

What is Healthy Food?

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Taken from 'The Rules'

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Many food additives have been shown to affect children's behaviour. Unfortunately the kinds of additives that do this are the ones most likely to be found in ready made foods created for children, colourful sweets, and fizzy drinks, fruit flavoured juice drinks and squashes, breakfast cereals, biscuits and cakes, children's party food and so on. Many of these highly processed foods are a million miles away from the real foods that they pretend to be, many are little more than chemically flavoured and coloured concoctions based on sugar, fat and waste products from the meat and dairy industries.

The effects on children of the flavourings and colourings in many of these ready made foods have been shown to range from tiredness and inattention at school, inability to relax or get to sleep, easily distracted, lack of concentration and hyperactivity, headbanging, full blown tantrums, violence and abuse in children who without these things in their diet turn into normal cuddly and loving children. They can also make worse the symptoms of Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyslexia, Eczema, Aspergers syndrome and numerous other childhood behavioural problems. It is no coincidence that these problems are increasing in our society along with the increasing use of ready-made foods.

Suspect chemicals are found in all kinds of foods including over the counter medicines but are most likely to be found in foods designed for children. Cheap colourful foods that are bulked out by chemicals and fats. For that reason I advise never to feed your children foods that are sold as children's foods. Feed them proper adult food.

Too many sweet things will make your kids fat, ill behaved, stupid and unhealthy. Sugary foods release their energy all in one go and can cause hyperactivity. We have all seen children's parties where the kids are nearly running around the walls screaming, this is due partly to the permissive party environment and partly to the rich sugary foods we stuff into them as treats at such times.

All this means that you have to read labels when you go shopping.

Most children eat far less than half of the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. The five portions recommended in the UK is really on the low side, in parts of Europe they recommend eight portions.

Some food facts

One Mars Bar has 280 calories, 43g of sugar and 6.4g of saturated fat. For a 10-year-old boy this is three quarters of his maximum recommended intake of sugar and a third of the maximum for saturated fat.

3 Slices of some sliced white breads have the same fat content as a Mars bar. Fat is put into bread to make it fluffier and last longer on the shelves of the supermarket. Bread never used to have fat in it at all and was considered a healthy whole food, bread does not need fat. White sliced bread is not healthy - read the labels, many white sliced breads now contain 2-3% fat.

One packet of cheese and onion crisps will provide a three year old with almost all of their recommended daily intake of salt.

You already know which foods are good for you and which are not, in case you are feeling ground down or not 100% sure, here is a simple list of

Good and bad foods.

Bad foods:

Chicken nuggets, burgers, chips, crisps, anything off a special children's menu. Anything loaded with salt, sugar or fat, anything loaded with colourings. Fizzy pop, fruit drinks that don't have real 100% fruit in them.

Anything that has been processed to look like something else, for example: chicken should look like chicken, meat should look like meat, if it doesn't look like meat it is because they had to disguise it because something else is in there that isn't proper meat.

When the factories process food to look like a dinosaur or nugget, they fill it with chemicals and scrap food that you would not eat if you saw it. They do this because the things they stuff processed food with are cheaper than decent food. Salt, sugar, water, fat and offal are cheap ingredients that can really make a tasty looking burger, sausage or nugget.

Cheap food filled with offals, fats and sugars is not nutritious, so you end up eating more of it, so it ends up not so cheap in the long run *and* you and your kids end up fat.

Now I am not saying that you should never touch any of this stuff, lets face it, nothing is as comforting as a bag of chips when you really feel like it. But at least you know what goes in a bag of chips; most of the stuff in the list above is best avoided

completely. A simple rule is if you cannot clearly see what it is made of; don't ever put it in your mouth.

The simpler your food is, the better it is for you and your kids.

Good foods:

Food falls into three distinct groups. **Protein** which the body needs because that is what you are made of and cells need to replace themselves. Vegetables and fruit provide **minerals and vitamins** that keep you healthy and functioning well, and also contain fibre to keep your digestive tract working well. **Carbohydrates** give you energy to burn all the other things and keep you going throughout the day with energy being released at a steady pace rather than all in one go.

It is a bit more complicated than that, each group has some of the properties of the other groups but a simple rule to make sure of a balanced meal is to eat a proportion of each of these groups for each meal. To get a balanced meal, half of each plate should be vegetable; the other half should be split equally into carbohydrate and protein.

- **Protein** should make up about 25% of each meal.
- **Carbohydrate** should make up about 25% of each meal.
- **Vegetables** and fresh fruit should make up 50% of each meal.

Here is a list of ingredients that you could consider choosing from:

Protein:

Beans and lentils, cheese, milk, yoghurt, eggs, lean unprocessed meat (e.g. not burgers), unprocessed fish, unprocessed chicken.

Carbohydrate:

Starchy things like pasta, potato, rice, porridge oats, barley, lentils, and other grains, Bread.

Fruit and vegetables:

Choose whatever is in season and good value. I always look at the label and buy produce as fresh as possible and as local as possible, local vegetables support local growers and they should be fresher and cheaper.

Always wash fruit and vegetables very well to get rid of pesticides, many of these have been shown to build up in the human body, and remember that in most fruits and vegetables the vitamins are concentrated near the skin so peel them only if you have to, but scrub them well. Avoid buying salads in sealed bags. These are often washed in a bleach solution in very poor conditions, the bags are usually filled with a

gas designed to prevent salads going brown or rotten and have been linked to a large number of food poisoning cases.

Of course if you fill your fridge and larder with the stuff I recommend, you have to actually cook instead of just warming things up, you end up eating a lot of home made soups, stews, pies, stir fries and so on. Having somebody spend time in the kitchen turns it into the hub of the home, and kids absolutely love it, they feel proud to come from a home where somebody cooks and they can learn to cook with you and you can start them off on a lifetime of healthy living.

Remember, if you have a carrot in the fridge and a chocolate cake in your fridge, the child will take the chocolate cake.

A cheap and hearty stew with all the food groups

Finally I want you to go shopping and buy the following ingredients: crusty brown bread, cheese, 1 onion, some grains either pearl barley, brown rice or lentils, at least 2 different fresh vegetables of any sort that are in season, cheap and local, (carrots, leeks, celery, cabbage, swede, parsnip, kale) a stock cube, a tin of ready cooked red kidney beans or butter beans or other white beans and a tin of tomatoes. When you get back I want you to wash, peel and chop the vegetables into 1" cubes and put everything in a large pan, top it up with a can full of water, put on a tight fitting lid. Bring to boil and then simmer for at least an hour until the grains are soft and plump. Top up with water if you need to.

Sit at the table with your family, ladle it into bowls and eat with the crusty bread and the cheese and talk about what went well today.

Have fun in the kitchen

With Love
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