

# A Healthy School Start



Karolinska  
Institutet

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# Introduction

"Your health is your wealth" as the saying goes. Our health is impacted by our daily habits, for example what we eat and how much we move. Having healthy habits as a child makes it easier to maintain healthy habits as an adult. You as a parent have the largest impact on your child's lifestyle habits. In this brochure you will find information about how you can support your child in developing healthy habits in simple ways. All the advice is based on research.

A Healthy School Start is an evidence-based family support programme, developed by researchers at Karolinska Institutet.



**En frisk  
skolstart**

# You are your child's hero

You are the most important person in your child's life and what you do impacts the child the most! It is you that can make sure your child will develop healthy habits early in life. In order to be able to form healthy habits, children need guidance. This can take the form of encouragement and setting boundaries. You as a parent are the most important role model for your child. Show that you care, give encouragement generously and often! Respect your child's opinions and do not be afraid to set boundaries

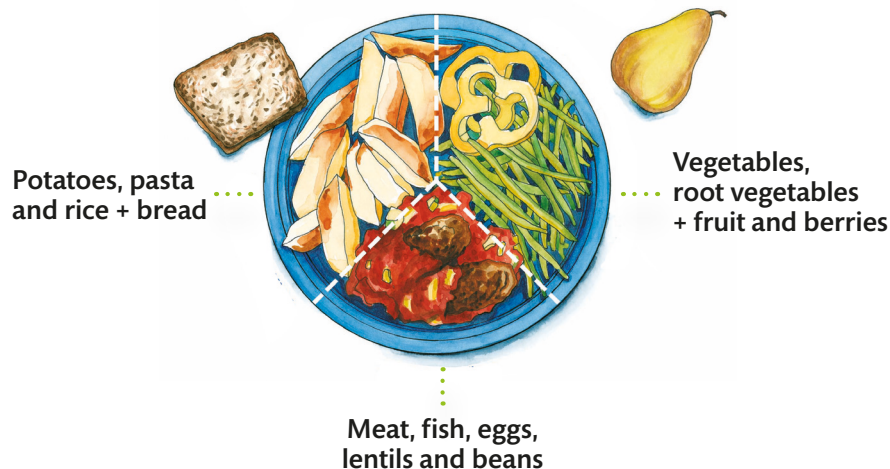


## You can help your child to develop good eating habits:

- **Be a good role model.** Eat together, in a calm environment, and eat the same food as your child. In this way you will teach your child to do as you do.
- **Set boundaries.** Limit the amount of sweets in the home. This way you make it easier for yourself to set boundaries and for you and your child to choose healthy things to eat..
- **Trust your children when they say "I'm full".** Do not nag or force your child to eat more.
- **Do not give up.** Children may be suspicious of certain foods or certain tastes. It's completely normal. Continue to serve the food in question and eat together.
- **Never make jokes about your child's body weight** and avoid talking about dieting.
- **Involve your child.** Include the child when selecting recipes, buying groceries, and cooking - a great opportunity to teach healthy eating and food culture.
- **Do not use food or sweets as a reward,** to comfort, or to punish.

# Simply good food

## Consider the Plate Model when shopping and serving food



The plate model shows how a good lunch or dinner can be composed, with a good balance between different foods. Lots of vegetables and potatoes, pasta, bulgur, couscous or other foods that are filling. A smaller portion of the plate is filled with meat, fish or a vegetarian option. The plate model can be helpful no matter what kind of cuisine you eat, whether you are vegetarian or not, etc.

For more information, see  
[www.ki.se/gph/enfriskskolstart](http://www.ki.se/gph/enfriskskolstart) or [www.livsmedelsverket.se/en](http://www.livsmedelsverket.se/en)



## Meals, recommendations and food choices

### Some suggestions:

- **It is your responsibility** to buy and cook healthy food at home for your child. Good, varied, nutritious food is necessary in order for children to grow, develop and learn well.
- **At the same time**, it is the responsibility of the child to determine what and how much of the food that is to be eaten.
- **Children need food regularly** and should eat breakfast, lunch and dinner, even on weekends.
- **Pizza, French fries and soda** are not good 'everyday foods'. They are appropriate to serve no more than 2 times a month...
- **Water is a good drink**. Serve water, milk or similar products with meals. Skimmed milk is suitable for both children and adults.
- **Bread and cereal**. Serve whole grain products from two years of age.



# Vegetables and fruits everyday

Eating vegetables and fruits every day is a good, healthy habit. Children often need guidance and support to get into the habit of eating vegetables and fruits, and here you as a parent have an important task. Encourage your child to eat a lot of vegetables and fruits and eat them together with the child, preferably several times each day. Always have vegetables and fruits at home. Children up to 10 years need to eat about 400 grams each day.

