

# Nuts and children

Good nutrition is important for everyone, but particularly for children who have extra nutritional needs for growth and development. Ensuring that your child eats a well balanced diet which provides all of the essential nutrients they need can help them develop healthy habits, now and in the future.



A healthy diet for your child should include foods from each of the main food groups:

- Breads and cereals, particularly wholegrain varieties.
- Vegetables, mushrooms and fruit.
- Lean meat, poultry, fish, seafood, eggs, tofu, legumes, nuts and seeds.
- Dairy products such as milk, yoghurt and cheese or calcium-fortified alternatives such as soy milk.
- Healthy fats such as avocado, cooking oils and margarine spreads.

Variety is the key to optimising nutrition. Introduce your child to new foods regularly and if they don't like them the first time

around, try them more than once. Kids need to try foods several times before their real preferences emerge and increased exposure to specific foods can also increase their likeness for it.<sup>1-4</sup>

## Including nuts in your child's diet

A handful of nuts each day is a valuable inclusion in your child's diet. Nuts are a particularly nutritious food – rich in healthy fats, high in dietary fibre, a good source of protein and a wide variety of important vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.

Nuts make a convenient, healthy and filling snack, particularly teamed with dried fruits, and are a good replacement for less nutritious snack foods such as chips, biscuits and lollies.

## Heading off weight problems

Childhood obesity is a major concern in Australia today. Nuts can play an important role in filling kids up with nutritious food, without expanding their waistlines. Research has shown that Australian adolescents that regularly eat nuts have a healthier BMI – a measure of overweight,<sup>5</sup> and other studies have shown adult nut eaters have healthier body weights.<sup>6</sup>

How do nuts help with weight management? Nuts have a number of properties that make them special – the nutrients in nuts help to satisfy hunger and reduce overeating; plus they're a high-fibre wholefood, with a glycemic index (GI) lowering effect. For more on the special weight management effects of nuts, see the *Nuts and weight management* factsheet.

## Set kids up with a healthy heart for life

Poor diets mean life-long heart problems start developing in childhood – make sure your kids develop healthy eating habits that will benefit them for life. Nuts are packed with healthy, heart-smart monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats.<sup>7</sup> And children who eat healthy diets including nuts have a lower risk of heart disease.<sup>8</sup>

## Tips for including nuts in your child's diet

It's easy to give your kids a handful of nuts each day – even if your child attends a school that is nut free, nuts make excellent after-school snacks, plus use them in evening meals and desserts, and as fun foods during weekend activities. Remember to include two serves of fruit and five of vegetables, plus a handful of nuts every day. Here's a few tips to increase your child's nut intake:

- Make up small snack-size portions of mixed nuts and dried fruit for a nutritious alternative to snack foods like chips and lollies.
- Nut spreads make a great sandwich filling, combined with celery or grated carrot; or use it to fill celery sticks for a quick snack.
- Add walnuts or pecans to homemade cakes and muffins.
- Banana splits are a dessert that most kids enjoy – slice a banana down the middle, top with a scoop of vanilla ice-cream and sprinkle with chopped pistachio nuts.
- Combine home made popcorn with freshly roasted cashews and almonds for a healthy afternoon snack.
- Use chestnut meal to make gluten-free pancakes.
- Layer berries, yoghurt and crushed hazelnuts in a parfait glass for a healthy afternoon snack or dessert.
- Mix crushed macadamia or Brazil nuts with fresh breadcrumbs to make home made fish or chicken nuggets.

For further information on nuts and health refer to [www.nutsforlife.com.au](http://www.nutsforlife.com.au) email [admin@nutsforlife.com.au](mailto:admin@nutsforlife.com.au) or phone **02 9460 0111**

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Kids and adults need two serves of fruit, five of vegetables and a handful of nuts daily. So start them off the heart-healthy way: remember 2 + 5 + a handful – every day. For more on why nuts are great for heart health, see the *Nuts and heart health* factsheet.

## Introducing nuts to your young child

There are a few things to keep in mind when introducing nuts into your child's diet:

- It is often recommended that the introduction of nuts be delayed until 12 months of age to reduce the risk of allergies, but there is currently little evidence to suggest that this helps.<sup>9</sup>
- There is some evidence that delaying introduction of foods may actually increase (rather than decrease) allergy, however at this stage this is not proven and further research is needed.<sup>9</sup>
- Whole nuts should not be given to children until after five years of age due to the risk of choking. Smooth nut pastes or ground nuts added to other foods are a great way to make sure even young children can benefit from a small handful of nuts each day.
- When giving children whole nuts (or any other food which could be a choking risk) ensure that they are sitting down to eat and supervise them closely. Encourage them to eat small amounts at a time and to chew their food well.

## Nut allergies in children

Peanut allergy is the most common cause of serious food allergy reactions, affecting as many as one in 50 young children; tree nut allergy is also growing, but is less common than peanut.<sup>8</sup> Around 20% of children with peanut/tree nut allergy grow out of their allergy, around 20% worsen, and the remainder stay much the same in terms of severity.<sup>10</sup> It's not possible to predict reliably who might get better or worse over time, but if the allergy persists into teenage or adult life, it is very unlikely it will disappear.<sup>10</sup>

For more information on nut allergies, including information on symptoms, diagnosis and helpful tips on avoiding nuts see the *Nuts and Allergies* factsheet.

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