultry and /or alternatives
- Include milks, yoghurts, cheese and /or alternatives. Reduced-fat milks are not suitable for young children under 2 years because of their high energy needs, but reduced-fat varieties should be encouraged for older children and adolescents
- Choose water as a drink. Alcohol is not recommended for children

and care should be taken to:

- Limit saturated fat and moderate total fat intake. Low-fat diets are not suitable for infants
- Choose foods low in salt
- Consume only moderate amounts of sugars and foods containing added sugars

Care for your child's food: prepare and store it safely