

# KIDS READ THIS (PARENTS TOO) DEMAND THE GOOD STUFF THAT MAKES YOU GROW STRONG.

## What do Children Eat?

The eating habits of children and adults in the UK, as well as in other countries around the world are changing. In fact, they've been changing for hundreds of years. If you're a child or young person in Britain today, it's very likely that you eat foods that your parents hadn't even heard of when they were growing up. Similarly, your parents probably ate things as children that your grand parents didn't when they were young. In many ways we are lucky to have so many different foods and styles of cooking available to us. As more people from other parts of the world have come to live in Britain, and Brits themselves have travelled more widely, taste buds have become more adventurous. It's funny to think that, thirty years ago, pasta was considered quite exotic! One of the things we sell a lot of at Unicorn, houmous, has only really become popular here in Britain in the last couple of decades, though people have eaten it for centuries in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries.

In some ways however, diets have been getting worse. More now than ever, children and adults are eating too many foods that are bad for them, and not enough of the things that help their bodies stay healthy.

Poor diet is a major cause of type 2 diabetes, a disease that more and more children are developing. Some people are even worried that life expectancy could actually start to fall if we don't change our eating habits.

## What Should Children Eat?

Twenty-first century children and young people know a lot about nutrition already. You'd be hard pressed to find a child or young person who would tell you that a deep fried Mars Bar is better for you than an apple, or that 'fast food' is more nutritious than a home prepared rice salad packed full of fresh vegetables, nuts and seeds. Nor would it be easy to find a child who really thinks that lying on the sofa watching telly is a healthier pastime than playing football in the park or going swimming.

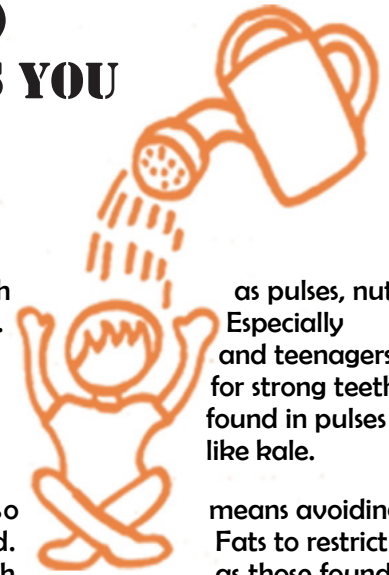
It is not always this obvious however, especially where messages are increasingly mixed. What is the difference between good fats and bad fats? If something is "fortified with vitamins and irons," doesn't that mean it's good for us? A good place to get advice on healthy eating is Foods Standards Agency (FSA) website [www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk), which includes advice for omnivores, vegetarians and vegans alike. A healthy balanced diet contains a variety of types of food, including loads of fruit and vegetables. Meals should be based around starchy foods such as wholemeal bread, rice and wholegrain cereals. We also need some

protein-rich foods, such as pulses, nuts and seeds and soya. Important for children is plenty of calcium, and bones, and iron, and green vegetables

A healthy diet also means avoiding certain types of food. Fats to restrict are saturated fats such as those found in butter, pastries, biscuits and crisps and chocolates. Foods with added sugar and salt should be kept to an absolute minimum, or better yet, avoided altogether. A staggering 92% of children consume too much saturated fat and 83% consume too much sugar.

Especially and teenagers, for strong teeth found in pulses like kale.

means avoiding Fats to restrict as those found



## Why are we eating so much junk today?

This answer to this is rather a complicated one, and has lots of different answers, depending on who you talk to. Is it just because lots of children really like sweets and crisps and are being greedy? This is not a very good answer though, as children and adults alike have always liked sweet, salty and fatty foods, it's just that now, we eat more than ever. Perhaps a better answer is that children are eating more junk foods because they are more readily available. Just think about how many times you see sweets and crisps on sale throughout the day; in shops on the way to school, in vending machines at school or your local swimming pool, at the checkout at the supermarket. Then think about how many times you see food being advertised on television! Also think about how the adverts are different between different types of programmes, are they messing with your mind? The Food Commission discovered in a 2003 Childrens TV survey that three quarters of the adverts were for foods high in fat & sugar. Only a few were for healthier foods and there were none for fruit and vegetables. Some people have called this the "obesogenic environment," meaning, it's no wonder we're getting fat!

Well, if it's not children being greedy, perhaps it's the parents fault, after all, parents are supposed to know what's best aren't they? Actually this is not a very good answer either. Parents want their children to grow up to be healthy and try very hard to feed their children a healthy diet, but it can be an uphill struggle. Being a parent is a busy job. Tired mums and dads want meals that they can cook quickly, which often means processed foods. Parents also have to contend with pester power from children! Have you ever been shopping with your mum or dad and nagged them to get you your favourite cereal, or fizzy drink, or lunchbox snack?

