

Feeding school-age children and youth

FACT

School age children and youth need to eat healthy, balanced diets

Children's bodies are growing and developing very fast. For this reason, they need increasing amounts of food that:

- provide energy: e.g. cereals, starchy roots
- help growth: e.g. animal foods, legumes and oilseeds
- protect against illness and keep good health: e.g. vegetables and fruits.

Hungry children cannot study well. Children need three meals a day. Breakfast before going to school is particularly important for helping them to learn well.

Healthy snacks between meals make sure the child has enough energy and grows well

Some healthy snacks are fruits, vegetables, boiled eggs, sour milk, bread, sweet potatoes, boiled or roasted maize cobs, fried fish, chapatis, bean cakes, nuts and oilseeds.

Eating many sticky, sugary and salty snacks (like sweets, chocolates, candies, sodas, lollies, crisps) is not good for a child because:

- they can cause tooth decay
- they can lead to overweight and obesity, and overweight-related diseases like high blood pressure and diabetes
- they are poor value for money because they do not help the body to grow well nor protect against illness.

ACT

Make sure your child eats healthily

- ❖ Give your child three meals a day and snacks in between.
- ❖ Give your child a variety of foods in the right proportions (see Fact Sheet 4).
- ❖ Make staple foods (e.g. maize meal, millet, rice, bread, potato, yam, cassava) the main component of the child's diet.
- ❖ Give your child plenty of fresh vegetables (including green leafy vegetables) and fruits. These foods keep your child healthy and protect him/her against illness. Green leafy vegetables and orange/yellow vegetables are especially healthy because they contain vitamin A (see Fact Sheet 6).

- ❖ Give your child animal foods (e.g. milk, eggs, meat, offal, poultry, fish) **or** legumes (beans, lentils, peas) every day. These foods help your child to grow well.
- ❖ Include a little fat or oil in meals to add energy and help to absorb vitamins.
- ❖ Add oilseeds (e.g. groundnuts, soybeans) to your child's diet. They provide extra energy and are good for growth.
- ❖ Add a little iodised salt to family meals. Do not use more than 1 teaspoon per person per day.
- ❖ Make sure your child eats fruits with or after every meal to protect health and improve the iron absorption.
- ❖ Give your child plenty of clean water to drink.

Adolescent girls need more iron-rich foods

Adolescent girls when they start menstruation need twice as much iron as boys (see Fact Sheet 5). Give girls iron-rich foods daily, e.g. animal foods (meat, fish, offal, eggs, milk), legumes (peas and beans) or dark green leafy vegetables, and make sure they eat fruits with their meals.

OTHER IMPORTANT TIPS

REMEMBER! Remind your children to wash hands with clean water and soap before starting to eat. Teach them to use clean utensils for preparing and eating foods.

PASS IT ON! Teach your child to recognise and choose healthy foods. Know what foods your child eats and buys at school and guide your child on healthy food choices. For example, explain what healthy snacks are and discuss the health value of snacks that children can buy in schools.