

Healthy eating and adequate physical activity are essential for all children and young people to ensure proper growth and development can take place. They contribute to reducing the risk of preventable disease in later life and help to establish patterns of behaviour and attitudes that are beneficial throughout life.

### Healthy Care

This briefing is for all who are involved in Healthy Care Partnerships and:

- identifies why physical activity and healthy eating and drinking are important for children and young people
- identifies key messages about physical activity and healthy eating and drinking
- provides examples of how healthy care can promote physical activity and healthy eating and drinking for looked after children and young people
- offers signposts to guidance, resources and further information.

The Healthy Care Programme, funded by the Department for Education and Skills, is a practical means of improving the health of looked after children and young people in line with the Department of Health guidance *Promoting the Health of Looked After Children* (2002a). Through partnership working, policy development, and with the participation of looked after children and young people, it will ensure that services are child-focused, provide a healthy care environment and support the National Healthy Care Standard.

The National Healthy Care Standard is based on a child's entitlement to:

- appreciation, love, respect and consistency
- a safe, protective and healthy care environment
- opportunities to develop personal and social skills to care for their health and well-being now and in the future
- effective healthcare, assessment, treatment and support.

## Healthy eating and physical activity

There is almost no research evidence about physical activity and healthy eating and drinking in relation to looked after children and young people. Some looked after children and young people may experience increased health inequalities due to their pre-care experiences of poverty, neglect and abuse.

Obesity, poor diet and lack of physical activity have been repeatedly identified as threats to the nation's health. They are increasingly affecting children and young people and giving rise to concern about their long-term health in adulthood (Great Britain Parliament 2004, DH 2004a, and National Audit Office 2001).

The facts about the health of children and young people, as listed below, highlight that there is a serious problem.

- In the past 10 years, obesity in six-year-olds has doubled (to 8.5 per cent) and has trebled among 15-year-olds (to 15 per cent) (Department of Health 2003a). A third of young adults are obese or overweight (Department of Health 2002b).
- Overweight adolescents have a 70 per cent chance of becoming overweight or obese adults (Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology 2003).
- Maturity-onset diabetes (type 2) is now being seen in schoolchildren who are obese – previously it was only seen in middle-aged and older adults (Department of Health 2003b).
- Children in Britain eat on average only two portions of fruit and vegetables a day, and one in five eat no fruit at all

(Office of National Statistics 2000).

- Meals and snacks eaten outside the home tend to be high in fat, with about 40 per cent of calories coming from fat (Great Britain National Food Survey Committee 2001).
- Consumption of fast foods has increased with more meals eaten at 'quick service' catering outlets (Department of Health 2003b).
- A significant proportion of older children have low levels of some vitamins and minerals (vitamin A, riboflavin, iron, zinc, calcium, magnesium and potassium) in their diets (Office of National Statistics 2000). Nutrients are important for healthy growth and development, preventing anaemia and promoting healthy bones.
- Tooth decay is one of the most common childhood diseases in the UK. The main cause is the sugar found in foods such as soft drinks, cakes and confectionery (Food Standards Agency 2004).
- The consumption of fizzy drinks has almost doubled in the past 15 years, young adults now drink an average of six cans a week (Food Standards Agency and Department of Health 2002).
- Three out of ten boys and four out of ten girls are not meeting the recommended hour-a-day requirement for physical activity for children (Department of Health 2003c).
- Two in ten boys and girls take less than 30 minutes activity a day (Department of Health 2004a).
- Children spend on average 11.4 hours

a week watching TV or video, 7.5 hours on sport/exercise and 4.4 hours playing computer games (Sport England/MORI 1999).

