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Experts launch toddler portion sizes you can recommend with confidence

Infant & Toddler Forum releases best-practice guidance on how much food to offer

The Infant & Toddler Forum (ITF) today launches new evidence-based portion size ranges for children aged 1-3 years.

The portion ranges, submitted as a poster presentation at this years' Unite/CPHVA Annual Conference (19/20 October), can be used as best practice guidance by healthcare professionals to address parental anxiety around over- and under-feeding.

The guidance is available as a practical, downloadable factsheet (www.infantandtoddlerforum.org).

Portion size information for 1-5 year olds has been identified as an area where guidance is lacking (1) and people are under-informed. In a recent ITF poll of healthcare professionals, only 12 per cent answered a question on toddler portion sizes correctly (2). In addition, research carried out by the Forum last year showed that over three quarters of parents (77%) have never received clear advice about toddler portions (3).

One predictor of how much young children eat is how much is put on their plates (4, 5, 6). We also know the food that parents and carers offer infants and toddlers influences taste preferences and eating habits, with obvious implications for later health. Therefore, it is never too early to start promoting nutritious, balanced diets and encouraging them throughout childhood.

Dr Atul Singhal, Professor of Paediatric Nutrition at the Institute of Child Health and Chair of the Infant & Toddler Forum, says: "Half of British children aged two to three are now overweight or obese (7), and given most excess weight is gained by the age of five in 91 per cent of girls and 70 per cent of boys (8), it is vital to get feeding right in the pre-school years. We know that in the UK adult portion sizes have increased dramatically within the last twenty years (9), and guidance that can help parents and carers offer young children appropriate amounts may help in our fight against childhood obesity.

"This new Factsheet from the Forum helps healthcare professionals feel confident in advising families on limiting high calorie foods. The advice will also help to reassure parents and carers who worry their children aren't eating enough and dissuade them from coercing toddlers to eat larger portions than they need to."

Judy More, paediatric dietitian and lead author of 'Portion sizes for toddlers: 1-3 years', explains: "Our new guidance provides portion size ranges rather than specific amounts, because how much toddlers eat varies widely from day to day and meal to meal. The Factsheet provides realistic advice for anyone feeding toddlers; the ranges address the fluctuating appetites of growing children and take into account the foods parents and carers actually offer (10)."



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The portion size ranges ensure the energy and nutrient requirements of 1-3 year olds are met; except vitamin D (11). The ranges were developed using the portion sizes of food and drink consumed by the children in two large UK dietary surveys: the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) and the National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS) for 1½ - 4½ year olds. The foods are presented in the five food groups as shown on the Food Standards Agency's eatwell plate (12).

In response to the new Infant & Toddler Forum guidance, *Dr Pauline Emmett, Research Nutritionist and Dietitian, Senior Research Fellow at University of Bristol, says: "The types and amounts of foods we offer to our children are very important in promoting their future health. This Factsheet will help parents to understand which are the foods to promote as having good nutritional content and which to use only sparingly as extras (but not as treats)."*

Health and child care professionals can download 'Portion sizes for toddlers: 1-3 years' for free from www.infantandtoddlerforum.org

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Notes to editors

The Infant & Toddler Forum (ITF) is an independent group of leading experts from paediatrics, neonatology, health visiting, dietetics and child psychology, specialising in early years nutrition and development. The ITF is supported by an educational grant from Danone UK. The views and outputs of the group, however, remain independent of Danone UK and its commercial interests.

- (1) Portion size information for children aged 1-5 years was identified as one area where there is a lack of guidance and misinterpretation of existing guidance in the *Preliminary Review of Early Years Food, Nutrition and Healthy Eating Guidance in England: A Summary*. Jan 2010.
- (2) Quick Poll on the ITF's healthcare professional website (www.infantandtoddlerforum.org). "How many tablespoons of baked beans in tomato sauce is about the right amount to offer to a toddler?" Responses as of 12 October 2011. Out of 239 respondents, 29 gave the correct answer as 2-5 tablespoons.
- (3) 'Who's feeding your toddler?' OnePoll on behalf of the Infant & Toddler Forum, 2010.
- (4) Birch LL, Johnson SL, Andresen G, Peters J, Schultze MC. The variability of young children's energy intake. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 1991, 324,232-5.
- (5) Faith MS, Kelley S, Birch LL, Francis L, Sherry B. Parent-Child feeding strategies and their relationship to child eating and weight status. *Obesity Research*, 2004, 12, 11, 1711-1722.
- (6) Galloway AT, Fiorito LM, Francis LA, Birch LL. Finish your soup; counterproductive effects of pressuring children to eat on intake. *Appetite*, 2006, 46, 318-323.
- (7) Bates B, Lennox A, Swan G. *National Diet and Nutrition Survey: Headline results from Years 1 and 2 (combined) of the Rolling Programme (2008/2009-2009/2010)*: London: HMSO, 2010
- (8) Gardner DS, Hosking J, Metcalf BS, Jeffery AN, Voss LD, Wilkin TJ. *Contribution of early weight gain to childhood overweight and metabolic health: a longitudinal study (EarlyBird 36)*. *Pediatrics*. 2009;123:e67-73.
- (9) Benson, C. (2009) 'Increasing portion size in Britain.' *Society, biology and human affairs.*, 74 (2). pp. 4-20.
- (10) Foods allocated for the ITF portion size ranges were selected from the most frequently eaten foods in ALSPAC, NDNS, and from foods recorded by parents using [Tot It Up](#), the ITF's online dietary analysis tool. Tot It Up was used to include foods currently on the market. Foods included were those most likely to make a contribution to a nutritionally adequate diet.
- (11) All toddlers need a supplement of vitamin D. NICE public health guidance 11: *Improving the nutrition of pregnant and breastfeeding mothers and children in low-income households*. National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, London, 2008.
- (12) The eatwell plate shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group. This includes everything you eat during the day, including snacks. <http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/publication/eatwellplate0210.pdf>