



**Do your family
meals contain
enough nutrients?**

Picture the scene...

It's Friday teatime. It's been a long week. (Aren't all weeks long?!) Deadlines are looming. The youngest is teething. So sleep is in short supply. The middle one has been rehearsing for the school play, so is tired and excitable. The eldest has just hit those awkward tweenage years.

What do you cook to make everyone happy? Now, we all know the answer we'd like to give... a healthy, balanced plate full of homemade and lovingly prepared organic goodness. But truth is, sometimes that just isn't possible.



Sometimes it can feel like you're the only one who struggles to meet your family's nutritional needs alongside all the other pressures of life.

But good news is... you are absolutely not alone! A recent article in the Daily Mail, 'Why Are So Many Women Boasting About Being Slummy Mummies?' tried to shame parents who admit to feeding their toddlers frozen fish fingers. The article suggested that parents were celebrating their failings.

But the response from real parents was hilarious and very honest. We all have days where things are a struggle and we do the best we can just to get through the day!

That's why at Vegetology, we want to give busy parents a helping hand. Understanding what nutrition your family needs and how much of that you are getting from popular and easy to make meal choices is a great first step. You can then work out how to supplement the extra vitamins and minerals you and your family needs with snacks and where necessary, supplements.



Let's start with basics...

We often hear words thrown about, like nutrients and essential vitamins and minerals, but it isn't always clear what people mean when they refer to these terms. Then there are macronutrients and micronutrients, recommended daily allowances and the 5-a-day campaign. It can be easy to get totally confused by nutritional advice and feel like it is a whole other language.

That's why we wanted to start with some basic definitions. Nutrition is actually simpler than you think. Often advertising companies complicate things to sell their products. But here are some basic definitions to get started.

What are Nutrients?

Nutrients are the substances your body needs to function - they are the essential substances we can't do without. There are six basic categories of nutrients:

- **Carbohydrates**
- **Proteins**
- **Fats**
- **Vitamins**
- **Minerals**
- **Water**





Nutrients are broken down into two lists normally.

Macronutrients

These are the nutrients we need in larger amounts, because they are the energy nutrients - the ones that provide the fuel for our body:

Carbohydrates - this is the main source of fuel for your body. We find carbohydrates in foods like bread, potatoes, pasta, vegetables and nuts. Sugar is also a carbohydrate. Some carbohydrates release their energy slower than others - making them a better fuel source.

Protein - this provides the building blocks for your body, so is really important for growing bodies as well as adults. Protein is found in meats, dairy and vegetable and nut sources.

Fats - there is more than one kind of fat - too much saturated fat can harm your health, but our body needs unsaturated fat (and some saturated) to function healthily.

Micronutrients

We need micronutrients just as much as we need macronutrients, but in smaller quantities. If we are thinking of macronutrients as the fuel for our bodies, then micronutrients are what sparks the ignition and gets our body working. Micronutrients are the vitamins and minerals essential for our body to function healthily. Vitamins such as Vitamin C, D, A and minerals like Omega-3 are all micronutrients.