- Physical education is compulsory within the National Curriculum – two hours a week for 5- to 16-year-olds. Healthy eating is covered in a range of curriculum subjects. However some looked after young people experience interrupted education or are excluded and miss the opportunity for regular physical activity and learning about healthy eating.
- There is some evidence that young people in residential care have limited control over food provided for them and limited access to food beyond set meal times. This may create barriers to accessing a healthy, well-balanced diet (Caroline Walker Trust 2001).
- Access to a healthy diet may also be determined by income, and access to and availability of healthy food. People on low incomes tend to have poorer diets and eat less fruit and vegetables (Department of Health, 1996).

### Key messages about healthy eating and drinking

The Food Standards Agency advises that: **A healthy diet contains lots of fruit and vegetables; is based on starchy foods such as wholegrain bread, pasta and rice; and is low in fat (especially saturated fat), salt and sugar.** (2005)

The Balance of Good Health guidelines (see box) give information about healthy eating and clarify key messages.

#### 5 A DAY

It has been estimated that eating at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables a day could reduce the risk of deaths from chronic diseases, such as heart disease, stroke and cancer, by up to 20 per cent (Department of Health 2000).

The 5 A DAY Programme aims to encourage all adults and children over five years to eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables each day. A portion is 80 grams and can be as little as:

- one medium-sized apple, orange or banana
- two tablespoons of vegetables such as carrots or broccoli
- a glass of fruit juice.

It can be fresh, frozen, chilled, canned, 100 per cent juice, or dried fruit – it all counts. But:

- potatoes, sweet potatoes and yams don't count
- fruit juice only counts as one portion, no matter how much of it you drink.

Children under five should be given a mixed and varied diet including a variety of fruit and vegetables. Health visitors will be a vital source of information and support on diet for the under-fives.

### The Balance of Good Health

The Balance of Good Health guidelines give information about healthy eating and clarify key messages. The eight guidelines for a healthy diet for everyone over five years of age are:

- enjoy your food
- eat a variety of different foods
- eat the right amount to be a healthy weight
- eat plenty of foods rich in starch and fibre
- eat plenty of fruit and vegetables
- don't eat too many foods that contain a lot of fat
- don't have sugary foods and drinks too often
- if you drink alcohol, drink sensibly. (Food Standards Agency 2001)

Note: this does not apply to children under five years (health visitors, midwives, registered dieticians and GPs can advise on a healthy diet for this group) or children with special dietary needs (GPs and registered dieticians will be able to provide relevant advice).

Further information and resources about the Balance of Good Health (including leaflets and posters) are available from the Food Standards Agency and the British Nutrition Foundation.

### Key messages about physical activity

Physical activity in childhood has a range of benefits during childhood, including healthy growth and development, maintenance of energy balance, psychological well-being and social interaction. (Department of Health 2004)

Physical activity can help to prevent excess weight gain during childhood, and can help overweight children to lose weight.

Physical activity is important for bone health. In particular, exercises that produce high physical stresses on the bones – such as jumping, skipping, dancing and aerobics – during the years of the growth spurt can help to increase bone mineral density and protect against osteoporosis in later life.

### Recommended levels of physical activity for 5- to 18-year-olds

- All young people (5 to 18 years) should achieve a total of at least 60 minutes of at least moderate intensity physical activity each day. At least twice a week this should include activities to improve bone health (activities that produce high physical stresses on the bones), muscles strength and flexibility.
- The activity can be continuous or intermittently accumulated throughout the day. Young children can achieve the 60 minute target through the accumulation of bouts of activity of varying duration. This can include short bursts and bouts of physical activity, as well as longer bouts as when taking part in sports.
- This hour can be made up from a variety of activities across the day, including organised sport, play, walking or cycling to school, physical education or planned exercise.
- Moderate intensity activity is at a level where the child or young person feels warm and slightly out of breath. (Department of Health 2004)

One of the most effective ways of encouraging school-age children to increase their physical activity level is to support them with opportunities for outdoor play. The best types of free-time exercise are walking and playing informal ball games. Children get more exercise from outdoor play than they do from clubs and formal sports activities (Children's Play Council 2004).

