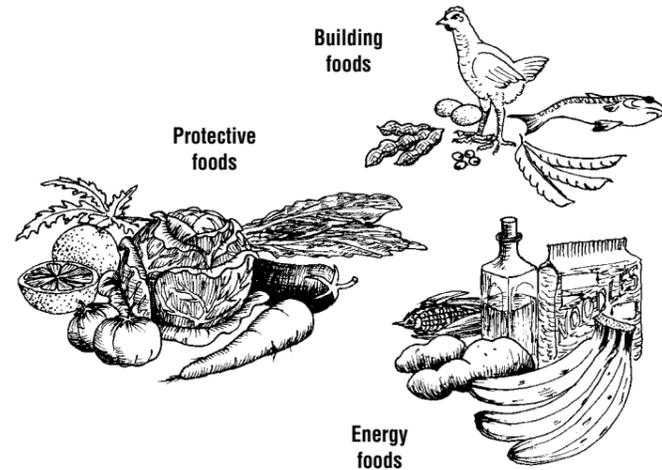


Feeding young children

Based on information from Ann Ashworth, *World Neighbours*, Sarah Carter, Rachel Blackman and Diane Reed



The three food groups

A child's diet should include food from the three food groups:

- **Energy foods** help children play and work. These are staple foods such as maize, rice and plantain, and oils such as vegetable oil and animal fat, and sugar.
- **Building foods** or protein help children to grow and repair the body after illness. Examples are peanuts, soybeans, pigeon peas, milk, eggs, fish and meat.
- **Protective foods** contain vitamins and minerals, which help the body to run smoothly and protect against illness. Most fruit and vegetables are protective foods.

Mealtimes should be fun

Mealtimes should be relaxed and enjoyable and an opportunity for the whole family to spend time together. Don't force children to eat in a hurry.

Use mealtimes to improve children's development. For example:

- Children can learn new words and concepts, foods and colours. Talk about how the food tastes, name the utensils, foods and colours.
- Let children touch and pick up food themselves. This helps to develop their co-ordination.
- Help children feel good about themselves by giving them praise and smiling at them.



Meals

These recipes are examples from around the world of meals that have a good balance of all three food types. Each meal meets at least one third of a small child's daily requirements of energy, protein, iron and vitamins. Adapt these ideas using your own local foods.

Dhal, carrot and amaranthus (Asia)

Cook dhal (lentils) until soft. Add a few spices to give flavour. Add half a small carrot when the lentils are nearly cooked. Add some amaranthus leaves and steam, or cook separately. For the child's meal, mash 1 rounded tablespoon of cooked lentils with the carrot, 1 teaspoon of ghee (or oil) and a tablespoon of cooked leaves. Serve with half a chapati and 1/4 cup milk.

Millet and bean porridge (Africa)

Gather cowpea leaves (or sweet potato/pumpkin/cassava/kale leaves) and steam or boil. Make a thick porridge from millet and bean flours (3 parts millet to 1 part bean). Mix 5 tablespoons of porridge with 1 tablespoon cooked leaves and add 1 teaspoon oil, margarine or groundnut paste. Alternatively, serve the cooked leaves separately and fry with onions and tomato for flavour.

Rice, beans and liver (Latin America)

Cook rice. Boil beans with chopped onions and a few spices until soft. Add some potato and continue cooking. Steam a chicken's liver with the rice or cook it with the beans. For the child, mash 3 tablespoons rice, 1 tablespoon of beans and potato, 1/2 tablespoon liver and 1 teaspoon margarine.

Rice, lentils and yoghurt (Middle East)

Cook rice. Boil lentils until soft. Fry some onion until brown and add spices for flavour. Add to lentils. For the child's meal, mix 3 rounded tablespoons cooked rice with 1 1/2 tablespoons lentil and onion mixture and 1 teaspoon oil. Serve with 3 tablespoons yoghurt. Serve with half an orange to improve iron absorption.

Biscuits

Biscuits can make nutritious snacks. Here is a very easy recipe that will work in an oven or on top of a fire or stove.

1/2 cup sugar 1/2 cup fat Pinch of salt

2 cups wheat flour (or a mix of 1 cup wheat and 1 cup other flours such as soy or millet)

2 small spoons of a sweet spice such as nutmeg, ginger or mixed spice if available

1/2 cup finely chopped nuts (pound to a paste if for small babies)

Mix all these ingredients together to make a very stiff dough with either milk, an egg or water.

Either roll out thinly and cut into squares about 5cm in size, or take small spoon-sized pieces of dough and work into a round (like a chapati), again to about 5cm in size. If using an oven, cook on a tray for 15 minutes at 180°. If cooking over a stove or fire, use a thick metal frying pan or sheet of metal. Cook very slowly over a cool heat, again for about 15 minutes, turning over once.

These biscuits may be kept in an airtight container for a few days.

Good snacks

Snacks are foods eaten between meals. Nutritious snacks may be useful to help fill the energy gap and are an easy way to give a young child extra food. Snacks should be easy to prepare.

Good snacks provide both energy and nutrients. Examples are:

- mashed ripe banana, paw-paw, avocado, mango and other fruits
- yoghurt, milk, puddings made with milk
- bread or chapati with butter, margarine, groundnut paste (peanut butter) or honey
- biscuits, crackers
- cooked potatoes.

Poor snacks are high in sugar (which rots teeth) and low in nutrients. Examples are:

- fizzy drinks (sodas)
- ice lollies/lollipops
- sweets.



Vegetable oil

Vegetable oil, as well as being a useful source of energy, helps make food soft and tasty. Children aged 6–12 months should eat two teaspoons each day mixed into their food. Children aged 1–2 years should eat three teaspoons per day.



Encourage independence

- Encourage children to hold their own spoon by twelve months old. This can be messy, and they will need help, but it makes their mealtimes more interesting.
- Cut up food into small pieces so that it is easier to eat.
- Give children their own plate or bowl.



Food hygiene

Good hygiene when preparing food is always essential but especially when food is being prepared for young children. Always wash hands with soap and water before handling food. Cooking utensils should be clean. Dry them on a drying rack.

Never cough, sneeze or smoke over food that is being prepared for eating. If you are ill, particularly with vomiting or diarrhoea, do not prepare food as you are likely to pass on your infection. Cover cuts and sores on your hands and wear clean clothing.

Flies carry disease so food should always be covered. Some food such as milk, eggs, cooked meat, cooked rice and other cereals will spoil more quickly than other kinds of food. Once cooked, food should not be left at normal temperatures for more than two hours.

Raw meat and fish, and uncooked vegetables with soil on them, should never come into contact with cooked foods. After handling these foods, wash hands well before handling cooked foods.

