



Government of Western Australia  
Child and Adolescent Health Service  
WA Country Health Service

# tips to support healthy choices (2-5 years)

**You are an important role model for your child. Your child will watch what you eat, how much you exercise, how much screen time you use and how you look after yourself.**

**Children who grow up in families that enjoy a healthy lifestyle are more likely to make their own healthy choices as they get older.**



## Physical activity

Children need plenty of time to just run around and play.

Toddlers and pre-schoolers should be physically active for at least 3 hours every day, of which one hour should be energetic play. This can be spread throughout the day, in a range of activities.

Here are some ideas for **keeping physical activity fun**:

- Use a large, soft ball to practise catching, throwing, bouncing and kicking.
- Play different music, or make sounds to encourage dancing and a sense of rhythm.
- Teach your child to ride a scooter or bicycle.
- Play with push toys like trucks, doll prams and toy lawn mowers.
- Leave the car at home and walk to local places like the library, park or shops.
- Find an active friend for your child to have regular play dates with.
- Play at different places – backyard, playground, nature play space, park and beach are great places for supervised play.
- Include your child in everyday jobs like helping with the gardening, unpacking shopping or tidying up play spaces.





## Screen time

Screen time is the time spent watching TV, using computers, playing video or hand-held computer games, or using tablets or smartphones. There are benefits and risks to using these screens, so a healthy family lifestyle includes limits on daily screen time.

Experts say that children aged 2 to 5 should have no more than 1 hour of screen time each day.

Children under 2 years should have no screen time at all except for video-chatting with family and friends.

- Don't allow screens in your child's bedroom, including TVs, tablets, video games, computers or phones.
- Use a timer to keep track of how much time your child spends looking at a screen.
- Try to have at least one full day every week where your family doesn't use screens for entertainment.
- Try to limit time spent being inactive, even if not screen based, to no more than 1 hour at a time.

## Healthy eating

**Healthy eating habits start early and set children up for life. Make healthy eating an everyday priority that becomes a family lifestyle.**

- Offer 3 main meals and 2 or 3 healthy snacks for your child each day.
- The **Australian Guide to Healthy Eating** gives a guide for the types of food to offer, number of serves and serving sizes for your child (see pages 6 to 9).
- Offer water to drink. Avoid sugary drinks (including fruit juice).
- Limit treats that are high in sugar, fat or salt. Only offer these occasionally as planned treats – not just when you or your child feels like it.



## Establish healthy eating patterns

**Children sense how much food their bodies need and eat enough to match this.** But children lose this natural ability if encouraged to over-eat or finish all the food on their plate.

In the first 12 months, babies grow very fast. As toddlers aren't growing as quickly, their appetites often drop - this is normal. They just aren't as hungry because they aren't growing as quickly!

- Help your child to learn about their body's hunger cues.
  - As the parent, your role is to decide **which** food to offer your child, and **when** and **where** to offer it.
  - Your child's role is to decide **whether** they eat, **what** they eat and **how much** they eat.
- Eat meals together at a table, with the TV and other screens turned off.
- Set up a regular mealtime routine, and remember, breakfast is important.
- Fight boredom! If your child asks for food or milk after a meal or snack, they may just need help finding something to do, rather than more food!
- Offer rewards for your child that are something other than food.
- Be sure to model the healthy eating habits you want your child to develop.



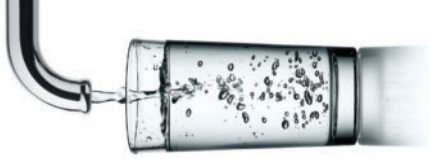
# Australian Guide to Healthy Eating

This guide shows the proportion of the **five food groups** we should all eat daily.  
Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from these **five food groups** every day.  
Drink plenty of water.

