

The eatwell plate

Use the eatwell plate to help you get the balance right. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.



This model shows the proportion and variety of foods which should come from each of the five food groups. Eating a diet in these types of proportions will help ensure that enough vitamins, minerals, protein and fibre are eaten without too much fat, especially saturates, and sugars. The five food groups are:

1. Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods
2. Fruit and vegetables
3. Milk and dairy foods
4. Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein
5. Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar

Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods

Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods are the main source of starchy carbohydrate providing energy in the diet. By choosing some whole grain products such as brown rice, wholemeal bread and wholegrain breakfast cereals, more dietary fibre and B group vitamins are included. A packed lunch should always contain a starchy carbohydrate food such as:

- Bread, rolls, baguettes, tortilla wraps, chapattis or bagels
- Pasta, rice or cous cous e.g. pasta salad
- Potatoes e.g. homemade potato salad with plain yoghurt and minimum mayonnaise

Fruit and vegetables

A third of the diet should be made up of fruit and vegetables and it is recommended that a minimum of five portions a day are eaten. Fruit and vegetables contain differing amounts of fibre, vitamins, minerals and plant chemicals which all promote good health. A packed lunch should aim to provide at least one portion of fruit and one portion of vegetables. This could include:

- Add salad to sandwiches

- Chop carrots, peppers and cucumber into sticks as a snack
- Vegetable soup in an unbreakable thermos
- A tub or small can of fruit salad, some grapes or a piece of seasonal fruit e.g. a clementine or peach
- Bananas, apples, pears and oranges
- Dried fruit such as apricots, sultanas, raisins and figs
- A small carton of pure, unsweetened fruit juice

Milk and dairy foods

The milk and dairy food group includes milk, cheese, yoghurts and fromage frais. It does not include butter, other spreads, cream or eggs. Fortified soya milk also falls into this category. These foods are an important source of calcium, protein, and vitamins B12, A and D. Packed lunches should aim to provide one portion from this group. This could include:

- A carton of yoghurt or fromage frais, preferably plain or fruit varieties
- A small carton of semi-skimmed milk
- A portion (30g) of cheese. Reduced fat cheese is preferable e.g. Edam, mozzarella, cottage or reduced fat cheddar

Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein

These foods provide protein as well as important minerals such as iron and zinc. Fish, especially oil-rich fish such as mackerel, sardines, pilchards, salmon and herring, provides omega-3 oils. Packed lunches should contain one item from this group unless cheese is chosen as an alternative. Consider:

- Sliced cold meat e.g. ham, turkey or chicken
- Canned fish, mashed with lemon juice or plain yoghurt
- Hard-boiled eggs
- Vegetarian alternatives such as hummus, and lentil or quorn based products

Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar

Foods high in fat, and foods and drinks high in sugar add variety and interest to the diet but, because they are easy to over-consume, their consumption should be limited. They provide energy from the fat and sugar but little else in terms of nutritional value. The foods and drinks from this group, most likely to appear in lunchboxes include crisps, biscuits, cakes, chocolate confectionery, sugar confectionery and carbonated sweetened drinks. Where possible, try not to include these foods and drinks in a packed lunchbox.