



HSE HEALTH PROMOTION & IMPROVEMENT

HEALTHY HABITS

PARENTS | PRIMARY SCHOOL

CORK KERRY COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE

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A guide for parents* on key health messages for primary-aged children

Parents* have a huge influence in supporting children to make positive health choices. It can often be difficult to know which health messages are correct, and which sources of health information are reliable and trustworthy. This leaflet provides you with the most up-to-date Irish health guidelines for children, issued by the HSE, the Department of Health and other government agencies.



“It’s so hard to know what information is correct and up to date, it’s always changing and there is lots of misinformation”

Confused Parent!



*Parents refers to parents/guardians/carers throughout

KEEPING ACTIVE

Vital for Physical & Mental Wellbeing

Supporting and helping your child to be physically active is one of the most important steps that you can take to maintain and improve their health, whatever their age or ability.

Being physically active is a core component of good health and wellbeing. Physical activity is essential for physical, psychological, emotional, and social health. It should be seen as part of everyone's daily lifestyle, whether young or old. By supporting and encouraging children to take part in physical activity we can help them to develop good habits, which will prove invaluable throughout their lives.

The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland recommend that children and young people should be active at a moderate* to vigorous** intensity for at least 60 minutes a day every day. This should include muscle-strengthening, flexibility and bone-strengthening exercises three times a week. 60 minutes a day can be accumulated by doing a number of shorter sessions during the day.

*heart is beating faster than normal, breathing is harder than normal

**heart is beating much faster than normal and breathing much harder than normal



RESOURCES

- Tips on how to improve children's activity levels [hse.ie](https://www.hse.ie)
- The START campaign aims to support families to take small steps to eating healthier food and becoming more active [safefood.net/start](https://www.safefood.net/start)
- National Physical Activity Guidelines [hse.ie](https://www.hse.ie)



