

# How much should we eat?

There is a simple way to measure the size of a portion for adults and children – by using the size of an individual's own hand.

This handy guide shows what a portion from each food group looks like and how many portions per day is recommended for adults and children.

Use a child's own hand or an adult's own hand as a guide to how much to serve.

Adults and children's hands are in proportion to the rest of their body so this helps to remember that children will need much smaller portions than adults.



**Clenched fist  
= 1 portion**

**Carbs – bread, rice, pasta and potatoes**

Adults & children  
6+ portions a day

Children under 5  
4 portions a day\*

\*they need less high fibre/  
wholegrain starchy foods so  
they don't fill up on these  
instead of other food groups



**Slightly cupped hand  
= 1 portion**

**Fruit and veg**

Adults & children  
5+ portions a day  
(125ml fruit juice)



**Palm of hand  
= 1 portion**

**Protein – meat, fish, eggs and beans**

Adults & children  
2–3 portions a day

Children under 5  
2 portions a day



**Top two sections of  
2 fingers = 1 portion**

**Milk & dairy foods**

Adults & children  
2–3 portions a day

Children under 5  
3 portions a day  
(Full fat for under 2s)  
(120ml yoghurt =  
1 portion for children)  
(125ml milk =  
1 portion for children)

Some foods are hard to imagine in these shapes and sizes so you may need to think of them chopped or rolled up e.g. 1 slice of bread rolled up is about 1 portion of carbohydrate for an adult or 2 portions for a child. A boiled egg chopped up is about 1 portion of protein for an adult or 1 – 2 for a child.

Many people are surprised by the size and number of daily recommended portions and discover they are eating more and feeding children more than they actually need.

## Added sugar in foods and drink

All the sugar and fat that our bodies need can be found naturally in the 4 main food groups but there can be a lot of 'added' sugar and fat in today's processed foods, often where you least expect it and especially in those aimed at children.

### Sugar

'Added' or 'free' sugar is any sugar that has been added by a manufacturer to a product (including sweets, yoghurts, cakes) added by a cook to a recipe (including desserts) or sprinkled on top at the dining table (including on cereal, in drinks). 'Added/free' sugar is also found in unsweetened fruit juice, honey and syrups. The recommended amount of 'added/free' sugar per day is as follows:

Age	recommended maximum added sugar intake	Sugar cubes*
4-6 years	no more than 19g per day	5 cubes
7-10 years	no more than 24g per day	6 cubes
From 11 years	no more than 30g per day	7 cubes

\*Based on a 4g sugar cube (adapted from Change 4 Life resource)

Sugar **Low:** under 5g per 100g  
**High:** more than 22.5g per 100g

### Fat

We also need to watch how much fat, especially saturated fat, we eat and give to children. Saturated fats can be found in many processed foods including crisps, chips, meat products, ice cream, biscuits, cakes and pastries.

When looking at the amount of fat on food labels, it is good to keep the following in mind:

	Low	High
Fat	3g per 100g or less	more than 17.5g per 100g
Saturated fat	1.5g per 100g or less	more than 5g per 100g

## Be wise about portion size

### Top tips

- Children have an inbuilt fuel gauge. Often they say they are full but we encourage them to eat more than they need for fear they haven't had enough.
- An empty stomach is roughly the size of a loosely closed fist, eating too much stretches the stomach, doing so regularly means more is needed to feel full.
- It's better to give a child a smaller portion to start with and let them ask for more if they are still hungry – a small second helping, particularly of fruit and vegetables normally does the trick!
- It can take 15-20 minutes after food is eaten for the range of fullness signals to reach the brain. Some children will think they are still hungry when they may just need to slow down and wait a while.
- To ensure children get the right number of portions a day give them 3 meals plus 2 healthy snacks across the day.
- To help get portion sizes right use small side plates for toddlers and young children and medium plates for older children. Serving a child on a large plate will often mean they eat more than they need as we tend to fill the plate.
- Children can fill up on drinks just before a meal which can reduce their appetite for food. Try to limit drinks before a meal to avoid this, especially sugary drinks.
- Watch packaging sizes – many foods and drinks especially those high in sugar and fat are packaged for adults and for sharing. Save some for later, or divide it out. Buy mini versions so you decide the amount children eat not the food manufacturers.
- Mealtime battles will often reduce when we check how much we are expecting children to eat against these recommended portion sizes