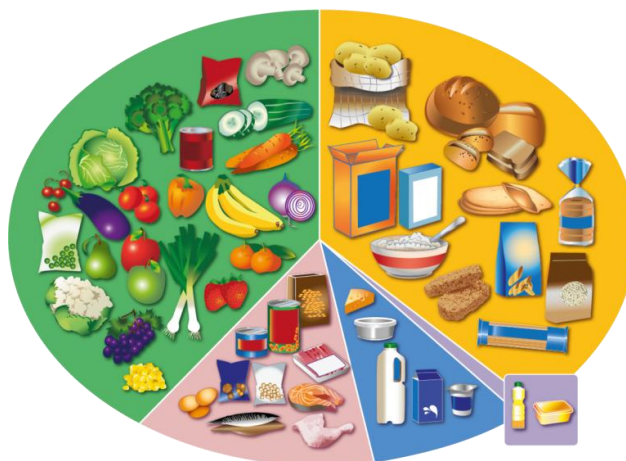




## The Wider benefits of Healthy Eating, Healthy Eating on a Budget

Healthy food also links to wider health outcomes. The government reported in April 2026 that **one in three children are leaving primary school overweight or obese**, and that tooth decay from diets high in sugar is the leading cause of hospital admissions for children aged 5 to 9. These figures show why schools and families working together around food is not about judgement or restriction, but about helping children build habits that support their health, confidence and learning over time.

We also understand that this is not always simple. Some children have allergies, medical needs, sensory sensitivities, selective eating, religious requirements, cultural food practices or other dietary needs. Neurodivergent children may find food especially challenging. NHS guidance explains that neurodivergent children and young people may forget to eat or drink, struggle to recognise hunger or fullness, prefer specific textures or brands, need food presented in a particular way, or become anxious around new foods. A supportive approach works best: low pressure, predictable routines, safe familiar foods, gentle exposure to new foods, and partnership between home and school.



Where a child has SEND, disability-related needs or medical needs, reasonable adjustments may be appropriate. Government guidance explains that schools have a legal duty under the Equality Act to make reasonable adjustments so disabled pupils can benefit from what school offers in the same way as their peers. In practice, this may include flexibility around

snack routines, safe foods, visual supports, a quiet eating space, allergy-aware planning, sensory considerations, or working with parents and professionals to agree a realistic plan.

We are also very aware that healthy eating can feel more difficult because of rising food costs. Government statistics show that in the financial year ending 2024, average household spending on food and drink was **£47.19 per person per week**, and household food and drink spending increased by **2.4% in real terms** from the previous year. Low-income households are affected more heavily: in 2024, the lowest 20% of households spent **14.3%** of their expenditure on household food and non-alcoholic drinks, compared with **8.6%** for the richest 20%. The Food Standards Agency also reported that **24%** of participants in England, Wales and Northern Ireland were food insecure in 2024.

Healthy eating does not need to mean expensive or complicated food. Budget-friendly choices can include porridge oats, wholemeal toast, rice, pasta, potatoes, lentils, beans, eggs, frozen vegetables, tinned fruit in juice, tinned tomatoes, own-brand yoghurts, homemade soups, simple sandwiches and batch-cooked meals. Frozen and tinned fruit and vegetables can still count towards a healthy balanced diet, and planning meals around lower-cost staples can help families provide filling, nutritious food without unnecessary pressure.

For families who may be eligible for support with food costs, the NHS Healthy Start scheme can help some families buy milk, fruit, vegetables, pulses and infant formula.