

5 TIPS TO STOP YOUR CHILD FROM GETTING 'HANGRY'

Food is intimately linked to how we feel. Children require regular intake of food to avoid the 'hanger' meltdowns.

"I've seen it for myself. Right around dinner time, my 6-year-old daughter becomes emotional and argumentative, but after eating dinner, these behaviours are reversed." – Dr Andrew Leech, GP

Studies have shown that diet can affect cognitive ability and behaviour in children and teenagers.¹ So, for school children to learn effectively, they need a regular intake of nutrients. Eating some form of glucose can help with mental performance, particularly when a child is involved in a demanding task or one that lasts for a long period of time.

Here are 5 tips to get you thinking about how to avoid hangry children in your house!

1 Don't skip breakfast¹

One thing the studies consistently show is that breakfast remains the most important meal for children's learning and for a morning energy boost. Any breakfast is better than nothing.² So, if your child finds breakfast particularly hard, there are options.

When choosing foods, aim for high fibre, low-GI options such as an egg, baked beans, an English muffin, or porridge with fruit.

If your child finds it hard to eat breakfast, they may find it easier to manage a liquid style breakfast 'on the go' whilst heading to school. This could include a complete and balanced Oral Nutritional Supplement such as PediaSure.



2 Smaller, more frequent foods

Thankfully, schools are starting to think this way now too, introducing a 'crunch and sip' mid-morning. Snacks at regular intervals may be the future of how we offer foods to children rather than the traditional three big meals a day.

Regular snacks help keep children alert and active.³ When preparing snacks, think rainbow foods such as capsicum, carrot, celery, cucumber, cherry tomatoes, grapes, and bananas.



3 Look out for additives and preservatives

Avoid typical treats such as muesli bars, chocolate bars, soft drinks and chips, as these tend to have more additives and preservatives than non-packaged foods and drinks. A good rule is to shop around the edge of the supermarket looking for fresh ingredients.

4 Be one step ahead

Get in early and prepare food before your child gets hungry. Think about the times children have longer gaps between meals. Typically, after breakfast and on return home from school.

It's also a good idea to set up a routine around snacks and meals and put mealtimes on the fridge, so everyone is on the same page. This will help to avoid constant nagging for food.

4 Work with your child

Talk to your child about what they find useful for them such as keeping a food diary which can help pinpoint ingredients that might make them feel hungry soon after.

Find out what snacks your child likes by taking them on a supermarket tour. Use this opportunity to have fun and introduce new foods.

At the end of the day, as busy parents, we can only do our best.
Putting these tips into practice takes consistency, routine and practice!

For additional support for your child, speak to an Accredited Practising Dietitian.

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References: 1. Bellisle F, *Br J Nutr.* 2004;92 Suppl 2:S227-32. 2. BBC goodfood. Behaviour in children: how diet can help. Available at: <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/behaviour-children-food-and-additives> 3. Health and Wellbeing Queensland. Healthy food for kids on the go. Available at: <https://hw.qld.gov.au/blog/healthy-food-for-kids-on-the-go/>

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