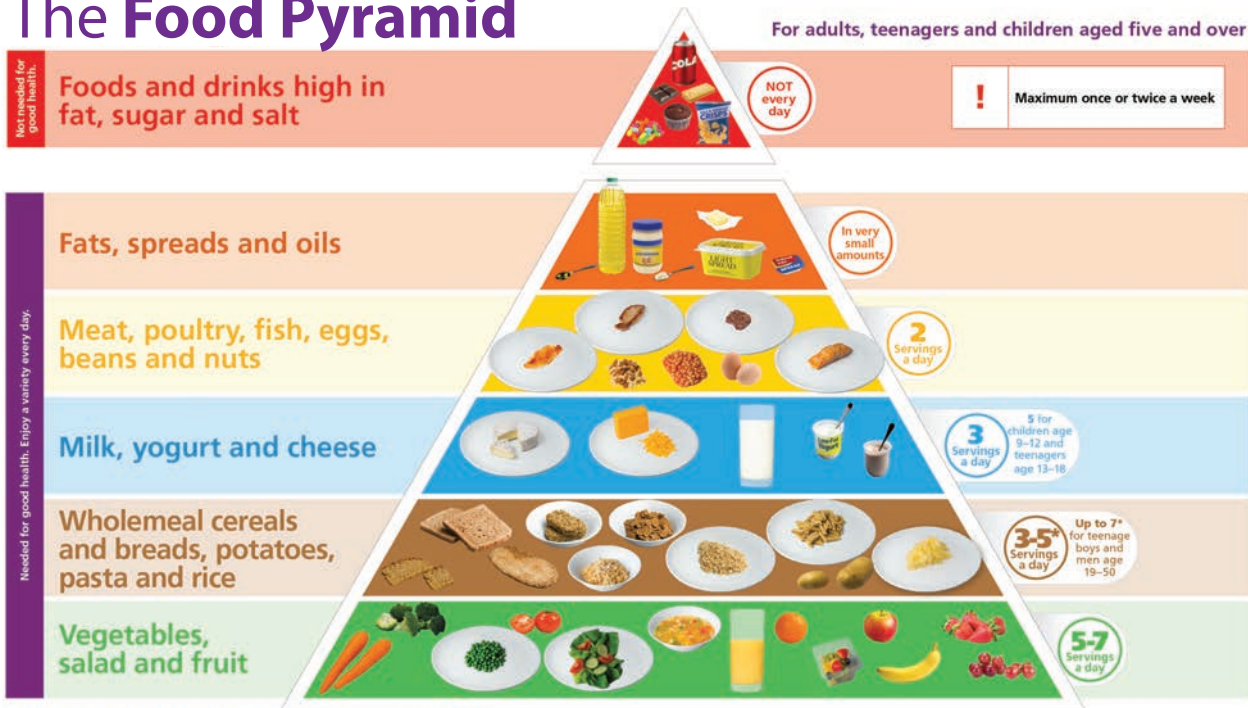
Key Points for Parents



- Being active does not have to be organised or structured 'Sport'. All physical activity counts towards your child's 60 minutes per day of activity.
- Activities, such as dance, playing in the garden, running around, swimming, sport (including street sport and games), active travel, such as walking or cycling to school and even housework, e.g. Hoovering ALL count.
- If your child(ren) has/have not been active at all or for a while start slowly with bouts of 15-30 minutes once or twice a week and gradually increase and build it into their daily routine.
- Add activities over time until they reach the goal of at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity activity per day.
- Join in the fun and be active with your child – 'make family time active time', show them games you played when you were younger or go for a walk or cycle together.
- This will also help you get your recommended 30 minutes activity on at least 5 days a week or 150 minutes a week for adults.

EATING WELL

The Food Pyramid



*Daily Servings Guide – wholemeal cereals and breads, potatoes, pasta and rice

Active	Child (5-12)				Teenager (13-18)				Adult (19-50)				Adult (51+)			
	Child (5-12)	Teenager (13-18)	Adult (19-50)	Adult (51+)	Child (5-12)	Teenager (13-18)	Adult (19-50)	Adult (51+)	Child (5-12)	Teenager (13-18)	Adult (19-50)	Adult (51+)	Child (5-12)	Teenager (13-18)	Adult (19-50)	Adult (51+)
♂	3-4	4	4-5	3-4	3	3-4	3	3	3-5	5-7	5-7	4-5	4-5	4-5	4-6	4
♀	3-5	5-7	5-7	4-5	4-5	4-6	4	4								

There is no guideline for inactive children as it is essential that all children are active.

Drink at least 8 cups of fluid a day – water is best

Get Active!
To maintain a healthy weight adults need at least 30 minutes a day of moderate activity on 5 days a week (or 150 minutes a week); children need to be active at a moderate to vigorous level for at least 60 minutes every day.

Source: Department of Health, December 2016.

Healthy eating is about getting the correct amount of nutrients – protein, fat, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals that you need to maintain both good health and a healthy weight. In order to help with our food choices, the food pyramid guide is used. Foods that contain the same type of nutrients are grouped together on each of the shelves of the food pyramid.

Following the food pyramid will guide you towards the right balance of nutritious foods within your calorie range. While the food pyramid can be used as a guide for children over 5 years, it is important to promote a positive body image to children.

The following page has information on how healthy eating supports healthy teeth.

RESOURCES

- Your Guide to Healthy Eating hse.ie
- Start your kids on their way to a healthier life safefood.net
- [Promoting a Positive Body Image to Children: A Practical Guide for Parents](#)

Key Points for Parents

- Limit the number of times and the portion sizes of treat foods offered to children.
- Offer lots of fruit and vegetables every day, encourage them to 'eat the rainbow' of different colours.
- Think brown rather than white for breads, cereals, rice and pasta.
- Check your child is getting enough calcium rich foods (milk, yoghurt and cheese) every day: 3 servings for children aged 1-8 years and 5 servings for children aged 9-18 years.
- Replace sugary drinks with water or milk. Sugary drinks are linked with excess weight in children.
- Iron is a very important nutrient for school age children.
- Foods high in iron include beef, lamb, pork, dark meat of poultry, eggs and foods fortified in iron, such as breakfast cereals.
- Involve your child in shopping, preparing and cooking food (including making their school lunches!).
- Encourage them to make choices on what they eat from a healthy range of foods.
- Be aware of and support your school's healthy eating policy.