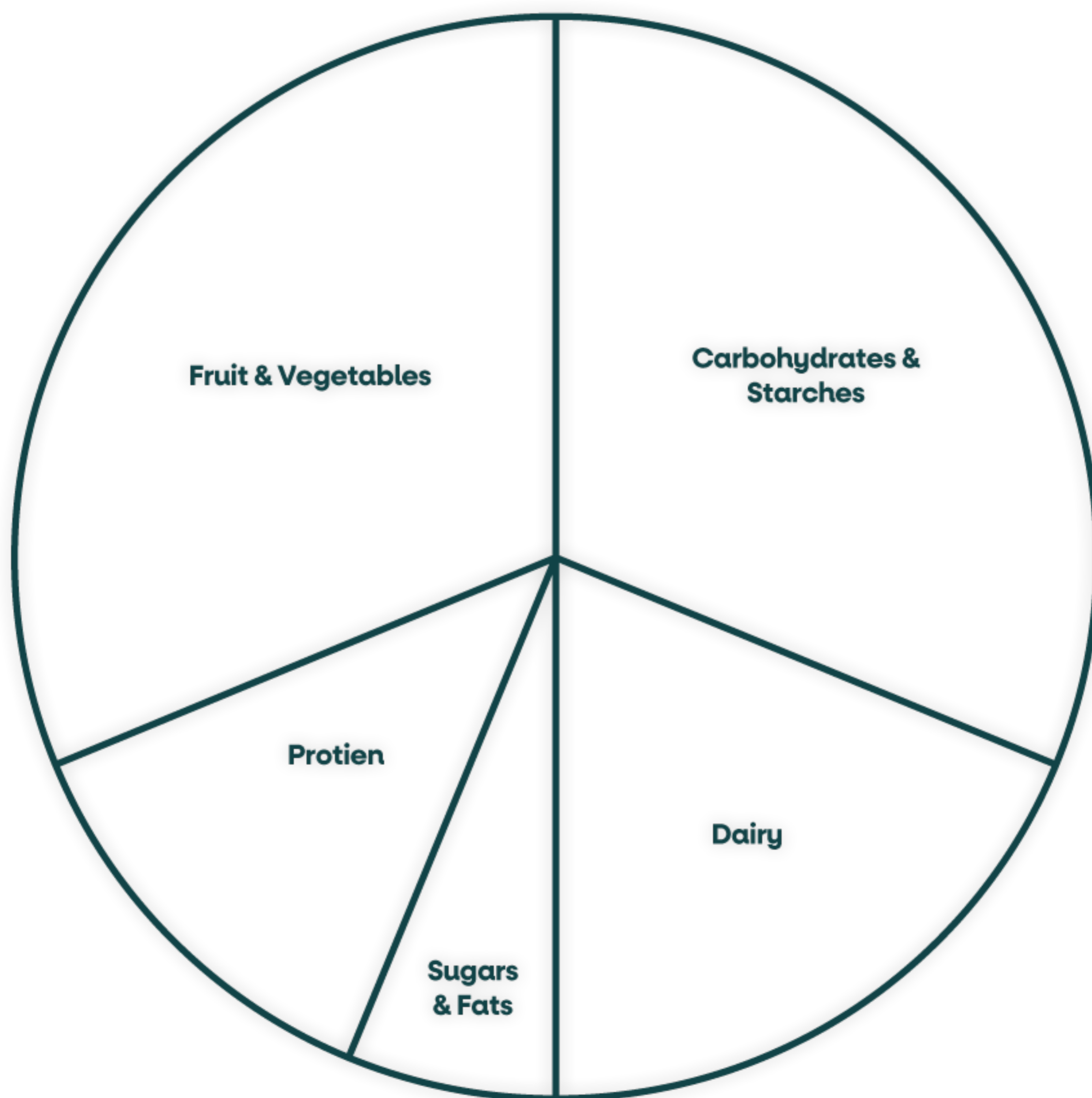


How many nutrients do we need?

We know we need a balanced, varied and healthy diet. But what can be really confusing is how much of each type of nutrient we need. That's where the EatWell plate comes in really handy.

Created by Public Health England, this handy illustration shows how much of each type of nutrient we need, for those in the family over 5 years old. While many argue that this nutrient allocation does not make provision for enough protein, it is always advisable to seek personalised dietary information in the form of a consultation with a health professional such as a dietician or nutritionist.

For toddlers, this is a great resource from the British Nutrition Foundation, 5532 Plate.





Recommended Daily Allowances

To achieve the right balance in the family's diet, another useful strategy is to be guided by recommended daily allowances. RDA covers all types of nutrients, from sodium to dairy and everything in between.

Pre-prepared foods will have the RDA (recommended daily allowance) per portion size on the food label, to help you choose wisely. This is really important for regulating how much saturated fat, salt and sugar your family is having as a part of their daily diet.

Are you getting your 5-a-day?

The now infamous '5-a-day' campaign is another really simple way to get everyone in the family to eat more fruit and vegetables. When life gets busy and we don't always have time to cook meals from scratch, it can be easy to skip the fruit or vegetable element of a meal. Fruit and vegetables tend to be the biggest source of micronutrients, so it's important not to go without them for too long.

So you have a strawberry milkshake, is that one of your five a day? Well it depends how it was made. But most likely not! A portion size is roughly 80g of the source. To make it easier, here's a list to get you started on how you could add to your family's five a day in meals and snacks. All of these are one of your 5-a-day.



