

Starchy food 1 or 2 portions	Protein 1 portion	Vegetables 1 portion	Fruit 1 portion	Dairy 1 portion
Bread. For example, wholemeal or white bread, rolls or wraps.	Meat. Chicken Turkey Pork Beef.	Raw. For example carrots, celery, cucumber, peppers, cut into batons. Cherry tomatoes cut into halves (lengthways).	Raw. Any fruit; for example, grapes, apple, satsuma, pear, strawberries, blueberries.	Yoghurt. natural Greek yoghurt. **Fruit yoghurt **fromage frais
Pitta pockets. wholemeal or white, look for the small child- sized ones or cut an adult one in half.	Fish. For example, tuna, salmon, mackerel.	Tinned. For example, sweetcorn, included in salads or as a side dish.	Tinned. Look for fruit in juice rather than syrup. For example, pears in apple juice.	Cheese. For example, cubed hard cheese. Cheese triangles. Cream cheese sandwiches or spread on crackers.
Bagel. Look for small child-sized ones or cut an adult one in half.	Non-meat alternatives. Hummus, beans such as kidney beans or lentils.	Frozen. Cooked and then cooled peas included with salad or served as a side dish.	Cooked. Stewed fruit or compote added to natural yoghurt or as a side dish.	Milk desserts** for example, rice pudding. Custard pot.
Pasta. Comes in all sorts of shapes and sizes. Useful for salads or as a side dish.	Eggs. Hard boiled, mashed into a sandwich or as part of a Spanish omelette.	Cooked. Cooked and cooled broccoli, carrots .	*Dried. Raisins or sultanas Dried mango. Dried figs or apricots.	
Potatoes. Cooked as a side dish or include in a Spanish omelette.	Nuts. Nut or seed butters in a sandwich.			

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Grains such as couscous, polenta or bulgar wheat. Use in salads or a side dish.

** Dried fruit counts as one of a child's 5 A DAY but are high in natural sugars and can stick to children's teeth so only offer as part of a meal and keep the portion size small, around 15g.*

*** Some yoghurts and fromage frais can be high in added sugar, so look out for those which are lower in sugar.*

Example

Starchy carbohydrate = Wholemeal bread

Protein food = Chicken

Vegetables = cherry tomatoes

Dairy = Greek yoghurt

Fruit = strawberries

Put it all together = a chicken sandwich with side dish of cherry tomatoes. A portion of Greek yoghurt with some halved strawberries

Portion sizes

As well as thinking about balance, it is important to think about portion sizes for children's packed lunches.

- Use a child-sized lunch box. This will reduce the temptation to provide too much food.
- Use small containers that will fit into the lunch box for side items such as vegetable sticks or chopped fruit. Using small containers will help keep portion sizes correct. Small cake cases make great little containers for dried fruit.
- Many pre-packed items are in adult-sized portions not child-sized, so look for the smaller sized wraps, bagels and pitta pockets or be prepared to cut adult sized ones in half or even quarters.
- You may have to open pre-packed food and re-pack in correct portion size for your child.
- Try to keep portion sizes correct for each food group. This will encourage your child to eat a variety of foods.
- Remember children's appetites will vary.
- If you are not sure that you have the portion size right, try placing all the lunch box items you have prepared on a child-sized plate. Do the portion sizes look about right?

Variety

Just like the Eatwell Guide encourages a variety of foods across the day, it is a good idea to introduce variety in a child's lunchbox across the week, and across each food group as much as possible. Foods in a lunchbox are going to be consumed cold, so keep this in mind when thinking about what foods are suitable. For starchy foods, think about varying them without offering sandwiches every day. Bread comes in many varieties, so including wraps, pittas or bagels can be a simple swap to make. Pasta comes in lots of shapes and sizes and is easy for little ones to pick up. Potatoes can be incorporated into a salad or served on their own as a side dish. Grains such as couscous, rice or bulgur wheat can also make a nice change.

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Likewise, with fruit and vegetables, try including a rainbow of different coloured fruit and vegetables across the week. Vegetables don't have to be limited to salad on a sandwich or slices of cucumber. Try grating carrot or beetroot into a sandwich or cut into small pieces of peppers and mushrooms as part of a pasta salad. Some children might prefer softer cooked vegetables- carrots, broccoli, green beans, peas or sugar snap peas can be cooked and chilled to go in a packed lunch. Others will be happy eating some vegetables raw – try offering mushrooms, tinned sweetcorn or courgette batons.