DENTAL HEALTH

Your smile is one of the first things that people notice about you – here are some tips for you to share with your children for great oral health to help prevent tooth decay, tooth wear and gum disease.

Key Points for Parents



Encourage good dental habits by sharing the following with your child:

- Brush teeth for 2-3 minutes twice daily, using a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste and replace the brush when the bristles are worn.
- Fluoride keeps teeth strong and helps prevent tooth decay. Check that your toothpaste has at least 1000ppm fluoride.
- Using a soft toothbrush with a small head, clean every tooth, front and back, spit, but don't rinse afterwards.
- Floss daily to remove particles of food that may have become trapped and can cause gum inflammation, tooth decay and bad breath.



Things to Consider

- Wear a mouth guard when playing sports to reduce the risk of dental injury.
- Let your loose teeth fall out naturally and avoid pulling or fiddling with them.
- Visit your dental team at least once a year for a check-up.

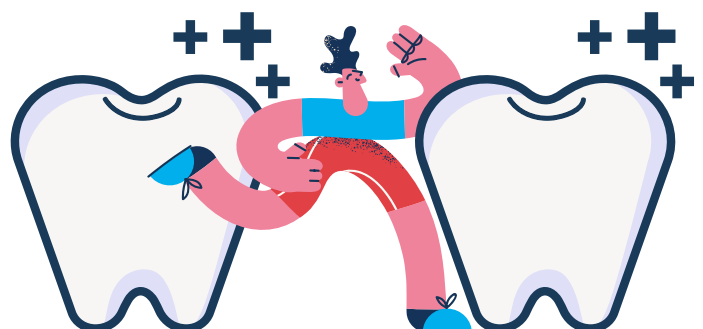
DIET TIPS

- Choose healthy snacks and drinks between meals, such as whole fruit. Limit sweet drinks and food at mealtimes, e.g. juice/smoothie – one small glass per day with a meal.
- Avoid fizzy drinks which can cause a tooth acid attack, decay, and tooth wear. Unflavoured milk and water are the most tooth friendly drinks.
- Read food labels for sugar content.

RESOURCES



- [2-7 years Tooth Tips](#)
- [8-12 years Tooth Tips](#)
- Braces Information dentalhealth.ie
- [What to do to save that tooth](#)



E-CIGARETTES / VAPING

It is internationally recommended that children and young people should not drink alcohol or take drugs as their bodies and brains are still developing until their early to mid twenties.

The longer that young people can delay drinking, smoking and drug use, the less likely it is that problems will occur in later life. Teenagers and young people's attitudes to smoking, alcohol and other drugs are influenced by many things - friends, social media and advertising. Fortunately, in spite of these many influences, parents remain the single strongest influence on their child's substance use behaviours.

Vaping and e-cigarettes are the latest challenge to health. E-cigarettes are electronic devices that produce an aerosol by heating a liquid (often called 'e-liquid'). This e-liquid usually contains nicotine, which is an addictive drug found in regular cigarettes and other tobacco products.



Key Points for Parents ✓

- Find the right moment to discuss vaping, such as when you see someone vaping, you're walking past a vape shop or you see advertisements.
- Ask questions like: what do they think about vaping? Do they know people who vape? Are they vaping themselves? Why do they think people vape?
- Listen to them, learn from them, but also use what you know to help them understand the facts about vaping.
- Talk about the different reasons why young people may vape and give examples, such as wanting to fit in, curiosity, stress. Talk to them about how to respond if they ever feel pressured to try vaping and practise this together.
- Talk about your concerns and tell them why you don't want them to vape or smoke.

