



Euroopan unionin  
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# Eating and nutrition recommendations for young children Tips for parents

Pienten lasten ruokailu ja  
ravitsemussuositukset  
Vinkkejä vanhemmille  
(englanti)



## FAMILY MEAL

- A child over one year old can eat the same food as the rest of the family and drink regular milk.
- It is important for the family to eat together. Children learn by observing their parents and siblings.
- Parents decide what food is served and when the food is eaten. The child can decide how much they want to eat.
- During meals, it's important to talk about food and eating in a positive way.
- Toys, phones, and other devices should be put away during mealtime. The focus should be on eating and spending time together.



## **GETTING USED TO NEW FLAVORS AND THE CHILD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD**

- Encourage and support your child to try new foods. Tell your child about different foods and their names. Do not pressure or force child to eat.

Child is not always eager to try new flavors. It is normal for a child's appetite to vary and for the child to be cautious or hesitant about new foods.

- Child can explore new foods by tasting, smelling, looking at, and touching them. It may take from 10 to 15 exposures before the child gets used to a new flavor.
- Teach your child that all bodies are valuable and unique. Avoid making comments about weight or appearance when the child is listening.



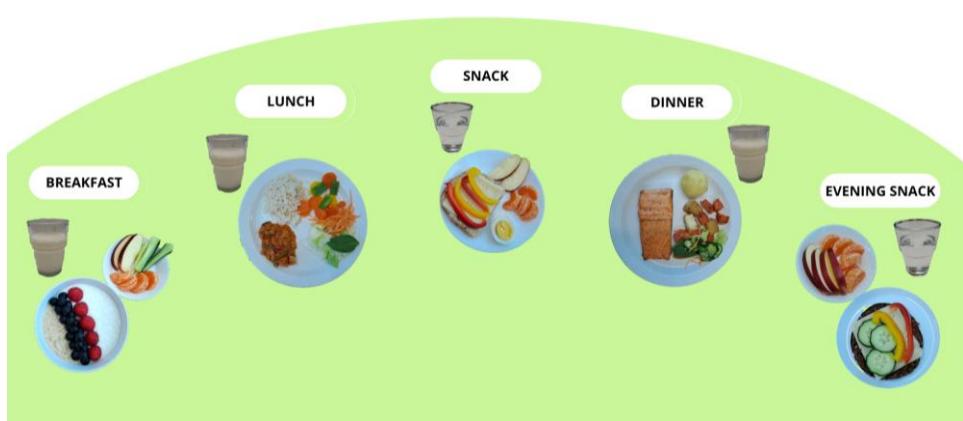
## CUTLERY

- Encourage the child to eat by themselves, even if it can get messy.
- The child can drink from a regular cup, glass, or straw cup.
- The child no longer needs a bottle. The pacifier should be given up by the time the child turns two years old at the latest.
- Prolonged use of pacifier bottles and pacifiers can affect the alignment of the teeth. It also increases the risk of tooth decay.



## REGULAR MEAL TIMES

- Anna lapselle janujuomaksi vettä.
- Regular meal times give the child a feeling of safety and help them to have the energy to get through the day.
- When the child eats regularly, their blood sugar stays stable, which prevents irritability and tantrums caused by hunger. Regular eating also supports good sleep.
- A child's food portions may sometimes be small. If the child is growing well, is active and healthy, parents usually don't need to worry about small amounts of food.
- Offer the child meals every 2 to 4 hours, totaling five meals a day: breakfast, lunch, snack, dinner, and evening snack.
- Offer food to the child only at mealtimes. Avoid eating between meals. This way, the child will get hungry, and the food will taste better. Eating between meals increases the risk of tooth decay.
- Give the child water to drink when thirsty.



## **PREPARING A CHILD'S MEAL**

A varied diet supports a child's healthy growth and development.

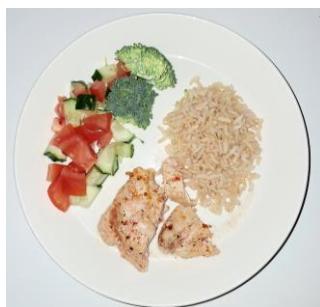
The plate model is a helpful guide for preparing a meal.

