

The West Midlands Active lifestyle and healthy Eating in School children study

EVENING MEAL PARENT INFORMATION

What is a healthy dinner?

- A good balance of important nutrients
- A good source of vitamins and minerals
- Served in the early evening

As with a healthy breakfast and lunch, a healthy dinner is a good source of nutrients, vitamins and minerals. Making a few simple changes can help ensure the whole family is eating a nourishing, well balanced meal.

Basing a meal on a healthy carbohydrate or starchy food is a good place to start. Foods such as potatoes, bread, rice and pasta are good options to help children feel full from their evening meal so that they do not need snacks before bed time. Boiled, jacket or mashed potatoes are the healthier options rather than chips.



Ensuring each meal contains protein is important both to help children feel full, and to help them grow. Good sources of protein include lean meats, fish, beans and lentils. Red meats tend to be higher in saturated fat than white meats so selecting leaner varieties is a good idea, and trying to cut down on red meat can be beneficial. Meat substitutes, such as Quorn, can sometimes be a good alternative to meat as they can help to reduce the fat in a meal and are also convenient as they can be cooked from frozen, for example in a Spaghetti Bolognese.



The evening meal is a good time for children to eat vegetables counting towards their recommended 5-a-day. If your child can be reluctant to eat vegetables, try mixing them in with pasta sauces or sprinkling them on top of a homemade healthy pizza. Serving fruit for dessert is another good way of helping children get their 5-a-day.



It is important for children to drink water throughout the day, and it is a good accompaniment to the evening meal. Pure fruit juices or milk are also good drinks, but remember to only serve one glass of fruit juice per day. Always read the label of fruit-juice drinks as they can often be full of sugar and flavourings. Caffeinated drinks are not a good option to be consumed with or after dinner as they can affect children's sleep.

Meals from scratch

Making meals from scratch can be the healthier option as you know exactly what are in them, rather than lots of additives which can be found in ready prepared foods. If you plan for the week ahead it can help to ensure the meals are both time and cost effective. It can also be handy to keep some stock items in the cupboard for those days when you need something quick and simple. For example, a tin of tomatoes and some frozen vegetables can make an easy pasta sauce, or a jacket potato with beans or tuna.

However, there are times when everyone is short of time and preparing meals from scratch may not always be possible. Here are some handy tips:

- Check the label of ready-made foods in the supermarket. Some can be much healthier than others. The luxury and more expensive brands aren't always the healthiest; sometimes the economy ranges offer both better value for money and contain less additives!
- Add a selection of vegetables onto the side of ready prepared meals. Frozen vegetables can be ready in less than ten minutes and can help add some good vitamins and minerals to the meal.
- When preparing meals from scratch you could intentionally make extra portions and freeze them. Then when you are short of time you will have your own home made ready meal!



Portion sizes

Portion size is important in ensuring children are eating the right amount for their size and age. Portion sizes have increased in recent years and it is often difficult to tell what a correct portion size is. Using child sized plates and bowls at meal times can be helpful as child sized portions look very small on adult sized plates. There is some useful information on the Change 4 life website about 'me size meals'.

<http://www.nhs.uk/Change4Life/Pages/kids-portion-sizes.aspx>

Some new recipe ideas

Sometimes it can be difficult to think of new recipe ideas which are healthy and tasty as well as appealing to children. We have put together a small selection of simple recipes below which you may like to try. There are ideas from all around the world, helping children think about new tastes and what children from other cultures eat and drink. You can also find new recipes on the internet, from cookery books or from other parents, neighbours and friends.

Healthy Kebabs (Turkey)

Serves 4



- 900g (2 lbs) of chicken or turkey breast
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 onion cut into chunks
- 1 green or red pepper, cut into chunks
- 1 pinch freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice □ Kebab sticks



1. Cut chicken into cubes. Toss in a mixing bowl along with oil, onion, peppers, salt, black pepper and lime juice. Mix well, cover, and refrigerate overnight.
2. Preheat oven grill, griddle pan or barbecue.
3. Thread the ingredients, onion and peppers onto skewers, 6 to 8 pieces per skewer and cook for 5 minutes per side (or until the meat is thoroughly cooked through).

Mediterranean slice

Suitable for vegetarians, serves 4

- 4 slices of ciabatta
 - 4 tbsp green pesto (contains nuts)
 - 140 g frozen sliced roasted peppers
 - 140 g Tomatoes, diced
 - 125 g ball mozzarella, or 85 g cheddar, grated
1. Heat oven to 200C/fan 180C/gas 6. Place ciabatta slices on a baking sheet and heat until lightly toasted (approx 15 minutes).
 2. Remove from the oven and allow to cool to touch.
 3. Spread the pesto onto ciabatta slices followed by the tomatoes and peppers.
 4. Tear the mozzarella ball into small pieces, then scatter it (or use cheddar, if you prefer) over the vegetables. Return to the oven or place under the grill for 5 -7 minutes until the cheese has melted.



Couscous salad

You could have this on the side of a meal or make it into a main meal itself by adding some lentils or beans, fish or chicken.

Suitable for vegetarians, serves 4

- 100 g couscous
 - 250 mls hot low salt vegetable stock
 - 2 spring onions
 - 2 peppers
 - 3 sticks of celery
 - 10 cherry Tomatoes
 - Any other vegetables of your choice
1. Wash and chop the vegetables.
 2. Tip couscous into a large bowl, and pour the stock over.
 3. Leave the cous-cous for 10 minutes, until fluffy and all the stock has been absorbed.
 4. Add the vegetables to the cous-cous and mix well.

Make your own chicken nuggets

- 500g chicken breast
- 1 cup plain flour
- 1 teaspoon mixed herbs
- 1 egg (beaten)
- 250mls low-fat milk
- 3 cups of cornflakes, crushed

1. Preheat oven to 180°C.
2. Cut the chicken into bite-sized pieces.
3. Set out a crumbing station by putting the flour and mixed herbs in the first bowl, the egg beaten with the milk in the second bowl and the crushed cornflakes in the third bowl.
4. A few pieces at a time, roll the chicken in the flour, dip into the milk and egg and then roll in the crushed cornflakes.
5. Lay these on a wire rack with a tray underneath.
6. Bake for 25 minutes (or until cooked through, time will depend on the size of your chicken pieces).

Yoghurt Fruit Sundaes



- Fruit of your choice (e.g. frozen berries, defrosted)
- Natural low fat yoghurt (300mls)
- Oats (for decoration)

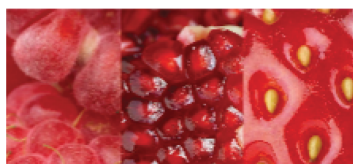
1. Layer the fruit and yoghurt into a glass of bowl.
2. Lightly swirl the ingredients together to they become lightly mixed.
3. Sprinkle the oats on top of the sundae and serve.

Healthy Indian Lassi

Lassi, or yogurt drink, is a healthy drink which is tasty and easy to make.

- Low fat natural Yogurt (250mls)
- Skimmed or Semi Skimmed milk (250mls)
- Fruit of your choice (e.g. cherries, mango, frozen berries, or banana)
- Ice cubes (optional)

1. Pour all the ingredients into a blender.
2. Blend until smooth.
3. Serve!



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Some images included in this appendix are from iStock.com:

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