## and/or high cereal fibre varieties



## Vegetables and legumes/beans





# Recommended number of serves

		2–3 years	4–8 years	9–11 years	12–13 years	14–18 years
Vegetables and legumes/beans	Boys	2½	4½	5	5½	5½
	Girls	2½	4½	5	5	5
Fruit	Boys	1	1½	2	2	2
	Girls	1	1½	2	2	2
Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain and/or high cereal fibre varieties	Boys	4	4	5	6	7
	Girls	4	4	4	5	7
Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds, legumes/beans	Boys	1	1½	2½	2½	2½
	Girls	1	1½	2½	2½	2½
Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives, mostly reduced fat	Boys	1½	2	2½	3½	3½
	Girls	1½	1½	3	3½	3½



# What is a serve?



## Sleep

Around this age, your child's sleep patterns may be changing. A well-rested child will have more energy to play and learn. Poor quality sleep is also linked with being overweight.

**Children this age need 10 to 12 hours sleep a night.**

**Many younger children can do with an hour or 2 of rest or sleep in the middle of the day as well.**

A regular bedtime routine will help prepare your child for sleep. Keep to the routine on weekends too, when possible.

- A bedtime routine might include a bath or shower, brushing teeth, quiet time with a book, and into bed with a kiss goodnight.
- It's best to avoid screen time in the hour before bedtime. Watching screens makes it more difficult for children to fall asleep and cuts into sleep time.
- Good sleep is important for the whole family!

## Growth

The way a child is growing provides general information about their overall health and development. Healthy growth is supported by healthy eating, regular physical activity, getting enough sleep and not sitting still for too long.

One piece of the 'healthy growth puzzle' is a child's Body Mass Index (BMI). BMI is calculated from height and weight measurements. It is a simple and accurate way to tell whether a child is in the healthy range. Growth is measured several times during childhood to check if your child is tracking well for their age and gender. If there are any concerns, growth might be measured more often.

If a child is above a healthy weight range, weight loss is not usually needed. It is better to help children develop healthy habits so that they can 'grow into' their weight.

Avoid talking about weight with your child. Instead, speak positively about body image and focus on healthy habits that will help everyone in the family.

## Healthy teeth

Strong teeth help your child to talk, eat, and look and feel good.

A healthy mouth means no pain or discomfort and saves money.

To keep a healthy mouth

- 🦷 At least once a month 'lift the lip' and look at your child's teeth for signs of decay.
- 🦷 Continue to help your child to brush their teeth until they are around 8 years. Brush in the morning and before bed at night.
- 🦷 Use a pea-sized amount of low-fluoride toothpaste until 6 years old.
- 🦷 Get your child to spit the toothpaste out – NOT swallow or rinse after brushing.
- 🦷 Drink fluoridated tap water as the main drink – it's the best and cheapest drink.
- 🦷 Provide healthy meals and snacks.
- 🦷 If your child is still sucking their fingers, thumb or a dummy, encourage them to stop.

**Healthy teeth**



Keep up regular dental checks.

**Early signs of tooth decay**



Can be reversed, visit dentist now.

**Tooth decay**



Severe and may be painful. Visit dentist urgently.

For more information, contact your dentist, or Dental Health Services at [dental.wa.gov.au](http://dental.wa.gov.au) or on 9313 0555.

## Parenting support

### ■ Triple P

supports parents to raise happy and confident children, through small changes and simple routines. To find metropolitan parenting groups, visit [healthywa.wa.gov.au/parentgroups](https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/parentgroups) or phone 1300 749 869. Visit **WA Country Health Service** for non-metropolitan parenting groups ([wacountry.health.wa.gov.au/childhealth](https://wacountry.health.wa.gov.au/childhealth)).

### ■ The Raising Children Network

offers reliable and practical child health and parenting information and activities for Australian families ([raisingchildren.net.au](https://raisingchildren.net.au)).

### ■ Ngala

offers parenting support for families with children from birth to 18 years. Visit [ngala.com.au](https://ngala.com.au) or phone 9368 9368.

### ■ Your **family doctor** may also offer growth monitoring and support.

### ■ Contact your **child or school health nurse** if you need further support.



**This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.**

This publication is provided for general education and information purposes. Contact a qualified healthcare professional for any medical advice needed.