

Good nutrition is critical if your child is to be happy, healthy and fulfil their potential. In September 2009, new nutrient-based standards will be introduced transforming school menus to ensure school food offers all the essential goodness that children need. See what the key nutrients are all about and where to find them.

Zinc helps children stay strong and heals them inside and out. It's on the school lunch menu in fish cakes and spaghetti bolognese.

Iron keeps their circulation healthy with a rich flow of oxygen. Breathe easy when you know they're eating iron-rich food like red meat, vegetable curry, nuts, dried apricots, brown rice, cereal and green leafy vegetables.

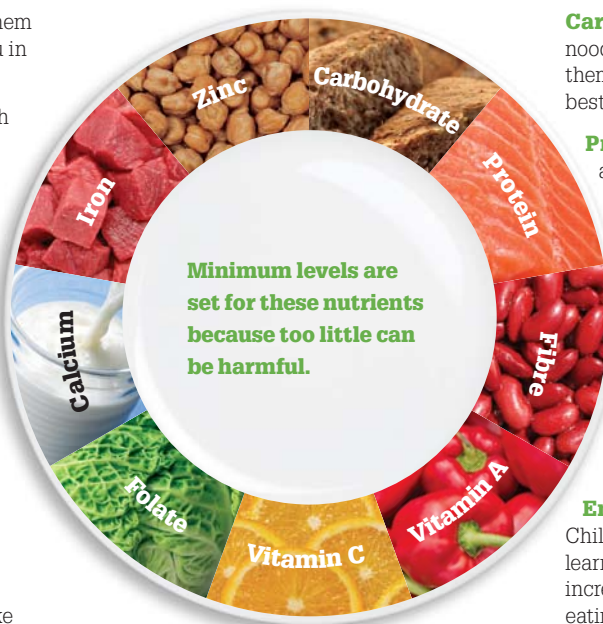
Calcium gives children strong bones and teeth – that's something to smile about. Help children drink and eat the right things now – milk, cheese, canned fish, green vegetables, dried fruit and beans – then they will still be smiling and walking tall when they're older.

Folate may not be familiar to them but they'd feel weak without it. Keep up their energy all year with peas, chickpeas, brown rice, asparagus and broccoli.

Vitamin C keeps them fit and healthy and helps them take up iron from their food. Make sure they get enough fruit and vegetables – broccoli, Brussels sprouts, sweet potatoes, oranges and kiwi.

Fat is high in energy. Although children need some fat in their diet, too much can lead to an increase in weight and to heart disease in later life. Fat is found in cakes, biscuits, chips (and other fried foods), mayonnaise, salad cream and pastry. Oily fish is a good example of what is best for them.

Saturated fat. Too much saturated fat can cause high cholesterol which leads to a build up of fat in blood vessels over time. Avoid too much butter, cream and mayonnaise and cheese. Choose lower fat dairy products such as semi skimmed milk, low fat yoghurts and reduced fat cheese.



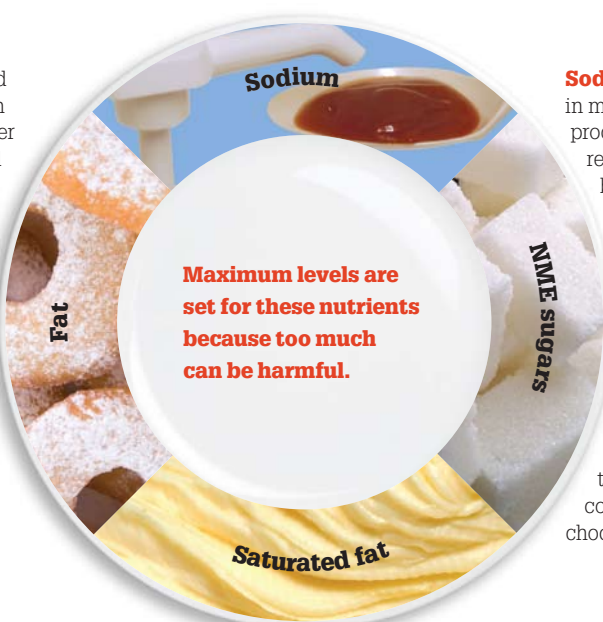
Carbohydrate, the starchy kind like couscous, noodles, rice, bread, potatoes and pasta, give them energy. Wholemeal bread and cereals are best as they give them stamina for the day ahead.

Protein helps the body grow and repair itself, after injury or illness. It's found in meat, fish, dairy products, nuts, seeds, beans, lentils and tofu.

Fibre keeps digestion on track. Children should eat a variety of oats, cereals, beans, lentils, fruit, vegetables, brown rice, wholemeal bread and pasta.

Vitamin A helps fight off infection so keep children fighting fit by eating carrots, red peppers, oily fish like mackerel and salmon, eggs, liver and dairy products.

Energy is vital for growth and development. Children need enough energy to concentrate, learn and play but too much energy can cause an increase in weight so encourage children to stop eating when they are full. Energy comes from fat, carbohydrate and protein in the diet. It is important that children get more of their energy from starchy carbohydrates and protein and less from fat.



Sodium comes from salt. Salt is naturally present in many foods but large amounts are added to processed foods. Foods high in sodium include ready made soups and sauces, gravy, some breakfast cereals, crisps, bacon, ham, sausage and pizza. Avoid adding salt during cooking and avoid giving too many processed foods to children.

Non-milk extrinsic sugars naturally exist in foods such as honey. Sugar is a carbohydrate but whilst starchy foods provide us with energy, fibre, vitamins, and minerals, sugars provide instant energy and no other nutrients. They can also cause tooth decay. Non-milk extrinsic sugars are contained in fruit juices, jam, cakes, biscuits, chocolate and sweets.