Also, while many children and young people do not participate in enough physical activity and need encouragement and support to do so, many others are physically active and should be encouraged and supported to maintain this.

It is important to note that these recommendations are general. Children

and young people with specific health conditions and needs should consult their GP and/or request exercise advice from qualified health or fitness professionals.

### How Healthy Care can promote physical activity and healthy eating and drinking

A healthy care environment provides a sound base for the promotion of healthy eating and drinking and physical activity because, for children and young people, it:

- provides supportive personal relationships
- strengthens their sense of self
- stimulates their curiosity and desire to learn about the people and world around them
- provides opportunities to exercise choice and learn about responsibility
- is free from fear or violence
- offers a safe living environment
- promotes and protects their physical and mental health.

Children and young people need to learn about a healthy diet and how to make healthy eating choices. Carers and staff can support this by encouraging discussion about diet, involving children and young people in making choices about food, involving them in shopping for and preparing meals. Also, food is often connected with comfort or showing affection and carers need to be aware of this and strike a healthy balance. Similarly, carers and staff can encourage and support children and young people to engage in more physical activity (for example, support children and young people to walk or cycle to school in safety). The way carers and staff themselves behave is important as they are role models for children and young people.

Healthy Care Partnerships can promote healthy eating and physical activity for looked after children and young people by ensuring that it is addressed in Healthy Care audits and Healthy Care action plans. This will include training and professional development for carers and residential social workers to support them in providing a healthy care environment and understanding the importance of their role.

## The National Healthy Care Standard

### A child or young person living in a healthy care environment is entitled to:

1. feel safe, protected and valued in a strong, sustained and committed relationship with at least one carer;
2. live in a caring, healthy and learning environment;
3. feel respected and supported in his/her cultural beliefs and personal identity;
4. have access to effective healthcare, assessment, treatment and support;
5. have opportunities to develop personal and social skills, talents and abilities and to spend time in freely chosen play, cultural and leisure activities; and
6. be prepared for leaving care by being supported to care and provide for him/herself in the future.

### Examples from Healthy Care Partnerships of action to promote healthy eating and physical activity.

#### Policy

- Outcomes about healthy diet and opportunities for physical activity are written into the local children and young people's preventive plan.
- A policy on healthy eating and drinking has been developed for residential children's homes.

#### Partnership

- Health assessments are held in local leisure centres. Young people can drop in to see the nurse or doctor as well as take part in arts and leisure activities including using the swimming pool and fitness centre.
- A community dietician works with staff and young people in children's homes. Young people's involvement has included designing a new kitchen for their residential home and learning about budgeting, shopping and cooking.

#### Practice

- A Healthy Care health promotion training course for foster carers on healthy eating and drinking and nutrition for families was delivered locally by multi-agency partners.
- A leisure and fun coordinator was appointed to ensure looked after children could access leisure activities including physical activities.
- Height and weight is discussed sensitively at health assessments plus healthy diet and physical activity. Rapid weight loss or gain is followed up.
- Residential care staff have been trained in community sports award leadership to support and encourage more involvement in physical activity.
- Fresh fruit and vegetables, water and healthy snacks are freely available in residential children's homes.
- Carers and staff ensure that meals reflect the heritage and cultural preferences of children and young people.

#### Participation

- Looked after young people have helped to organise 'Cook and Eat' groups designed to develop cooking skills and knowledge about healthy eating and drinking.
- A young mother's group which includes young care leavers, supports and encourages breast-feeding and teaches how to budget and cook healthy meals.
- Children and young people are supported and encouraged to participate in physical activities of their choice (for example by ensuring play/sports equipment is available, making sure they can attend regularly and carers showing pride in the child/young persons efforts and achievements).
- Young people were consulted on the contents of a draft health guidance file for staff and carers that included issues such as healthy eating and physical activity. A care leaver was employed to run the consultation and developed a questionnaire and quiz. This resulted in a relevant guidance file as well as young people being more interested in health topics.

