

# Healthy eating for 1 to 4 year olds



**The Children's Food Pyramid Guidelines**

**Good eating habits started early can last a lifetime. If your child eats the right amount from the wide variety of foods on the Children's Food Pyramid, it can help them to:**

- **grow**
- **learn**
- **play.**

The amount of food a young child eats changes every day and at every meal depending on their needs. Taller, older children and children who are more active will eat more. It is important to use your child's appetite to help you decide how much food to offer them. This Department of Health leaflet is a guide to how much food to offer:

- 1 and 2 year old children
- 3 and 4 year old children.

These guidelines have been developed by nutrition experts in Ireland and are based on Irish and international evidence.



Children aged 1 to 4 years old have small tummies but they have high nutritional needs. They grow and develop quickly and need nourishing food to give them energy, protein and other nutrients.

### Healthy eating habits can last a lifetime

This age is the perfect age to teach your child healthy eating habits for life. Lead by example. If you eat a variety of healthy food your child will be more likely to do the same.



### Small tummies need small servings

1 to 4 year old children have small tummies. They can only eat small amounts. Offer them 3 meals and 2 to 3 healthy snacks every day. All their food and drink needs to be nourishing.



### Portion size matters

Be guided by your child's appetite. Use it to help you decide how much food to offer them. Follow the Children's Food Pyramid guide to servings for portion sizes.



### Limit 'treat' foods

Foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt can be linked to being overweight in childhood. If you decide to give your child these foods offer them in TINY amounts and only once a week.



### Offer water and milk as drinks

Avoid sugary drinks like some cordials and fizzy drinks. Sugary drinks are not good for your child's teeth.



### Milk is a key food

Milk is a key food in the diets of 1 to 4 year old children. Offer your child three servings of milk, yogurt or cheese every day.



### Have a regular daily routine

Having regular times for meals and snacks sets up healthy eating habits for life. Start every day with a healthy breakfast



### More vitamin D needed in winter months

Young children don't get enough vitamin D in winter. They need to take 5 micrograms (5µg) vitamin D only drops or liquid every day from Halloween (31<sup>st</sup> October) to St Patrick's Day (17<sup>th</sup> March).



### Make sure your child gets enough iron

Offer your child red meat three times a week and choose breakfast cereals with added iron (12mg/100g) most days of the week. 1 to 3 year olds who are small for their age may need extra iron so talk to a health professional for advice.

## Size matters

Keep it simple and make one meal for all the family. It's really important to use child-size plates and bowls to offer your child a child-size portion of food.

The recommended plate size is a:

- child's plate, or
- side plate.

The recommended bowl is a:

- child's bowl, or
- small bowl.

See measurements below.

Child-size cutlery makes it easier for your child to feed themselves.



20cm

Child or side plate



26cm

Adult's plate



11cm

Child's bowl



16cm

Adult's bowl



**Child**

Beaker, glass or cup with 100ml milk



**Adult**

Glass with 200ml milk

**Child's portion**

**Adult's portion**



30g cooked chicken



50-75g cooked chicken



2x100ml milk



200ml milk



½ banana



1 banana



½ pitta pocket



1 pitta pocket





Wheat biscuits



Baked beans on toast



Chicken, potato, carrots and green beans



Beef stir-fry

## Drinks

Water is the best drink.

Offer 6–8 drinks every day.



### From beaker to cup and glass

Between 1 and 2 years of age, your child can move on from using a beaker with a lid. They can change to:

- using a beaker without a lid
- a glass
- a cup.



### Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is recommended in Ireland until children are 2 years of age or beyond.



### Tooth-friendly drinks

Milk and water are the most tooth-friendly drinks.