Fresh fruit or vegetables as a snack

- A medium sized apple
- A medium sized banana
- An orange
- Two medium sized plums
- Two small satsumas
- Seven fresh strawberries
- A handful of grapes
- Two (2 inch) slices of mango
- Two handfuls of fresh raspberries
- A medium sized fresh tomato
- Seven cherry tomatoes
- Half an avocado
- Three heaped tablespoons of sliced carrots
- A 2 inch piece of cucumber
- Half a medium sized pepper

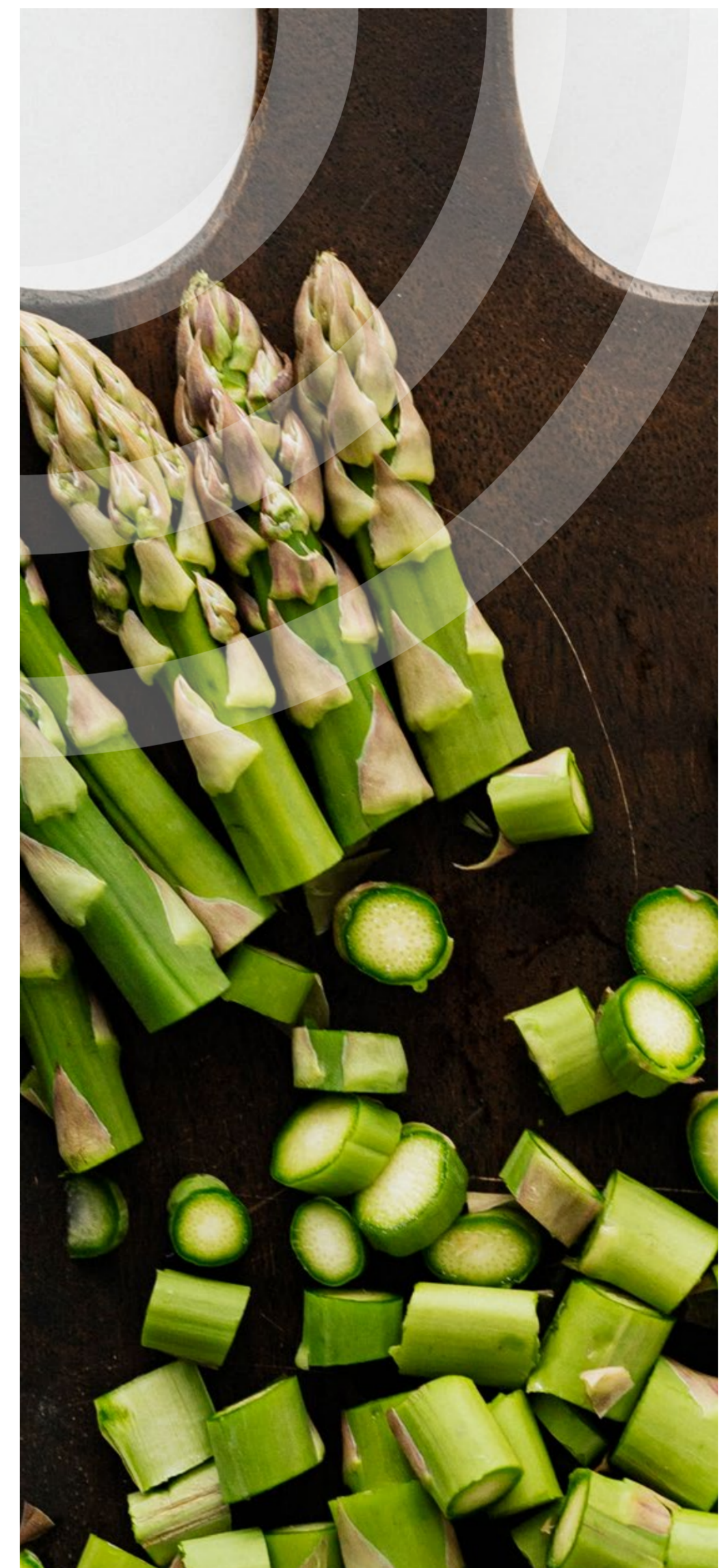


Canned or dried fruit counts too

- One handful of banana chips
- Three dried prunes
- Three heaped tablespoons of tinned fruit salad
- Twelve tinned pineapple chunks or two pineapple rings
- One tablespoon of raisins
- One heaped tablespoon of sultanas

Vegetables to add to a meal

- Five spears of fresh asparagus
- Two spears of broccoli
- Three 'baby' whole, or seven slices of beetroot
- Three heaped tablespoons of beans (for example, butter beans, cannellini beans or kidney beans), peas or sweetcorn
- A portion of eight Brussels sprouts
- Eight florets of cauliflower
- Three heaped tablespoons of chickpeas or lentils
- A cereal/dessert bowl of lettuce
- Three tablespoon of frozen mixed vegetables
- Fourteen button mushrooms
- One medium sized onion



Vegetables to add to a meal

Experts recommend that you should choose a variety of sources for your 5-a-day. In other words, you're probably not going to get all your micronutrients from just eating 5 medium-sized bananas a day (and you will actually get a lot of fruit sugar in the process!). Choosing between fruits and vegetables is not only good for micronutrient variety but can also keep mealtimes fun.



