

Dietary recommendations for children during the COVID-19 pandemic

Annex 2 to the Dietary recommendations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Statement of the Committee of Human Nutrition Science of the Polish Academy of Sciences

1. Breastfeeding

- Breastfeeding should be initiated as early as possible, preferably within two hours after birth and continued for the first six months of the child's life as exclusive feeding; then, until at least two years of age, complementary foods with no sugars or salt added should be introduced systematically during the second half of the year of the child's life, in accordance with the current guidelines of the national team of paediatric experts
- If COVID-19 infection is confirmed or suspected in a mother, wear a face mask near the baby, wash your hands thoroughly with soap or disinfectant before and after contact with the baby and routinely clean and disinfect all the surfaces being touched
- During a severe course of the COVID-19 infection in a mother, or in the case of complications that restrict direct breastfeeding, breastmilk can be expressed to ensure the baby has a continuous supply of breast milk if the mother's health allows it
- If, however, breastfeeding is not possible, consideration should be given to the possibility of resuming breastfeeding after a pause or using breast milk from a milk bank

2. Make sure to drink enough water every day

- A child should drink several cups of water every day (the recommended daily water intake is 1-2.5 litres, including water from foods)
- Water is the most suitable liquid, but other drinks (e.g. unsweetened milk) and vegetables and fruit containing a lot of water (e.g. cucumbers, tomatoes, spinach, melons, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, oranges, apples and berries) can be given to children as well
- Avoid giving children sweetened beverages (e.g. fruit drinks, syrups, fruit juice concentrates, fizzy and still drinks) as they contain sugar(s)
- Fruit juices can be given to children over one year of age, but in limited amounts (no more than ½-1 glass depending on the child's age)

3. Ensure regular physical activity

- Ensure that your child takes daily walks and plays outdoors
- Exercise together with your child on a regular basis, adapting the physical exercises to the abilities and conditions
- Control the amount of time your child spends in front of a computer or TV screen and limit it to the necessary minimum, especially if learning takes place in front of a screen

4. Provide fresh and non-processed or low-processed foods

- Every day, provide your child with vegetables, fruit, legumes (e.g. lentils, beans), low- or non-processed cereal products (e.g. coarse groats, oat and wheat flakes, maize), potatoes, nuts, and animal-based foods (e.g. meat, fish, eggs, dairy products) in quantities adapted to his/her age and nutrient requirements

- If you use ready-made meals (e.g. jarred or canned) or dried vegetables and fruit, choose those with no or little salt and sugars added
- Give your children raw vegetables and fresh fruit as snacks

5. Provide fats of adequate quality

- A child should eat unsaturated fats, e.g. found in fish, avocado, nuts, olive oil, rapeseed, sunflower and maize oil rather than saturated fats, e.g. found in fatty meat, lard and coconut oil
- Give your child dairy products in the recommended quantities (e.g. milk, fermented milk drinks, butter, cream, cheeses and cottage cheese), as they are a source of vitamins D, A, and B2 as well as beneficial fatty acids and cholesterol which is essential during the early stages of development
- Provide your child with various types of lean meat and fish rather than ready-made cold cuts that contain lots of fat and salt
- Do not give your child highly processed foods (e.g. fast food meals, ready-to-eat snacks, fried dishes, frozen pizzas, cakes, cookies or cubed margarine), as they contain industrially produced *trans*-fatty acids

6. Reduce salt and sugar intake

- Reduce daily salt intake from any sources to less than 5 g (approx. 1 teaspoonful) and use iodised salt
- When preparing meals for your child, reduce the amount of salt and high-sodium condiments (e.g. soya or fish sauces)
- Do not give your child high-salt or sugar snacks (e.g. salty sticks, salted nuts, cookies or sweets)
- Do not give your child drinks with a high sugar content (e.g. fruit drinks, fruit concentrates and syrups, flavoured milk and milk drinks)

7. Prepare home-cooked meals

- Prepare meals at home to improve the quality of your family's diet, as home-cooked food tend to be healthier and more nutritious for young and growing children than restaurant meals or industrially prepared food which may contain excessive amounts of salt, fats and sugars and can be high in calories
- Eating out during the COVID-19 pandemic increases contact with other people and the chance of being infected
- Involve children in choosing food and preparing meals together

8. Use psychosocial support and help from specialists

- If you feel insecure or overwhelmed by the responsibilities involved in feeding your children, seek psychosocial support from family and friends and specialist advice from a psychologist, dietitian or nutritionist