Top tip: to retain colour and nutrients, cook vegetables in as little water as possible and for as short a time as possible, cool rapidly under running water, drain thoroughly and chill in the fridge until needed.

Variety for dairy foods can also be offered but remember only one portion is needed in a lunch box, and a child will likely be given milk as a drink at nursery. A yoghurt or fromage frais with fresh fruit pieces could be swapped for a custard or rice pudding. And cheese doesn't have to be a sandwich filling but offered as cubes or batons with chopped vegetables. Most yoghurts and pre-made dairy puddings will be in the medium category for sugar, so try read the information per 100g on the label and choose at the lower end of the medium range:

Low <5.0g/100g

Medium >5.0g/100g to 22.5g/100g

High >22.5g/100g

It is important to offer variety across the protein foods for all children, and especially those who can't eat certain foods from this group for different reasons. Cooked meats can be included in a sandwich or chopped into a salad, as can cooked or tinned fish – just be sure to remove any bones before serving.

Non-meat sources of protein such as eggs can be hard-boiled and served chopped as a finger food, whilst spreads such as hummus or nut butters can be spread onto bagels or offered as a dip with some pitta bread and vegetable batons. Other non-meat sources of protein to include are beans, pulses and lentils which can all be added to salads with rice or pasta, or even blended into a dip.

For all children, try to include at least one day each week which provides a vegetarian source of protein. And if thinking about offering nut butters, check what the policy for nuts is in your setting.

Example of a weekly balanced menu

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Chicken sandwich	Tuna pasta salad	Wholegrain crackers and hummus dip	Spanish omelette (made with eggs, potatoes and peppers)	Bagel spread with cream cheese and ham slices
Cherry tomatoes	Sweetcorn	Cucumber sticks		Carrot sticks
Yoghurt	Fromage frais	Cheese cubes	Custard pot	Rice pudding
Strawberries	Grapes	Tinned pears	Stewed apple	Satsuma segments

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Pre-packaged items and processed food

Some pre-packaged products or ready-to-eat food may not be suitable for young children. They can contain too much salt or sugar and portion sizes may be too large. Some may also be low in nutrients and do not represent good value for money. When preparing a lunchbox, it is important to consider time and convenience and so some pre-packaged products may be included on occasion, but where possible try to limit these and provide home-made alternatives.

Here are some comparisons.

Pre-packaged or ready prepared food		Home prepared equivalents	
Food item	Cost *	Nutritional information per portion *	Notes
Packet of fruit flakes (18g)	From multipack 6 x 18g = 30p	10g Sugar	Sugar from concentrated fruit puree.
Raisins (15g)	15g portion from 500g pack = 5p	10g Sugar	Sugar is naturally occurring in fruit but is high and can stick to teeth so avoid as a snack and do not offer alone.
Grapes (40g)	40g portion from bunch of grapes =16p	4.5g sugar	Sugars naturally occurring in fruit.
*Pre-packed ham, cheese and crackers	£1.50	Salt 1.37g Saturated fat 7.5g	Pre-packed portion will be too large for young child
DIY chicken, cheese with bread or crackers.	1 x small edam cheese = 32p 2 x Rice cake = 7.5p or ½ pitta bread • 1 x small slice chicken (from larger pack) =20p Total = 60p	Salt 0.6g Saturated fat 3.4g	
Sausage roll (60g)	From multipack 30p	Salt 0.62 Saturated fat 5g Protein 5.9g	

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Grilled pork sausage (cooked weight 57g) with pasta shapes	½ - 1 x grilled pork sausage 12p 1 x small portion cooked pasta 4p = 16p	Salt 0.93g Saturated fat 4.6g Protein 11g	Sausages can be high in salt and fat, so limit how often these are offered
Mini scotch egg	4 x mini scotch egg = 40p	Salt 0.36g Saturated fat 2.4g Protein 4.4g	
Boiled egg	1 x egg 0.15p	Salt 0.19g Saturated fat 1.4g Protein 7.1g	