Food Labels and Nutrients

Whether you go to the supermarket to do your food shopping or get your online food shop delivered, you can check the labels of foods you're buying for nutrients.

This might sound like a lot of work, but knowing what you're looking for makes it easy and quick and can improve your family's health.

Here are four tips from us:

1

From most to least

Ingredients of packaged food labels will be listed from the most to the least. For example, if the first two ingredients are listed as sugar and fat, then you might want to limit how much of that food item

2

Portion Size

Check the portion size on the label against how much your family might eat of the food source and adjust accordingly.

3

Traffic Lights

This is another handy quick way to see how much fat, salt, carbohydrates and sugars in a food source. On many food labels there will be a traffic light coding: red - high, amber - medium, green - low levels for these nutrients on the pack.

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Check against RDA

It is impossible to remember how much of everything we should have, which is why food packaging will have the percentage of your RDA on them to help you work out your family's nutritional needs.



How do I make mealtimes more nutritious?

Whether you go to the supermarket to do your food shopping or get your online food shop delivered, you can check the labels of foods you're buying for nutrients.

We understand, at Vegetology, that family life is busy. There are probably a number of popular family meals that you are used to making and that the whole family enjoys. Many parents feel discouraged by having to change 'what works' in order to make healthier meals, but mealtimes are actually a great starting point to make small changes.

To help you do this, we took a number of popular family meals* and analysed the ingredients, macronutrients and micronutrients we are likely to be getting in those meal choices... and how we can make some simple additions or substitutions to make a more nutritious version of that meal for the whole family. We enlisted the help of Fitness and Nutrition coach, Dave Mercer, from www.davemercercoaching.com to compile this handy table.





Pizza

1 Slice of Margherita

Typical Ingredients

- Pizza dough base
- Mozzarella Cheese
- Tomato Base Sauce

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Macronutrients*

Protein 8g
 Carbs 28g
 Fat 10 g
 Fibre 1g
 Total Kcals 230

Micronutrients*

Sodium 600 mg
 Calcium 8 mg
 Iron 4 mg
 Vitamin C

More nutritious version of meal

Making your own base is a great option to cook with fresh ingredients. Alternatively, buy ready-made bases and get your kids to make their own by giving them an assortment of chopped vegetables, grated cheese and cooked protein such as chicken or ham to create their own designs.

 Use Vegan Cheese

Chicken Tikka Masala

with Rice

Typical Ingredients

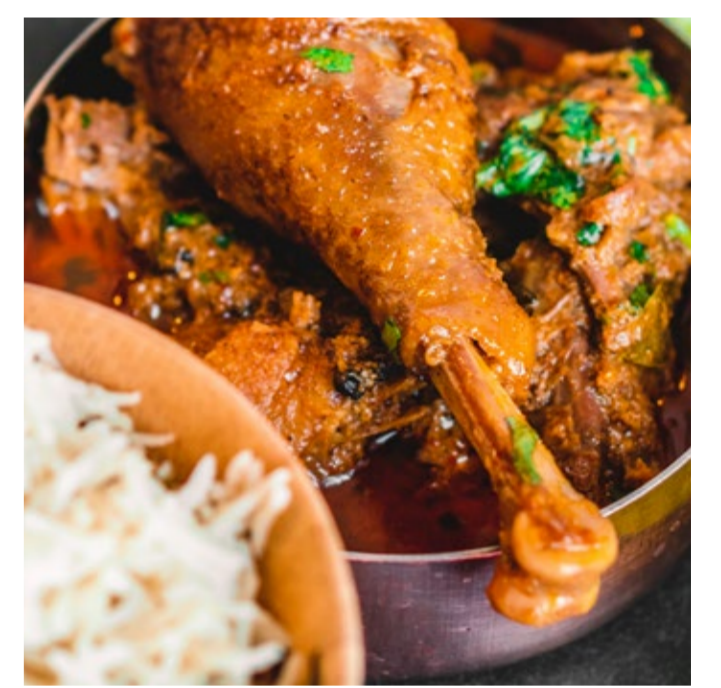
- 125g of chicken breast meat
- Masala Sauce (Homepride)
- 25g of Dried Rice

Macronutrients*

Protein 26g
 Carbs 50g
 Fat 10g
 Fibre 3 g
 Total Kcals 400

Micronutrients*

Sodium 1400 mg
 Calcium 8 mg
 Iron 20 mg
 Vitamins B12, Zinc, C



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More nutritious version of meal

Mix masala powder with low fat greek yoghurt or just marinade the chicken in a sauce made with blended mushrooms, tomato, onion, peppers and seasoning. The vegetables thicken the stock to make a nice consistency.