## **Some companies want to make money, not make you healthy!**

Food labellers are quite sneaky about concealing the nutritious reality of food. Knowing that parents will want to choose healthy foods, they might label the food as being "LOW IN FAT!," which it might well be, but it also contains loads of sugar and salt. Breakfast cereals might claim to be "FORTIFIED WITH VITAMINS AND MINERALS!" or "FULL OF GOODNESS!" meaning that the manufacturers have added supplements whereas, once again sugar and salt levels are dangerously high. Think about it, have you ever seen a food with a label that draws attention towards its bad points? "FORTIFIED WITH SUGAR AND SALT!" or "FULL OF BADNESS!"

Big food and drink companies have a lot of power over what we eat. They sell so many products, that they have enough money to spend billions of pounds on advertising campaigns, and can make sure that their product is available everywhere. You can buy fizzy cola drinks or chocolate sweets in most food shops in Britain, we are sure you can name a few popular brands.

## **Added Value - it means the companies make more money by 'processing' a product**

The easiest way to make a big profit is to sell processed foods. For example, if a company wants to sell fruit juice, it could buy fruit, squeeze it and sell the juice. The company can charge more than it paid for the fruits because it has "added value" to them by squeezing them and putting them in a bottle, then turning them into a drink. They can make more money selling the juice, than selling the fruit itself, because they have added value. To add even more value, a company can buy cheaper ingredients, perhaps concentrated fruit juice, add water and lots of sugar for flavour and maybe some chemically produced vitamin supplements and they can sell their "fruit juice drink, containing real fruit juice with extra vitamins." It sounds healthy to appeal to parents and tastes sweet to appeal to children. It would be a lot better for you, and better value, just to eat a piece of fruit or two and have a glass of water.

The Government also has the power to affect what we eat. They can do this in a few different ways. One way is to make sure that school dinners are healthy. After Jamie Oliver's famous TV programme, they are making a little bit more effort to do this. Another thing they are trying to do is encouraging people to choose healthy food and teaching children at school how to cook healthy meals. One thing they are less willing to do is to try and limit the power that big food and drink companies have over what we eat. Currently campaign groups are trying to get Parliament to ban junk food advertising. Fearful of upsetting food and drink companies and advertising companies, the Government is proposing instead a voluntary code which companies can stick to if they like. Why don't you use 'people power' and ask for the food that gives you energy, makes you grow and doesn't cost the earth.

## **Read the labels**

Not the tall claims on the front of the product, look at the list of ingredients, usually on the back in small letters. The FDA advises, 'There's no need to add salt to your child's food. If you're buying processed foods, even those aimed at children, remember to check the information given on the labels to choose those with less salt.'

### **These are the recommendations for the maximum daily amount of salt intake for children**

4 to 6 years – 3 g a day

7 to 10 years – 5 g a day

11 years and above (including adults) – 6 g a day

### **For sugar;**

10g sugars or more per 100g is A LOT of sugar

2g sugars or less per 100g is A LITTLE sugar

If the amount of sugars is between 2g and 10g per 100g, this is a moderate amount of sugar.

## **Be ad smart**

Remember that companies want to get you, or your parents to buy their product and will find lots of clever ways to try and do this. Advertising is not just done on television or bill boards, but also on company websites or other sites sponsored by companies, through competitions and special promotions. Often adverts will use celebrities to endorse their product. But think about it, does Gary Linekar really eat that many crisps? Did David Beckham get where he is by swigging Pepsi? Will that lump of processed cheese actually make you more exciting/clever/popular/beautiful?

## **Cook your own dinner!**

Eating is something you have to do three times a day, every day forever. Why not learn how to do it well. Unlike eating a particular brand of chocolate, being a good cook actually could make you more popular and is actually quite a bit of fun! It doesn't have to be expensive either, in fact preparing your own meals is cheaper than buying ready meals. Look in the library for cookbooks or trawl the internet for an endless supply of ideas, nourish yourself - you deserve it!

## **Some excellent references**

Food Standards Agency

[www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk)

Sustain: Alliance for Better Food and Farming (Sign the petition for Children's Food Bill!)

[www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)

The Food Commission

[www.foodcomm.org.uk](http://www.foodcomm.org.uk)

Chew on This- Food Commission website aimed at children

[www.chewonthis.org.uk](http://www.chewonthis.org.uk)