

### Child nutrition

A nutritious diet is a critical component of healthy childhood growth and development. The *Australian Dietary Guidelines (ADGs)* provide evidence-based advice about the amount and types of foods we need to eat to promote good health and wellbeing. According to the ADGs, both adults and children should enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from the Five Food Groups every day and drink plenty of water.

The Five Food Groups include: vegetables and legumes/beans; fruit; grains; lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds; and milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or their alternatives.

The recommended number of serves of each food group varies according to age and gender.

Adequate vegetable and fruit intake is linked to a significantly lower risk of obesity and chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, stroke and some cancers! Fruit and vegetables are rich sources of vitamins, minerals, fibre and antioxidants.

Food and drinks that are **not part** of the Five Food Groups are called discretionary choices because they are not an essential part of healthy dietary patterns. Discretionary choices are high in kilojoules, saturated fat, added sugars and/or salt or alcohol and, if chosen, should be eaten only sometimes and in small amounts.

Most Australians, including children, consume too many discretionary choices instead of choosing foods from the Five Food Groups.

Some examples of discretionary foods include:

- Sweet biscuits, cakes and pastries
- Processed meats such as ham, salami and sausages
- Ice creams and desserts
- Salty snacks such as chips and crisps
- Confectionary including lollies, chocolates and icing
- Fast food and takeaways including deep fried food, hot chips and meat pies
- Cream and butter
- Sugar sweetened drinks, including soft drinks, sports drinks, cordials and alcohol.

If chosen, discretionary choices should be consumed occasionally and in limited quantities.

Refer to the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating* if you would like to know more about the recommended servings for yourself or for your child.



**DON'T FORGET to drink plenty of water every day!**

Water should be encouraged as the drink of choice for children of all ages.

Research<sup>2,3</sup> indicates dietary patterns that are not based on the Five Food Groups can lead to:

- Poor growth and development, emotional wellbeing and health outcomes as an adult
- Poor school performance
- Nutrition deficiencies
- Increased risk of overweight/ obesity, chronic diseases, infection and premature death.

### What do we know about the eating patterns of children in the ACT?

Results from the 2018 ACT Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (ACTPANS) show that the majority of **ACT Year 6 students meet or exceed the daily recommendation of two serves of fruit.**

The proportion of children reporting that they eat sufficient fruit has been stable in recent years.



Self-reported daily fruit consumption, ACT Year 6 students

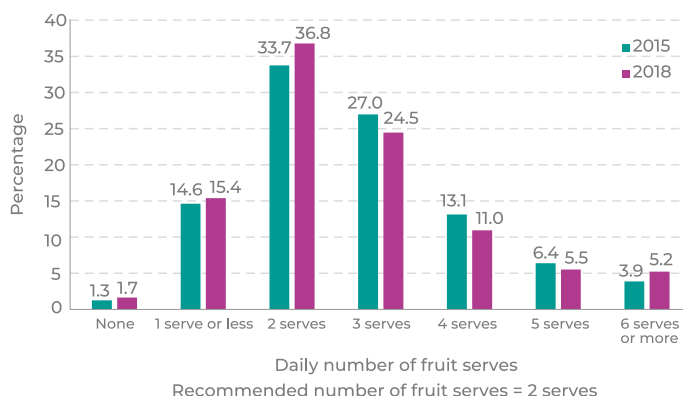
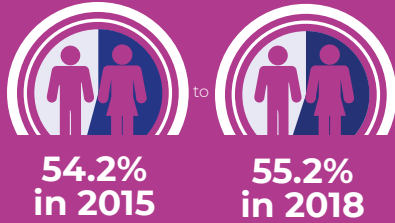


Figure 1: Self-reported daily fruit consumption, ACT Year 6 students (Source: 2015 and 2018 ACTPANS)

In contrast, **vegetable consumption amongst ACT Year 6 students is low**, with only one in 10 (10.3%) of children meeting the daily recommendation of five or more serves in 2018 (Figure 2). This figure remains stable from 2015.