The HSE recommends that
YOUNG PEOPLE DO NOT VAPE

If you or your child are worried about vaping you can contact the HSE stop smoking services at:

www.quit.ie

and search for stop smoking clinics or

FREEPHONE 1800 201 203



RESOURCES

- [HSE Vaping and E-Cigarette Information](#)



GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

SEXUAL WELLBEING

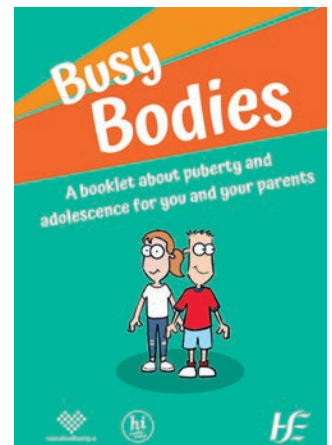
Sexual wellbeing is defined as a good balance of emotional, physical and social wellness in relation to sexual health and is linked to your overall general health. Children experience many physical and emotional changes during puberty.

Talking with children about relationships and sexual wellbeing can help children to:

- Build strong and positive relationships
- Develop emotionally
- Stay safe
- Delay the age they first become sexually active



Children will receive Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), as part of SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education), throughout their whole school life. At primary level, RSE aims to help children learn about their own development and about their friendships and relationships with others. This work will be based on developing a good self-image, promoting respect for themselves and others, and providing them with appropriate information. The role of parents and carers is to be open to discussion of your child’s questions at home.



By talking, age-appropriately, about these issues from an early age, you will be reinforcing what your child is discussing at school, watching on TV, talking about with their friends or reading about in books and magazines. You will also be preparing them for secondary school.

In addition to what they are taught in school, children still need the opportunity to talk to you as their parent/carer about relationships and sexual wellbeing. This is not a one-off chat but an on-going process, starting when a child is as young as 8 years old.

Be truthful and honest when talking to your child.



RESOURCES

- Making the 'Big Talk', many small talks sexualwellbeing.ie/for-parents
- There are a wide range of publications on healthpromotion.ie (under the search publications tool bar) on relationships and sexual wellbeing for primary aged children.



PROMOTING POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

As Important as our Physical Health



The emotional wellbeing of children is just as important as their physical health. Good mental health allows children and young people to develop the resilience to cope with whatever life throws at them and grow into well-rounded, healthy adults.

It is amazing and rewarding to watch your children grow and to learn to be independent. Parenting is not always easy, particularly if you think your child is unhappy or if you are worried about their behaviour.



RESOURCES

- Mental Health and Young People mentalhealthireland.ie
- Your Mental Health hse.ie
- Parenting Support



Key Points for Parents

- Make sure your children know you love them and are proud of them. Praise them for what they do well and encourage them to try new things.
- Worrying or difficult behaviour may be short lived, so give it some time. All children go through stages of feeling anxious or angry and this may just be them adapting to a change in the family or their school life. Children will generally grow out of worrying behaviour on their own or with family support.
- Talk to your child – even young children can understand feelings and behaviour if you give them a chance to talk about it. With older children, they may not want to talk at first. Let them know you are concerned about them and that you are there if they need you.
- Seek professional help if you are concerned.
- Make time for YOU.

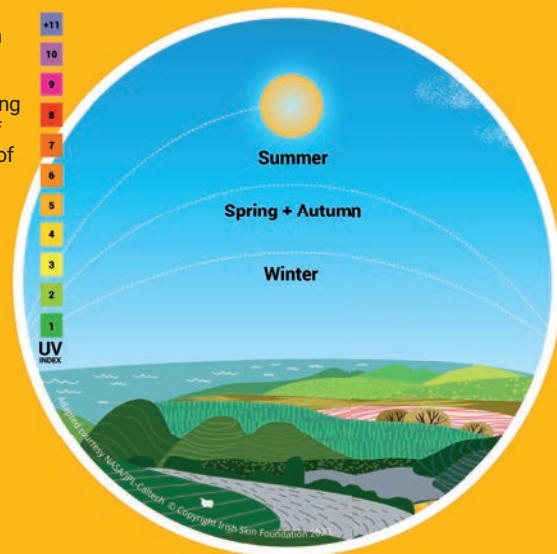
SUNSMART

Most people living in Ireland have fair skin, the type which burns easily and tans poorly, so are at high risk of UV damage and skin cancer. Exposure to UV radiation during childhood is particularly harmful, so protecting skin during childhood is extremely important.