- **Be a good role model.** If you eat and show that you enjoy vegetables and fruit, there is a greater chance that your child will also eat it, although it may take time.
- **Create a good routine** by including vegetables in each meal and choosing vegetables of different colors and shapes..
- **Try to capture your child's interest** and encourage the child to eat by serving vegetables in different ways; in small pieces, in different bowls, cooked, raw, or other ways your child likes best.
- **Do not give up.** Children may be suspicious of new vegetables. Do not force your child to eat or taste, instead eat it yourself and continue to serve it.



## Vegetables and fruits



**Children between four and ten years = 400 grams of vegetables and fruit each day**



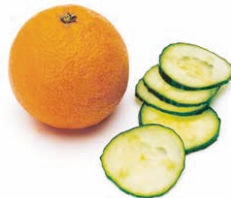
**FOR BREAKFAST - 60 g**

½ banana in the yoghurt  
1-2 pieces of paprika on the sandwich



**FOR LUNCH - 60 g**

2 dl (appr. 60 g) mixed vegetables from the salad bar:  
cabbage, carrot, corn, black beans



**SNACK - 120 g**

1 orange  
4-5 slices of cucumber on the sandwich



**FOR DINNER - 160 g**

½ dl ratatouille  
2 pieces of paprika  
1 apple

# Sweets, ice cream and cakes are OK sometimes

Sweets, soda, ice cream and potato chips taste good but are not foods growing children need. They contain a lot of energy but almost no nutrients, therefore children should not eat so much of these. Today, children eat too much of such foods, which can lead to nutritional deficiencies, obesity, and caries (tooth decay). It is your responsibility as a parent to set boundaries for your child. You are the one who can limit how much sweet drinks, ice cream and cookies your child eats.

This is the approximate amount of sweets a 6 year old can eat in a week



## Some suggestions:

- **Be a good role model** by not eating sweets, snacks and cookies in front of the child.
- **Create a good routine.** Do not keep sweets at home. It will be easier for you to set boundaries if there are no sweets, soda, cakes or sweet drinks at home.
- **Do not give sweets to your child on weekdays.** Instead, save them for special occasions.
- **Purchase small packages,** or serve snacks and sweets in small bowls.

## Who is influencing your child?

Marketing towards children is growing, especially for unhealthy food and drinks. Your child is constantly exposed to advertisements of these products. This happens via food packaging in supermarkets, on digital platforms like on social media, online games and video websites, but also in the street and on TV. As children can be influenced easily, be aware of your child's online activity.



**Some suggestions** to discuss with your child:

- **What are advertisements?**
- **Why are there colorful pictures** and cartoons on food packaging?
- **Why are the sweets always located** at the checkout in the store?
- **Can you believe everything you see in advertisements?**

# Jump, run and play every day

## If possible, do it together

Children need to be active several hours each day to feel good and for healthy growth. Small children are often very active, but research shows that after they start school, children move less. Therefore, it is important to continue the habit of activity throughout childhood.

The physical education in school is not enough. Children also need to be active outside of school and during the weekends. You as a parent have an important role in helping your child get into the habit of physical activity. Let them see that you too are active, and find activities you enjoy doing together.



## Movement/Physical Activity

### Some suggestions:

- **Be a good role model.** Be active together with your child and show that you think it's fun. Play and dance, walk in the woods, to the indoor swimming pool, go sledging or skating.
- **Create a routine.** Walk or bike to school and other places near your home with your child if possible, rather than taking the car or bus.
- **Let your child play outdoors as often as possible.** Children move more when they are outdoors rather than indoors.
- **Encourage your child** to jump, climb, balance, run, roll, dance...
- **Find a sports club** where your child can play sports with others. But only if your child wants to, do not pressure.
- **Show that you are interested in your child's activity,** ask what they did during school breaks, or after they have been playing outside.
- **Make sure your child has suitable clothes** and shoes for the weather. It's easier to be active then.



## What is your child watching and for how long?

Watching TV, using a computer, tablet or phone should be limited to no more than two hours per day for children. Pay attention to what your child is watching and how long he or she sits down. Help them find other things to do (see suggestions in the box to the right). You are a role model; children will do as you as parents do. Think about your own screen time while you are with your child.





