

# CRUNCH BITES PODCAST

BITE SIZED CHILDREN'S NUTRITION INFO

## Episode 7: Meat and greet: the low down on meat and meat alternatives.

**Mikala:** Hello, and welcome to Crunch Bites, a podcast for parents where we discuss all things children's nutrition and inspire you to build those healthy habits in the home. Join us as we chat about picky eating, reaching for rainbow foods, packing school lunches that actually get eaten, and so much more. Brought to you by Crunch and Sip and presented by Qualified Nutritionists. This podcast is packed with goodness and full of fresh ideas.

**Nicole:** Hi, everyone, and welcome. Firstly, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians and owners of the land that we're recording on today, the Whadjuk people from the Noongar Nation, and recognise their continuing and deep connection to the land, waters and community. I would also like to pay my respect to their elders, ancestors, and all Aboriginal peoples living and working in this area, as well as acknowledging that you might be dialling in from other lands across the country.

**Mikala:** Thanks, Nicole, and welcome, everyone. Today's episode is brought to you by lentils. Lentils are a fantastic plant-based food. They're iron-rich, full of B vitamins, so they really sit alongside meat very well in terms of their nutrition. And they're fantastic for boosting something like a bolognese sauce so that you can halve out your meat and bring in some more plant foods.

**Nicole:** They truly are a powerhouse, aren't they? They've got all of the beneficial elements of vegetables, but also high in protein, so really great meat booster or alternative for meat.

**Mikala:** Exactly.

**Nicole:** So that feeds really well in today's topic, meat and meat alternatives. We'll talk about what meat is, why it's important, and what some alternatives are for meat if you don't eat meat or you're trying to reduce the amount that you're eating. So, Mikala, what is meat?

**Mikala:** Good question, Nic. Meat is, pretty simply, just the flesh of any animal. So, it's what we know when we think of chicken, beef, pork, fish. It's the muscles, it's the fat, and then also it can extend to be like the ligaments, the tendons, and even the organs.

**Nicole:** So why is it important we eat meat?

**Mikala:** Meat is just one of those really nutrient-dense foods, so it's really power-packed. You get a lot of bang for your buck when you eat meat. It's obviously a really high-protein food, and protein's great for muscle growth, for development and repair. Protein's really awesome for keeping kids full for a longer period of time. But meat tend to be your main source of some really essential vitamins, like your iron, your zinc, and all of your beta vitamins as well. And we know that, obviously, those are the vitamins that help us to have a

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strong immune system and to have really good, long-lasting energy to get through a school day.

**Nicole:** Yeah, so it is a really important part of our kids' day that we want to be making sure we're fuelling them with food that's going to keep them fuller for longer and full of all of those powerhouse nutrients that will help with their growth and development. So how much is needed for that beneficial aspect for growth and development?

**Mikala:** So, it varies, obviously, across kids' ages, as well as depending on how active they are, depending on whether they're going through periods of growth, and also depending on their gender. And also, we suggest that we aim for that one and a half to two and a half serves per day. But we also try to be realistic about the fact that some days there may be more and some days there may be less. So that's just a bit of an average to aim for. And when we're talking about serves, it's things like around about 100 grams raw of red meats like beef, lamb, veal, even kangaroo. Noting that when you cook meat, it shrinks because the water actually evaporates out. So, by the time you've cooked it, it's about 65 grams, which is like thinking about the palm of your hand. It's a little bit more when we're talking about poultry, which is our chicken and our turkey. Once that's cooked, we're looking at about 80 grams. So that's like a deck of cards. And then a little bit more again when we're talking about fish. So once cooked, we're looking at about 100 gram fish fillet would make up a serve.

**Nicole:** Yeah, so that's really quite different to the way people perceive a serve as, isn't it? It's when you think about when you're serving dinner, quite often that the piece of meat or the chicken quite often takes up almost half the plate. And so that's what people would often think of as a serve. But when you dial it back and actually look at what recommendations are for the serving size, it's a lot smaller, isn't it?

**Mikala:** Yeah, and the good thing about that is that meat can go further. So, if we actually eat to the recommended guidelines, a family can be fed for a much more affordable amount of meat and still get all their nutrient requirements met.

**Nicole:** So, when we think about meat, is all meat the same?

**Mikala:** It's very similar in terms of the protein. So, yes, all meat is a really great protein source, but it's not the same when we start looking at your iron and those B vitamins, because at the end of the day, it's the blood in meat that delivers that iron. So to know if you're getting a more iron rich meat or not, you just want to look at the colour of it. And that's why beef is so dark and full of that red pigment, whereas chicken is quite a white flesh meat.

**Nicole:** That's a really easy and relatable way of thinking about it, is that colour of the meat in terms of that iron availability. So many children don't eat meat or they don't like meat. What are some alternatives that they can eat to ensure that they still get enough iron and protein in their day?

**Mikala:** Yeah, that's a really good point, Nic. And that's exactly why the food group is meat and meat alternatives, because we do need to be mindful of the fact that not everyone eats meat.

