

Patient information from BMJ

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Weight problems in children: improving a child's diet

Many different diets have been used to help children reach a healthy weight. The research doesn't tell us for sure which type of diet is best. But here are some of the things doctors often recommend.

- Cut down on unhealthy food options, such as fast foods, and concentrate on eating more fruit and vegetables. This means your child will be getting more nutrients and fibre, which are important in a healthy diet. Snacking on an apple or a carrot may make your child less likely to eat unhealthy snacks like biscuits or crisps.
- Avoid sugar-sweetened soft drinks, like cola or lemonade. These drinks have a lot of calories and few nutrients.
- Try the 'traffic light' diet. This involves learning whether foods fall into 'red', 'yellow', or 'green' categories. Green foods, such as fruit and vegetables, can be eaten freely. Yellow foods, such as cereals and dairy products, can be eaten in moderation. Red foods, such as sweets, biscuits, and crisps, should be avoided or eaten only occasionally. Ask your doctor for more information about this approach.
- Eat breakfast. Eating a healthy breakfast means children don't feel as hungry later. This can help them resist eating unhealthy snacks during the day.
- Don't use food as a reward (for example, offering a doughnut for finishing homework).
- Have family meals, where everyone eats the same food. Even if only one member of the family is overweight, it's easier for them to eat a healthy diet if everyone, adults and children, sticks to the same rules.

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