

# Supporting under 5s with type 1 diabetes at meal times

Nutrition and Dietetics

Information for Patients

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## Introduction

When young children are diagnosed with diabetes you may feel upset and worried about how to manage things, including their diet and eating patterns.

The Diabetes Team are here to help you and to make sure that diabetes does not affect how your child feels about food.

Remember, the nutritional needs of children with diabetes are not different to those without diabetes. There are no banned or special foods they should eat. It is important that children eat food from all food groups and that meal times are a relaxed and social time for everyone.

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**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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## Top tips for meal times

### Meal time structure

Try to keep to 3 main meals per day with up to 2 to 3 snacks, although snacking between meals is not always needed. Try not to let your child graze throughout the day, as this may lead to high blood glucose levels and a poor appetite at their next meal.

### Fussy eaters

If your child is a fussy eater and does not eat the meal they have been given, don't panic! It is a good idea to limit meal times to around 30 minutes. If they have refused to eat most of the carbohydrate part of their meal in this time, you will need to make up the carbohydrates they have not eaten to prevent blood sugar levels dropping (hypoglycaemia) later on.

Try and make up for the missed carbohydrates with non-treat foods or fluids, e.g. milk or pure fruit juice. Do not be tempted to offer sweet treats like cakes or biscuits to encourage them to eat, as children quickly learn to refuse a meal if these foods are offered instead.

### Insulin timing

If you are not sure how much your child will eat don't be tempted to give the insulin after they have eaten unless told to by the medical team. It is always best to give insulin before eating to allow it time to start working.

Keeping to a regular meal pattern and offering appropriate portion sizes, helps to make sure your child eats the food they are given.

The table below shows the estimated amount of carbohydrate needed per day, to make sure you are offering the right portion sizes at each meal time.

Age	Estimated carbohydrate requirement per day	Carbohydrates offered per meal
6 months	70 - 75g	15 - 25g
1 year	85 - 95g	20 - 30g
2 years	115 - 125g	30 - 40g
3 years	135 - 150g	40 - 45g
4 years	160 - 185g	50 - 60g

## Breast and formula feeding

Breast milk contains carbohydrates and depending on the amount taken, your child is likely to need some insulin.

In breast fed babies/ children, it can be difficult to work out how much breast milk has been taken. It is important to look at patterns in blood glucose (where this is available) and estimate how much is taken to decide whether insulin is needed, and how much.

Breast milk has about 7g of carbohydrates per 100ml. It is estimated that from 6 months of age, babies will take an average of around 200ml per feed. It is therefore safe to start by giving insulin for a minimum of 7g of carbohydrate following a feed.

As with meal times, try to have a regular routine with breast and formula feeds. Try not to let your baby graze or feed continuously throughout the day and night. This may make it more difficult to keep a track of and could lead to high blood glucose readings if too little insulin is given throughout the day.

## Vitamin supplements

All children up until 4 years of age who have less than 500ml of infant formula per day should take vitamin drops containing vitamins A, C and D.

If you are not sure which one is right for you, speak with your dietitian.

## Activity

All young children, with and without diabetes, should be as active as possible.

A lot of activity for this age group will be unplanned, so it can feel difficult to manage and prepare for. Depending on the type and length of activity, being active may cause low blood glucose levels.

It is important to always carry treatments for hypoglycaemia. Keep in mind that the effects of the activity may make it more difficult to notice symptoms of hypoglycaemia.

For planned activity, it is a good idea to check blood glucose levels before, and then check this every 30 minutes if possible. If the blood glucose is 7mmol or below, more carbohydrates will be needed.

For more information you can view leaflet number 908 'Exercise advice for children with type 1 diabetes' here: <http://yourhealth.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk/library/csi/dietetics/1069-exercise-advice-for-children-with-type-1-diabetes> or speak with the Diabetes Team for more advice.

## Remember!

Although it can be a stressful time after your child has been diagnosed, it is important to remember to have fun with foods. Make sure your child tries lots of different tastes and flavours to help encourage them to eat a variety of foods, and have a healthy relationship with food.

## Further information

The following websites offer further information on eating well for babies and young children:

- Infant and Toddler Forum [www.infantandtoddlerforum.org](http://www.infantandtoddlerforum.org)
- Child Feeding Guide [www.childfeedingguide.co.uk](http://www.childfeedingguide.co.uk)
- First Steps Nutrition [www.firststepsnutrition.org](http://www.firststepsnutrition.org)

## Contact details

Dietitian: 0116 258 5400 / 3930

Nurses office: 0116 258 6796

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