Some people don't eat meat for religious or cultural reasons. Some people are vegetarian for ethical reasons. And sometimes kids just actually don't like the taste or the texture of meat. So, because we still want to make sure we are getting that really great source of protein and those really important nutrients, specifically your iron, reaching for some plant-based options is important to substitute. And that means things like a couple of eggs is a great substitute. Around about a cup of cooked or

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canned legumes or beans, chickpeas, even baked beans is a great substitute. Tofu or tempeh can be a great one, and that's sort of reaching for about two decent slices. And then nuts and seeds and nut butters, they deliver really great protein, often great iron as well. And that's reaching for sort of roughly a tablespoon to get a serve. I think it's really it's worth noting that plant-based options are a good, they're a good part of a healthy and wholesome diet because they're often very affordable. They're often less processed, which means, you know, they don't have the added salts or fats or sugars. And then they tend to be more sustainable environmentally, just because they're easier to grow. They take up less land. They ask less of the land. So they tick a lot of boxes for quite a few reasons.

**Nicole:** Yeah, they definitely do. And it's a really good point to make as well, that even if you do eat meat, you can very much have a mix of plant based protein options and meat in your diet for that kind of real holistic effect and take a little bit of pressure off that weekly budget by swapping in some plant based proteins or, yeah, take a bit of pressure off the environment as well. By cutting your meat content down.

**Mikala:** Yeah, exactly.

**Nicole:** So, many people may not be aware, but when we eat certain foods with other foods, they can sometimes help absorb different vitamins and minerals. But sometimes they can also have the opposite effect and prevent or decrease that absorption. What can we match with our meat or meat alternatives to maximise the efficiency or the way that we absorb important nutrients such as iron?

**Mikala:** That's right. So, iron is one of those nutrients that competes for the same receptors as something like calcium. So, one of the main things that we suggest when you are eating an iron rich food is don't pair it with a calcium rich food. So, making sure that you just, you know, space those out by an hour or two. And then one of the nutrients that really assists with the absorption of iron is vitamin C. So, whenever you're having an iron rich food, it's recommended that you have some vitamin C alongside it. And the good news is that all your veggies are jam packed with vitamin C. So, pairing your veggies with your meat or meat alternative is obviously an easy way to enhance that absorption of the important nutrients. Something else that I found so interesting when I first learned this, and it's always good to share, is that plant-based foods are like an incomplete puzzle. But when you pair them together, you complete that puzzle and then you can absorb them. They become more bioavailable, easy to absorb. So, bringing together things like lentils and rice completes the puzzle. And then on top of that, if you were to put any animal-based protein with your plant-based protein, you complete the puzzle as well. But that doesn't have to mean meat. That can be things like a dollop of yogurt on the side of your lentil and rice dish, or some egg alongside a tofu burger or something of that nature. So yeah, there are ways to sort of complete a meal. And that's why I suppose we say reach for a range from the food groups, because it's your best way to enhance your absorption of nutrients on a regular basis.

**Nicole:** Yeah, you're exactly right. The way that different foods and nutrients interact with each other is like a great big puzzle. And the easiest way to think about it is exactly if we eat a variety, we don't even have to think about it because we know that we're going to get a range of different things that will interact together. And that's why, where possible, eating whole foods is much better than the supplements that are often sold at supermarkets. So, bringing it back to a bit of a lunchbox perspective, what about ham and salami? Where do they fit in this meat category? Are they nutritious options for the lunchbox?

**Mikala:** So, ham and salami, obviously their origins are from meat, but they've gone through quite a considerable amount of processing. They're what we consider a processed meat, which means that they have a long life, that they have undergone, that they've got additives included that move them away from

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being a whole food. And unfortunately, the science shows that a regular consumption of processed meats, and that is things like your bacon, your pastrami, your ham, your salami. [A regular consumption of processed meats has been linked to an increased risk of bowel cancer.](#) So unfortunately, they don't stack up so well when we're looking, trying to look at nutritious options to throw in the lunchbox.

**Nicole:** So, instead of these processed meats, what other meats could we suggest our parents pack instead?

**Mikala:** So, you could reach for some roasted meats, if you've had any roasted meats over the weekend, and just slice them, get them ready for the lunchbox during the week. You could reach for tinned tuna or tinned salmon. You could reach for some shredded chicken or chicken pieces or turkey. So, there's other options that are equally delicious, but at least move away from being so processed.

**Nicole:** Yeah. And when we think about it, if we're moving away from meat, what are some of the good plant-based options that we could add for the lunchbox?

**Mikala:** There's heaps of great plant-based options for the lunchbox. And a really good thing to be considering as well, because obviously we're not going to have meat at our disposal every day. Hummus is a fantastic alternative. Roasted chickpeas or fava beans as an actual snack make a great alternative. And then obviously any mixed beans, or as I said before, even baked beans. So, there's lots of other ways to bring in meat alternatives to still get that nutrition. And also remembering it doesn't always have to be in a sandwich. It can be finger food. It can be more of a deconstructed approach as well. So, it's finding the way that works for your family.

**Nicole:** Yeah. A lot of particularly younger kids do like that kind of deconstructed kind of pick plate style of serving lunch or food as well. So that's a really good note to make is you can serve it in a range of different ways.

**Mikala:** Exactly.

**Nicole:** So, if you enjoyed today's episode, please like, comment and share. Get in touch if there's any other topics you would love to hear more about.

Otherwise, it's been lovely to have a chat and we'll speak to you next time.

**Mikala:** Thanks, everyone. Bye.

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