



Teaching children about a balanced diet

Eating well has an impact on more than just children's physical health: it also has a positive effect on their attainment, concentration, energy levels and behaviour - all whilst helping them develop lifelong attitudes and habits around food and eating.

The messages children receive from adults and the environment around them also shape these - so we need to make sure that how we talk to children and what we model in school and settings are positive and consistent.

Talking about 'healthy eating' isn't always very engaging or motivating, especially for children. More often than not what children like to eat corresponds with what they associate as 'unhealthy' and the things we would like them to eat more of, or the 'healthy' things are on their disliked list.

This is why using the words 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' when talking about individual food and drink isn't a very helpful practice – it's overall diet that is important. We all eat and give our children things that would fall into both categories but we can be made to feel bad about the 'unhealthy' things - over time this can have a negative effect on our attitudes towards food, eating and our bodies. What we are aiming for is a balance.

“Children must be helped to make healthy choices in relation to food.” EYFS Statutory Framework Sept 2015

When helping children to understand what this means, we need to teach in an age appropriate way that we need to eat the right amounts: a balance of everything to give our bodies what they need. **There are certain foods we should eat lots of and regularly and other foods we should eat less of and not so often.**

Using the word 'balanced' rather than healthy and steering clear of healthy vs. unhealthy labelling will help children learn about eating well.

With a basic understanding of the Eatwell Plate we can help children to understand in an age appropriate way:

- Which food groups foods/drinks belong to
- What each food group does for our bodies
- In what amounts and how regularly we should eat them

There are a range of activity suggestions to support these key messages along with additional resources on the [DPH Award Website](#).

Other links to support this work include [Change 4 Life Teaching Resources](#) and [Food a Fact of Life](#)

Modelling a healthy happy snack and mealtime is also key to ensuring children develop positive eating habits and preferences. Please refer to [‘Food for Thought’](#) and [Top Tips](#) for information on how to plan these effectively.

Teaching children about healthy choices can also form part of your balanced packed lunch promotion work. For more information on this please see our guide.