### **Lunch and dinner**

$\frac{1}{2}$  serving of vegetables

$\frac{1}{4}$  serving of potato, pasta, rice or other grains

$\frac{1}{4}$  serving of fish, chicken, meat, egg, legumes or plant-based protein



### **Breakfast, snack and evening snack**

- vegetables, fruits and berries
- whole grain products, for example bread or porridge
- protein, for example dairy products, egg, nuts or hummus



## CHOOSE THESE OFTEN

- **Plenty of vegetables and fruits**
  - Offer vegetables to child on every meal.
  - Add vegetables on top of bread, into smoothie and mixed into food.
  - Offer fruits and berries on breakfast, snack and for dessert.
- **Whole grain products**
  - Contain plenty of fiber, vitamins and minerals



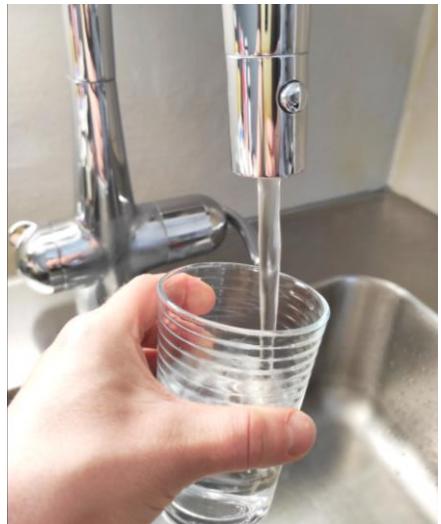
## CHOOSE THESE OFTEN

- **Fat-free or low-fat dairy products**
  - Contains plenty of calcium, which strengthens bones and teeth.
  - Child needs about 4 desilitres dairy product a day.  
1 slice of cheese = 100 ml of milk
  - Cabbage, fish, tofu, and legumes also contain plenty of calcium.
- **Soft plant-based fats**
  - Add on top of bread and use for cooking
  - Nuts, almonds and seeds also contains healthy fats.



## CHOOSE THESE OFTEN

- Fish, poultry meat and plant-based protein
- Products with **Heart Symbol Tuotteet, joihin on lisätty Sydänmerkki**
  - Heart Symbol tells that product is a healthy choice.
- Water to drink when thirsty



## EAT THESE ONLY OCCASIONALLY

- **Products high in salt**
  - Ketchup and other spice mixes
  - Use other spices instead of salt
- **Products high in added sugar**
  - Flavoured yogurts, puddings, cookies, and sweets
  - Dried and sugared fruits
  - Juices and sodas
  - High sugar intake increases the risk of tooth decay and creates health risks for children.
- **Red meat**
  - Beef, pork, sausages and wieners



## **EATING TREATS**

- You can share special treat moments with your child but the treats are not part of everyday food.
- It is important for parents to limit the amount of treats. Preferably, give treats as dessert.
- Besides treats, it is important to find other ways to celebrate and relax.
- Food and treats should not be used for comforting or as a reward.

## **EATING AND ORAL HEALTH**

- A regular meal times and avoiding eating between meal times help to prevent tooth decay.
- Bacteria easily transfer from an adult's mouth to a child's mouth. Do not taste food with the same spoon as the child.
- Everyone in the family should have their own cups and drinking bottles to prevent bacteria from spreading through saliva.
- After eating, you can give to child a xylitol lozenge or chew xylitol gum.



## **IMPORTANT THING TO NOTE IN A CHILD'S DIET**

- Offer fish 2–3 times a week. Only serve cooked fish.
- Give children sausages, wieners and cold cuts no more than 1–2 times a week.
- Liver sausage can be eaten up to 70 grams per week. Liver casserole can be eaten up to 300 grams per month.
- Do not give children seaweed products.
- Caffeinated drinks, such as cola, can be given to children in amounts up to 3 mg per kilogram of body weight per day.
- For example: A child weighs 15 kilograms, cola up to 3.75 dl per day.
- Coffee and energy drinks should not be given to children under 15 years old.
- Do not add honey or sugar to drinks.
- Heat all unpasteurized dairy products.
- Serve meat, fish, and poultry fully cooked.
- Beetroot must be cooked.
- Sprouts must be heated.
- Seeds from oil plants, such as sunflower seeds, can be given to children up to one tablespoon per day.
- Products containing cinnamon are not recommended every day.



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## Niitty 2 Project 2023–2026

Working together with immigrant  
families for a better everyday life

More information about the project:  
<https://projects.tuni.fi/niitty2/>

Family Info Material Portal:  
[tuni.fi/perheinfo](https://tuni.fi/perheinfo)

This guidance is based on the nutrition recommendations produced by the Pirkanmaa Wellbeing Area: *The Joy of Eating Together with a child under school age*. Updated November 2024.

<https://www.pirha.fi/documents/d/hyvinvointiaelintavoilla/syomisen-iloa-yhdessä-leikki-ikaisen-kanssa>

Other sources and more information:

Neuvokas Perhe. <https://neuvokasperhe.fi/syominen/>

Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare: *Eating Together – Food Recommendations for Families with Children*  
<https://www.julkari.fi/handle/10024/137459>

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