## Sedentary behaviors

### Remember:

- **Be a good role model.** Limit your own screen time when your child is present.
- **Create a routine.** Try to limit your child's screen time to around two hours per day in their spare time.
- **Find active things to do** like playing, playing games, or going outside together instead of using a screen.
- **Try to avoid sitting still** for long periods, both for you and your child.
- **Take an activity break together:** tickle each other, dance or play.

### Suggestions of active games to play together

- Hide and Seek
- Catch
- Dance game
- Follow the leader
- Play ball
- Play with a balloon
- Charades





## Sleep tight

Children need a lot of sleep in order to develop properly. If children get too little sleep, they will find it more difficult to learn in school. Their appetite may also decrease. Being active during the day helps your child get tired and fall asleep easier. Before bedtime, it's good to unwind, maybe with a bedtime story.



## Children who grow and develop need to sleep properly

Some points of reference:

- **Children under 5 years** – at least 11 hours
- **Children between 5-10 years** – at least 10 hours
- **Children between 10-16 years** – at least 9 hours

## Together for the child

It's important that you, as parents, communicate well when it comes to the child's food and activity habits. It's good to be in general agreement about things that affect the child's meals or screen time. It is also important to come to an agreement with other adults who often spend time with the child, for example grandmother or uncle, about how much sweets the child can eat during the week.

### Feel free to discuss:

- **How should we** be active together in our family?
- **How often** should we eat sweets?
- **How can we** make sure we eat enough vegetables in our family?
- **How can we** be good role models at mealtimes?
- **How can we** be role models when it comes to everyday activities?







# How is your own health status?

To be a good role model for your child, it is important that you take care of yourself and your own health.

An easy way to check your own health status is to do a risk test for type 2 diabetes.

Type 2 diabetes is a serious disease where the sugar level in the blood is too high. Common symptoms include fatigue and the need to urinate more often. The symptoms often come slowly and can sometimes be difficult to notice. The risk of getting type 2 diabetes is partly heritable, but the risk is also affected by your lifestyle.

You can significantly reduce your risk by eating healthier, moving more and not smoking. Even small changes have a big effect on health.

By answering a few simple questions, you can find out if you are at risk of developing type 2 diabetes within the next 10 years. Take the test on the next page or go to [www.diabetesrisktest.nu](http://www.diabetesrisktest.nu). To read more about type 2 diabetes go to [www.1177.se](http://www.1177.se)

## Diabetes Self-test

### Diabetes?

Test your risk of developing type 2 diabetes

Test if you are at risk of getting type 2 diabetes. Many people can avoid it by changing their lifestyles.

For the [diabetes risk test](#)

# Test your risk of getting diabetes within 10 years

## 1. Age

- ☐ Under 45 years (0 points)
- ☐ 45–54 years (2 points)
- ☐ 55–64 years (3 points)
- ☐ Over 64 years (4 points)

2. BMI (Calculate your BMI: your weight (kg) / (your height (m) \* your height (m)), e.g. 56 kg / (1,65 \* 1,65) = BMI 20.6 )

- ☐ Under 25 kg/m<sup>2</sup> (0 points)
- ☐ 25–30 kg/ m<sup>2</sup> (1 points)
- ☐ Over 30 kg/ m<sup>2</sup> (3 points)

3. Waist circumference directly below the ribs (usually at the level of the navel)

MEN

WOMEN

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 94 cm  | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 80 cm (0 points) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 94–102 cm        | <input type="checkbox"/> 80–88 cm (3 points)        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> More than 102 cm | <input type="checkbox"/> More than 88 cm (4 points) |

4. Are you physically active for more than 30 minutes every day? This includes physical activity during work, leisure, or regular daily routine.

- ☐ Yes (0 points)
- ☐ No (2 points)

## Your health

5. How often do you eat vegetables, fruit or berries?

- ☐ Every day (0 points)
- ☐ Not every day (1 point)

6. Have you ever taken medication for high blood pressure on a regular basis?

- ☐ No (0 points)
- ☐ Yes (2 points)

7. Have you ever been found to have high blood glucose (e.g. during health checks, during an illness, during pregnancy)?

- ☐ No (0 points)
- ☐ Yes (5 points)

8. Has any members of your immediate family or other relatives been diagnosed with diabetes (type 1 or type 2)?

- ☐ No (0 points)
- ☐ Yes: a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or first cousin (but not my parents, siblings or children) (3 points)
- ☐ Yes: my parents, siblings or children (5 points)