## National Policy

The National Healthy Care Standard contributes to the achievement of:

- **The five outcomes for children and young people described in Every Child Matters**  
The outcomes are to: be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; and achieve economic well-being.
- **The National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services**  
The framework identifies 10 national standards for children and young people's services. Standard 1 refers to the need to promote healthy lifestyles including healthy eating and active lives.
- **Choosing Health: Making healthy choices easier**  
The public health White Paper identifies a range of measures that focus on improving diet (in the home and other settings such as schools) and increasing levels of physical activity for children and young people.

## Useful websites

[www.ncb.org.uk/healthycare](http://www.ncb.org.uk/healthycare)

Information about the National Healthy Care Standard, including briefings on key topics and resources.

[www.5ADAY.nhs.uk](http://www.5ADAY.nhs.uk)

Provides information on what counts as a 5 A DAY portion, sizes and benefits. A section for professionals includes free resources and contacts for local 5 A DAY project coordinators.

[www.bhfactive.org.uk](http://www.bhfactive.org.uk)

The British Heart Foundation provides resources (for schools and others working with children) to promote physical activity, research summaries and updates.

[www.cwt.org.uk](http://www.cwt.org.uk)

Caroline Walker Trust produces nutritional guidelines for looked after children and a training pack for staff plus an email newsletter.

[www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk)

Information and advice for the general public on healthy eating includes quizzes and information about diet for children and other groups.

[www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk)

The Food Standards Agency offers advice and information on food safety, nutrition and diet, plus information on healthy eating and children's diet.

[www.foodinschools.org](http://www.foodinschools.org)

A joint Department for Education and Skills and Department of Health website with resources and information to support a whole-school approach to healthy eating. Also of use to other settings such as cookery clubs.

[www.hda.nhs.uk](http://www.hda.nhs.uk)

The Health Development Agency offers information about effective interventions on health issues, including physical activity and

healthy eating.

[www.nutrition.org.uk](http://www.nutrition.org.uk)

The British Nutrition Foundation provides resources and materials for professionals, schools and others plus expert nutritional advice.

[www.rhrn.thewhocarestrust.org.uk](http://www.rhrn.thewhocarestrust.org.uk)

The Who Cares? Trust offers resources and information for looked after children and young people.

[www.ncb.org.uk/cpc](http://www.ncb.org.uk/cpc)

The Children's Play Council aims to raise awareness of the importance of play in children's lives and the need for all children to have access to better opportunities and services.

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

NHS services across the country plus health advice and campaigns.

[www.sportengland.org.uk](http://www.sportengland.org.uk)

Sport England is the main government-funded sports body in England.

[www.teenagehealthfreak.org](http://www.teenagehealthfreak.org)

Information and advice on health issues for young people including diet and weight, plus answers to common questions.

[www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk](http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk)

Health information (including healthy eating and physical activity) for teachers and others. Plus four websites for children and young people about keeping healthy.

[www.youngtransnet.org.uk](http://www.youngtransnet.org.uk)

Information and resources for children and young people on transport issues such as cycling and road safety.

[www.youthsporttrust.org](http://www.youthsporttrust.org)

A charity that supports the education and development of all young people through PE and sport.

## Useful resources

*Healthy Eating: A whole diet approach*  
British Nutrition Foundation (2003)

*Eating Well for Looked After Children and Young People: Nutritional and practical guidelines*  
Caroline Walker Trust (2001)

*Eating Well for Looked After Children and Young People: Training materials.*  
Caroline Walker Trust (2001)

*The Management of Obesity and Overweight: An analysis of reviews of diet, physical activity and behavioural approaches – Evidence briefing.*  
Health Development Agency (2003)

5 A DAY posters, leaflets and other resources (including some in other languages) can be downloaded from [www.5aday.nhs.uk/professionals/resources.aspx](http://www.5aday.nhs.uk/professionals/resources.aspx)

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