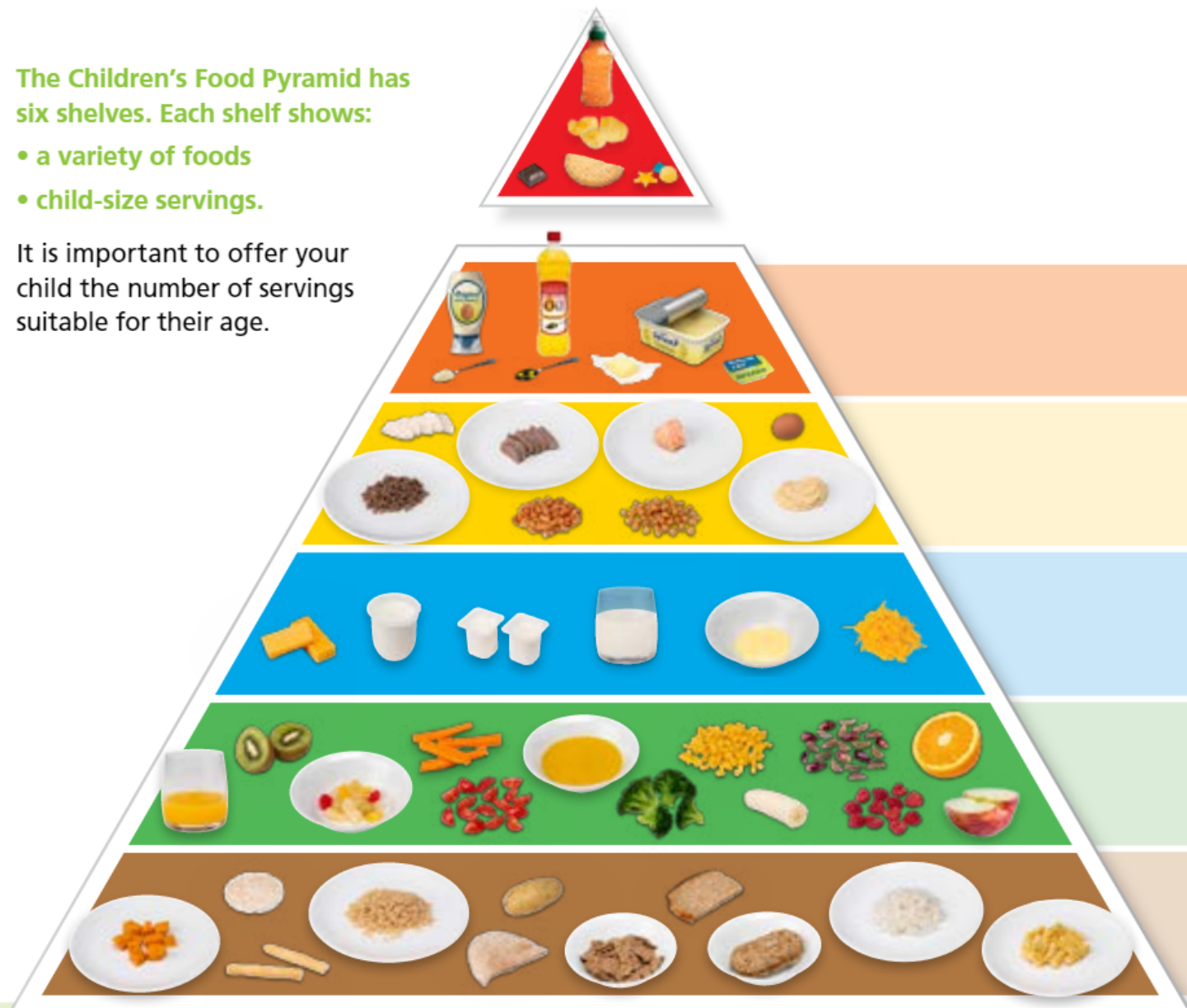
Limit sugar-containing fizzy drinks and cordials. If offered at all, make sure it's with meals.



The Children's Food Pyramid has six shelves. Each shelf shows:

- a variety of foods
- child-size servings.

It is important to offer your child the number of servings suitable for their age.