***Add up the points from all questions and read on the next page about your risk!***



# Risk of getting diabetes ?

**My risk score:** .....

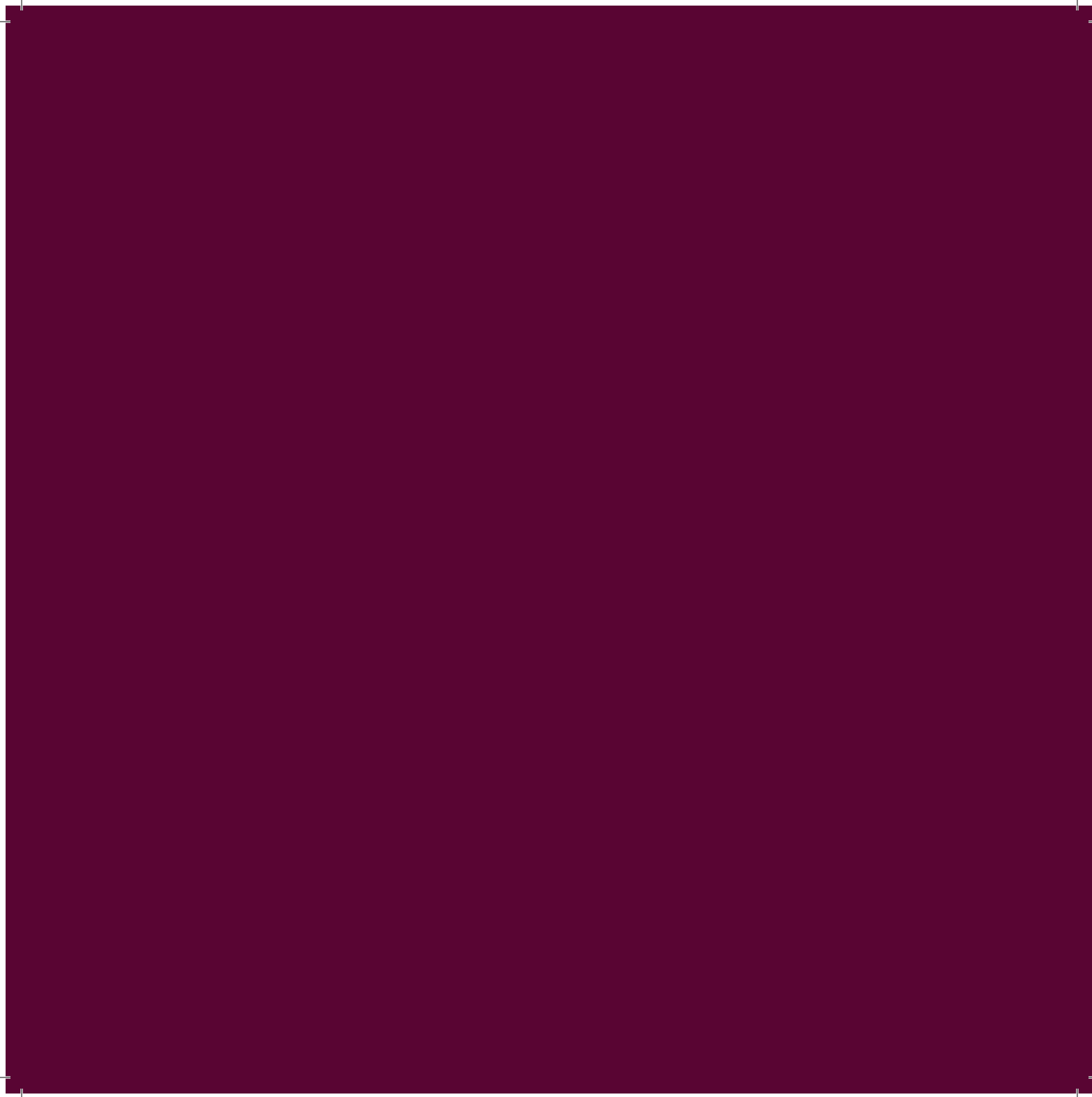
The risk of type 2 diabetes within 10 years is:

- under 7    **Low:** approximately one in a hundred falls ill.
- 7-11      **Low to moderate:** approximately one in 25 falls ill.
- 12-14     **Moderate:** approximately one in six falls ill.
- 15-20     **High:** approximately one in three falls ill.
- over 20    **Very high:** approximately half fall ill.

**If you got:**

- 7-11**      Consider your exercise and eating habits and keep an eye on body weight.
- 12-20**    Contact your primary health care center for further evaluation of the risk of the disease.
- 21-26**    Contact your primary health care center as soon as possible to have your blood sugar tested.





This brochure will help you as a parent to find simple ways to encourage your child to develop healthy habits. It deals with the importance of your own approach to your child's eating, activity, sedentary and sleeping habits. All the advice is based on research.



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