

## Children's Health

### Dietary changes can improve:

- Improved social behaviour
- Improve immunity
- Language, Reading & spelling
- Writing & drawing
- Concentration
- Skin disorders
- Reduce aggression
- Reduction of ADHD symptoms
- Hyperactive-Impulsive Behaviour

### Establishing a good relationship with food.

It is important to make sure that your child is following a good balanced diet at least 80% of the time, don't worry too much about the other 20%, as you can't be in control of what they eat all of the time. Your priority should be to deliver balanced healthy fresh food at home, what they actually eat at school and parties is a gamble. Some child psychologists believe that if you are too strict about food at home, then your children are more likely to stray into bingeing unhealthy foods when they are away from home.

Establishing a healthy and relaxed relationship with food is very important. Try not to call any foods 'bad' or 'fattening' as this can lead to obsessive dieting during teenage years when image can suddenly become their main focus. Some therapists believe that it's good to have a few chocolates and sweets around the house from time to time for your children to dip into if they wish. This 'take it or leave it' attitude is thought to dissipate any tendency to binge on these foods when away from home.

It is important to avoid using sweet foods as treats or rewards for good behaviour or as a bribe to motivate the completion of a task or project. This is a sure way to set up a pattern of comfort eating later on in life. There are many other non-food based treats and rewards that can be used instead.

Aside from all the emotional and psychological links with foods there are a few key areas of child development that benefit from good nutrition. During childhood we have the capacity to shape and influence bones, IQ and immunity in ways that will set the scene for the rest of their life.

## Healthy Bones

Focussing on foods that are rich in minerals helps to support growth spurts and enable strong bones to develop, and you also need to add in a good daily dose of vitamin D which allows minerals like calcium to be absorbed through the intestine. Vitamin D can be found in foods like oily fish but is also made when skin cells are exposed to sunlight. Getting your children out in the fresh air for at least two hours a day can help to naturally increase vitamin D levels and improve bone strength.

### Top tips for bone health

- Avoid giving your children drinks that contain caffeine like coffee, tea, hot chocolate, cola, Lucozade other energy drinks because caffeine depletes the body of calcium
- Many fizzy drinks contain phosphoric acid or phosphorus, another substance that increases calcium loss from bones. Substitute for diluted fruit drinks or water
- Increase magnesium intake by encouraging your child to eat plenty of green leafy vegetables.
- Include non-dairy sources of calcium in their diets like sunflower seeds, broccoli and tahini or sesame seeds
- Make sure they are getting plenty of exercise and do lots of walking which is great to build bone strength

### Top tips to help with Fussy eaters

- Encourage your child to get involved with meal planning, food shopping and food preparation. By getting your children to be more hands on they are more likely to want to eat the final product.
- Turn off the TV and ditch the lap trays and instead make eating a fun and social family event by gathering everyone around a dining table for a good old fashioned catch up.
- Stop constant snacking on sugary and fatty foods. Provide regular healthy snacks between meals to keep blood sugar balanced (fruit, raw vegetables) and stick to regular meal routines
- Having trouble with getting your children to eat healthy foods? Then try a bit of hide and seek, for instance add mashed butter beans to mashed potato to increase fibre, add 1 teaspoon of flax oil to fruit yoghurt to top up omega-3 oils or blend lots of vegetables into soups or sauces.
- Introduce new foods one at a time, children do not like a plateful of completely new foods that they don't recognise