Note: The Children's Food Pyramid above shows examples of foods on each food shelf. It does not represent the amount of food a 1 to 4 year old child should eat every day.



### Be active

From 2 years old children need to be active for at least one hour every day.



### Drinks

Water, breastmilk and milk are the drinks recommended for your children.

**Foods and drinks high  
in fat, sugar and salt**



Maximum once a week  
and in TINY amounts



**Ages one  
and two**

**Ages three  
and four**

**Fats, spreads and oils**

**In very  
small  
amounts**

**In very  
small  
amounts**

**Meat, poultry, fish, eggs,  
beans and nuts**

**2**  
Servings  
a day

**3-4**  
Servings  
a day

**Milk, yogurt and cheese**

**3**  
Servings  
a day

**3**  
Servings  
a day

**Vegetables, salad and fruit**

**2-3**  
Servings  
a day

**4-5**  
Servings  
a day

**Cereals and breads, potatoes,  
pasta and rice**

**3-4**  
Servings  
a day

**4-6**  
Servings  
a day



**Vitamin D**

Young children aged 1 to 4 need to take  
5 micrograms (5µg) vitamin D only drops or  
liquid in the winter months.



**Breastfeeding**

Breastfeeding is recommended in Ireland  
until children are 2 years of age or beyond.

## Cereals, breads, potatoes, pasta and rice



Children need more of these foods for energy and growth – that is why they are the biggest shelf on the Children's Food Pyramid. These starchy foods provide fibre and some B vitamins which are needed to convert food into energy. Offer at least one of these foods at every meal.



### Healthy eating habits

Offer your child a breakfast cereal with added iron most days of the week. This is especially important for younger children.

Standard porridge is a healthy breakfast food but children aged 1 to 4 will benefit from a porridge with added iron.

Check the label and choose cereals and porridge that contain at least 12mg of iron per 100g.

Limit the amount of sugar coated and chocolate coated breakfast cereals you offer your child.

Young children can meet their fibre needs by having a mix of white and wholemeal cereals and breads.

Offering all wholemeal or wholegrain choices may be too filling and reduce your child's appetite for other nourishing foods.

If your child is prone to constipation, offer more wholemeal and wholegrain varieties. Make sure they eat vegetables and drink enough fluid.



# Fats, spreads and oils



Fats, spreads and oils provide essential fats in your child's diet. Only use very small amounts of these foods.

## What is a small amount?

- 1 teaspoon of spread on bread
- ½ teaspoon oil in cooking.

## Healthy eating habits

Frying food is not recommended for young children.

Choose mono or poly-unsaturated spreads. Choose rapeseed, olive, canola, sunflower or corn oils.

Limit mayonnaise, coleslaw and salad dressings as they also contain oil.

Always cook with as little fat or oil as possible.

## Try to:

- grill
- oven-bake
- steam
- boil
- stir-fry.

# The red triangle at the top of the Children's Food Pyramid



The red triangle at the top of the Children's Food Pyramid contains food and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt. These are NOT needed for health or for keeping children at a healthy weight.

Sweets, chocolate, biscuits, cakes, fizzy drinks or crisps should not be a part of your child's everyday diet. Having foods and drinks from this shelf spoils your child's appetite for more nutritious food. If you decide to give your child these foods offer them in TINY amounts and only once a week.

## What is a TINY amount?

- 1 square of chocolate
- 3 crisps
- Half plain biscuit
- 3 soft sweets



## Healthy Eating Habits

While it's best not to offer these foods and drinks to children aged 1 to 4 years old at all, you may give tiny amounts occasionally.

Sugary foods and drinks are not good for your child's teeth.

Frozen pizza can be high in fat so limit it to a very small slice once a week.

Frozen foods like chicken nuggets, burgers or chips can be high in fat and salt and should be limited to small amounts once a week.

Takeaways can be high in fat and salt and should not be part of your child's diet.



Maximum once a week in TINY amounts.

These foods can be linked to childhood obesity.