Playing outdoors: Skin protection for children

Playing and spending time outdoors is good for your child, but it is important to protect their skin when outside in the sun.

- Ultraviolet radiation (UV) is a part of sunlight. It can damage skin and increase risk of skin cancer.
- Children's skin is very sensitive to UV from the sun. Sunburn during childhood increases the risk of getting skin cancer as an adult. If your child is badly sunburned more than 3 times before the age of 20, they more than double their risk of skin cancer as an adult.
- In Ireland, UV from the sun is strongest from April to September between 11am-3pm, even when it is cloudy.
- **Protect yourself and children by being SunSmart as part of your daily routine from April – September.**



SunSmart simple steps can protect children's skin and avoid getting sunburn: **Remember the SunSmart 5 'Ss'**, even when it is cloudy

Key Points for Parents



Slip on clothing: Cover skin as much as possible e.g. wear long sleeves, collared t-shirts, clothes made from close-woven material that does not allow sunlight through.



Slop on broad-spectrum (UVA/UVB) sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30+ for adults and 50+ for children, with high UVA protection, and water resistant. Reapply regularly.



Slap on a hat with a wide brim: Protect your face, ears and neck.



Seek shade: Sit in cover of trees to avoid direct sunlight and use a sunshade on your buggy or pram. Keep babies and children out of direct sunlight.



Slide on sunglasses with UV protection: Guard your eyes from harm.



RESOURCES

- [HSE SunSmart advice for the whole family](#)



SELF CARE FOR PARENTS Prioritise It

As we raise our children and juggle everything else in our busy lifestyles, we can forget to mind ourselves and “self care” can become lower down the priority list.

Self care allows us to check in with how we’re feeling and look after ourselves. It should not be seen as a luxury but rather an essential part of our lives.

Minding your own mental health and adopting good self-care is something that we should all prioritise. A new video-based mental wellbeing programme called Minding Your Wellbeing is now freely accessible.



Self Care

Activities and practices that we deliberately plan and choose to engage in on a regular basis to enhance and maintain our wellbeing.



RESOURCES

- [Minding Your Wellbeing](#). Five 20 minute video sessions.
- [The Five Ways to Wellbeing](#) are simple actions to practice each day to maintain or improve our mental health and wellbeing.

Key Points for Parents

Put self care on your agenda!



- Good self-care is key to improved mood and reduced anxiety. It's also key to a good relationship with oneself and others.
- Getting Active - being physically active is beneficial for your physical and overall wellbeing. It can help you deal with anxiety and stress.
- Eating Well - Healthy eating is really important to look after our general health and keep ourselves well. By nourishing our bodies and minds, we can develop a better connection between the food we eat and how we feel and positively impact our physical and mental wellbeing.
- Minding Your Mood - minding your mood and your mental wellbeing can allow you to enjoy activities you take part in, work productively, cope with normal stresses in life, and realise your own potential.

The **FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING** are simple actions to practice each day to maintain or improve our mental health and wellbeing



Your time,
your words,
your presence



DO WHAT YOU CAN,
ENJOY WHAT YOU DO,
MOVE YOUR MOOD



EMBRACE NEW
EXPERIENCES,
SEE OPPORTUNITIES,
SURPRISE YOURSELF



TALK & LISTEN,
BE THERE,
FEEL CONNECTED



REMEMBER
THE SIMPLE
THINGS THAT
GIVE YOU JOY



For further information, contact:

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