**Over half of all children (55.2%) consumed less than 2 serves of vegetables per day** in 2018, which has remained stable from 54.2% in 2015.



**Fewer than 2% (1.5%) report consuming no vegetables at all in 2018** (Figure 2).



Self-reported daily vegetable consumption, ACT Year 6 students

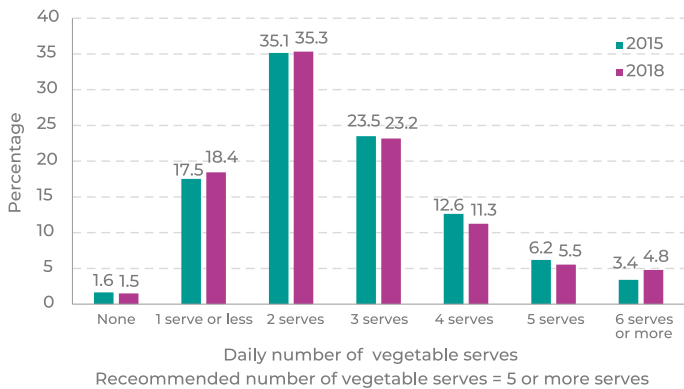


Figure 2: Self-reported daily vegetable consumption, ACT Year 6 students (Source: 2015 and 2018 ACTPANS)



The ADGs recommend that if discretionary food and drinks are chosen that they be consumed only sometimes and in small amounts. Currently ACT Year 6 students consume too many discretionary foods, too frequently. The most common food items include crisps, confectionery, energy/fruit bars, processed meat, ice creams and cake (Figure 3).

Self-reported weekly discretionary food intake, ACT Year 6 students

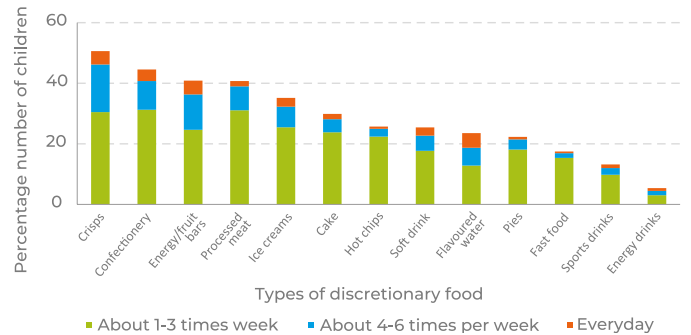


Figure 3: Self-reported weekly discretionary food intake, ACT Year 6 students (Source: 2018 ACTPANS)

## What are we doing to improve the diet quality of ACT children?

A number of school-based health and wellbeing programs are implemented by ACT Health. Refer to the links below for more information:

If you are concerned about your child's health and wellbeing and would like to seek personalised advice from a dietitian, contact The Women, Youth and Children Nutrition Service run by ACT Health. Find more information using this link <http://www.health.act.gov.au/our-services/nutrition/women-youth-children-nutrition-service>. This is a free service.

Alternatively, you can choose a dietitian using Dietitians Association Australia's Find an Accredited Practising dietitian webpage <https://daa.asn.au/find-an-apid/>. Fees may apply for this service.

## References

1. World Health Organization (2018), 5 Keys to healthy diet- Breastfeed babies and young children accessed via [http://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/5keys\\_healthydiet/en/](http://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/5keys_healthydiet/en/).
2. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (2018), Childhood nutrition facts accessed via <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/nutrition/facts.htm>.
3. Salam R A, Das J K & Bhutta Z A (2015), Current Issues and Priorities in Childhood Nutrition, Growth, and Infections, The Journal of Nutrition, V. 145, I.5, pp.1116S-1122S. Accessed via <https://academic.oup.com/jn/article/145/5/1116S/4589943>.