 Use cauliflower and coconut milk youghurt





Fish cakes / Fish fingers and chips

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Typical Ingredients

- 3 Fish Fingers or
- 1 Fish Cake
- Chips

Macronutrients*

Protein 14 g
 Carbs 47 g
 Fat 14 g
 Fibre 4 g
 Total Kcals 370

Micronutrients*

Sodium 250 mg
 Calcium 2 mg
 Iron 8 mg
 Vitamins C

More nutritious version of meal

Bake the Fish Fingers and use Oven chips or use a Air Dry fryer which are quick and easy to use while reducing the the fat content compared to frying. Use oven chips or even chop potatoes or sweet potatoes into wedges and bake in the oven. Add vegetables like sweetcorn or peas.

 Use Quorn Fishless Fingers

Spaghetti Bolognese 250g

Typical Ingredients

- Spaghetti
- Lean Beef Mince
- Tomatoes
- Onions
- Carrots
- Seasoning

Macronutrients*

Protein 30g
 Carbs 45 g
 Fat 14g
 Fibre 2 g
 Total Kcals

Micronutrients*

Sodium 525 mg
 Calcium 2 mg
 Iron 16 mg
 Vitamins C, B12, Zinc



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More nutritious version of meal

This is a great meal in which to hide vegetables! Blend the vegetables such as peppers, carrots, leek, spinach roughly then add tomato sauce. Also use leaner mince varieties such as Beef or Turkey or even combine them for a different taste.

 Use selection of mushrooms and courgette



Shepherd's Pie 250g

Typical Ingredients

- Potato
- Stock/Gravy
- Lamb Mince
- Onions
- Seasoning

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Macronutrients*

Protein 16g
 Carbs 35 g
 Fat 12 g
 Fibre 3g
 Total Kcals 290

Micronutrients*

Sodium 500 mg
 Calcium 7 mg
 Iron 12 mg
 Vitamins B12, C,D

More nutritious version of meal

Blend vegetables into the gravy/stock to increase micronutrient content of the meal. Try serving meal in an interesting way with broccoli as baby trees to make a forest on the side.

 Use lentils and aubergine

Fish Pie 250g

Typical Ingredients

- Potato
- White Sauce
- White Fish
- Seasoning

Macronutrients*

Protein 38 g
 Carbs 28 g
 Fat 6 g
 Fibre 6 g
 Total Kcals 318

Micronutrients*

Sodium 236mg
 Calcium 8 mg
 Iron 9 mg
 Vitamins C,D



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More nutritious version of meal

Homemade with white sauce made with small amounts of flour and butter in roux and mix up type of fish so use some oily fish as well as a base of white fish, to increase omega content. Peas and spinach (seasoned with nutmeg) work well in a fish pie and are a great way to increase micronutrients and add fibre.

 Use leek, courgette and squash with vegan roux



Beans on Toast

Typical Ingredients

- 1 Slice of Toast
- 200g of Baked Beans

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Macronutrients*

Protein 14 g
 Carbs 47g
 Fat 2 g
 Fibre 9g
 Total Kcals 280

Micronutrients*

Sodium 136mg
 Calcium 4mg
 Iron 6mg
 Vitamins A,C

More nutritious version of meal

Add cheese to increase protein content and add chopped ham/bacon, chives for extra flavour or a small portion of finely chopped spinach for fibre. Alternatively, create your own beans and sauce mix by adding borlotti beans or cannellini beans to a can of chopped tomatoes and onions and season to taste.

 Use vegan cheese and mushrooms





It's easier than you thought...

As you can see from the table, there is no reason why family favourite meals should be scrapped from the menu, when a few substitutions or changes in cooking method can enhance their nutritional content. In fact, the recipe of a successful family meal includes great tasting food, good nutritional ingredients, sitting down together and not having to reward vegetable eating for dessert.

At Vegetology, we understand that this isn't always possible. It's not 'slummy mummies' who feed their children frozen fish fingers, it's busy parents who are juggling work, school and extracurricular activities and family life. Sometimes our meal choices aren't the most nutritious, despite the best of intentions. That's why it is also really important to stock up on good quality, healthy nutritional supplements for your whole family. If you can see a gap in your family's nutritional needs then a supplement is a great way to top up and ensure your family remains healthy.