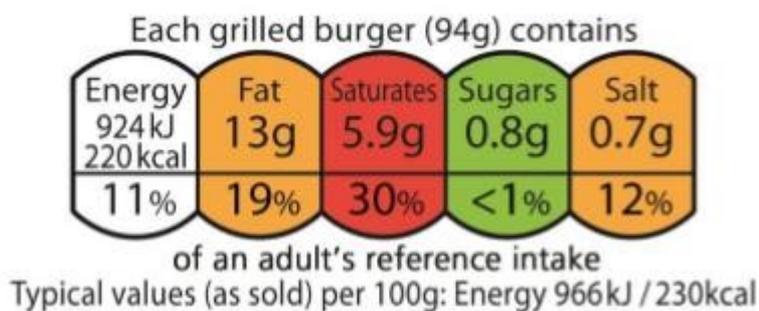
* Based on product information found on Sainsbury's food shopping website 27/03/2018 and analysis from Nutritics nutrition analysis software.

Nutritional information

Always read the nutritional information provided on the packaging to decide if the product is suitable for a young child. Remember to choose items that are lower in sugar and salt. Understanding food labels can be tricky. There are two ways to read a food label. Either use the traffic light system (if the product has one) which can sometimes be found on the front of the pack or use the nutritional information box found on the back of pack.

All pre-packaged/processed food must display nutritional information by law. Some packaging will have an at a glance colour coding **traffic light system** on the front of the packet. This tells you if the food is high, medium or low in fat, sugar and salt.

- Green = **LOW**
- Amber = **MEDIUM**
- Red = **HIGH**



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If there is not front-of-pack traffic light labelling it is still possible to work out whether a food is high, low or medium in a nutrient by using the nutritional information on the back of the packet.

Look at the “per 100g” column of the nutrition information panel and compare this with the table below to see if a food is red, green or amber. **Remember** to use “per 100g” not “per portion”.

		Fat	Saturated fat	Sugars	Salt
	Low	0-3g	1.5g or less	5g or less	0.3g or less*
	Medium	3.1g to 17.5g	1.6g to 5g	5.1g to 22.5g	0.31g to 1.5g*
	High	More than 17.5g	More than 5g	More than 22.5g	More than 1.5g *

Sugar

Most children in the UK eat too much free sugars, around 2-3 times more than the maximum recommended amount. Free sugars are any sugar added to food or drinks by the manufacturer, cook or consumer, including those naturally present in honey, fruit juice and syrups. Eating too much of these foods can increase the risk of tooth decay, particularly if they are eaten between meals or as drinks. Often these foods and drinks contain large amounts of calories and can contribute to weight gain and obesity if eaten in large quantities. These foods may also be limited in vitamins and minerals and so should be restricted in a young child’s lunchbox.

The table below gives the recommended maximum free sugar intake for young children.

Age	Recommended maximum free sugar intake
2 years	3 cubes (13g)
3 years	4 cubes (15g)
4-6 years	5 cubes (19g)

There is more information on free sugars from the BNF and British Dietetic Association in the ‘Resources’ tab of the course.

Drinks

The best drinks for children aged between one and five years are milk or water. Lots of the pre-prepared drinks aimed at young children are high in free sugars and shouldn’t be provided as part of a packed lunch. A childcare setting will provide water for children (and often milk too). Pack a cup or water bottle, clearly marked with your child’s name, that the setting can refill throughout the day as needed.

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- To make offering variety easier, keep a selection of bread; for example, wraps, bagels, pitta in the freezer and just get out what you need for the day.
- Use pastry cutters in interesting shapes to make sandwiches look more appealing.
- When cooking pasta or potatoes for tea, cook a little extra to put into a packed lunch the next day.
- Some children like ingredients to be separate so don't be afraid to provide a DIY lunch with items packed separately for the child to assemble.
- Use small containers within a larger box to help everything stay separated until lunch time.
- Cut fruit into bite-sized chunks and segment fruits like satsumas. This makes it easier to eat and looks more appealing too.
- Some foods may represent a choking hazard. Make sure grapes or cherry tomatoes are cut in half lengthways and do not include whole or broken nuts.
- Consider whether the food items will keep well throughout the morning and not become discoloured or soggy.
- Remember to check that containers do not leak when stored on their side or upside down.
- Make sure that all food is easy for children to eat, is cut into bite-sized pieces or that cutlery is provided if the nursery does not offer this.