

# What is a serving size?

A Guide for Pre-schools



## Foreword

Establishing good lifestyle habits, including positive attitudes and behaviours around food is one of the key cornerstones to shaping future health. This starts during the pre-school years when children grow rapidly and begin to learn about the environment around them. Providing an environment that supports healthy eating both at home and at school is important.

It is well recognised that gauging portion sizes for young children can be somewhat difficult; they need to be adequate without being excessive. This guide offers practical help to all those providing food for pre-school age children. It is a pictorial manual giving real life serving sizes to guide care-givers, parents and guardians on suitable size servings.

This booklet also provides sound advice on family-style eating habits, the introduction of new foods and the environment which nurtures **healthy eating habits for life**.

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**safefood**.

## Acknowledgements

We in **safefood** would like to greatly acknowledge the unique contribution and role of Charlotte Johnston Molloy in this resource.

In addition we would like to express our appreciation of the valuable support that was received from the Advisory Group of The Healthy Incentive for Pre-schools (HIP) project during the development of this resource.

The multi-agency group comprised

- Early Childhood Ireland - Marion Brennan and Rita Melia
- Dublin Institute of Technology - Drs Clare Corish and John Kearney
- Healthy Food for All – Sinead Keenan
- Health Service Executive - Corina Glennon Slattery, Charlotte Johnston Molloy and Kara Murphy
- **safefood** – Drs Aileen McGloin, Cliodhna Foley Nolan and Marian Faughnan

It is based on the Department of Health Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-School Services published in April 2004.

This publication is funded by **safefood**. It is based upon a research programme supported by **safefood**, in association with the Health Service Executive, Ireland.

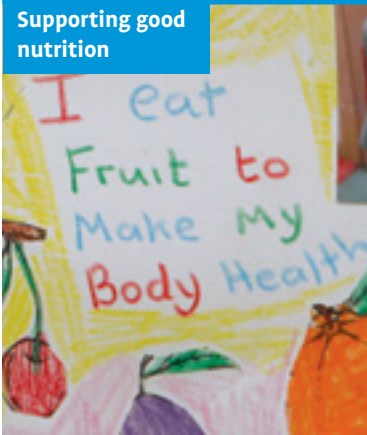
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## Introduction

This food guide of serving sizes for pre-school children is the first of its kind developed in Ireland. It was developed as part of The Healthy Incentive for Pre-schools (HIP) project, which established an incentive scheme for full day care pre-schools to improve their nutrition practices. The project supports the implementation of the Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-School Services.

### Supporting good nutrition



Pre-school children are undergoing rapid growth and good nutrition is essential to ensure they get all the nutrients they require. Some areas of nutritional concern for young children include

- Ensuring enough calories in the diet to support growth and development without providing too many to promote excess weight gain
- Providing enough iron in the diet to prevent anaemia
- Adequate intake of vitamin C (from fruits and vegetables) and calcium (from dairy foods)

With many children spending a substantial part of their day in childcare facilities and eating up to 2 snacks and 2 meals there it is crucial that the food provided is adequate and nutritious to support optimal growth and development.

### A healthy start



To support good nutrition in the preschool setting it is important that a variety of foods in the right amounts are available. Best practice shows that to achieve this

- Adequate serving sizes of all foods need to be provided for all children
- Family meal style service is the best way to allow children to decide what to take at each mealtime (see pages 8-11)
- When introducing new foods, it is important that enough food is provided so that small amounts of food can be served initially by children and that seconds are available

This guide contains a collection of pictures of recommended food servings for pre-school age children. Each picture is accompanied by the corresponding weight of the serving in grams/mLs and its equivalent in household measures.

## How to use this Guide

Children should be encouraged to serve themselves. It is absolutely fine if they choose not to eat all of the serving. Every child is different and allowing them to eat to satisfaction is an important part of their learning. Children's appetites vary from day to day but it's important that adequate serving sizes are available to allow children to eat this if they wish to.

### Using this resource



This resource provides menu plans and accompanying recipes for a 3 week period. Each recipe indicates how many servings are in each recipe.

The serving guide is designed to be used in conjunction with HSE's '3-Week Menu Plan — a Resource for Pre-schools'. Your pre-school may already have received a copy of the menu plan resource from the HSE but if not, the resource can be downloaded from [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie). It provides menu plans and accompanying recipes for a 3 week period. Each recipe indicates how many servings are in each recipe.

### Understanding serving sizes



This guide visually shows what a serving size of a selection of foods in the '3-Week Menu Plan' looks like when served on a plate. A number of other everyday foods for children is also included.

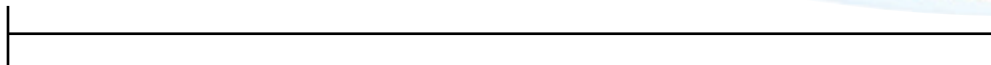
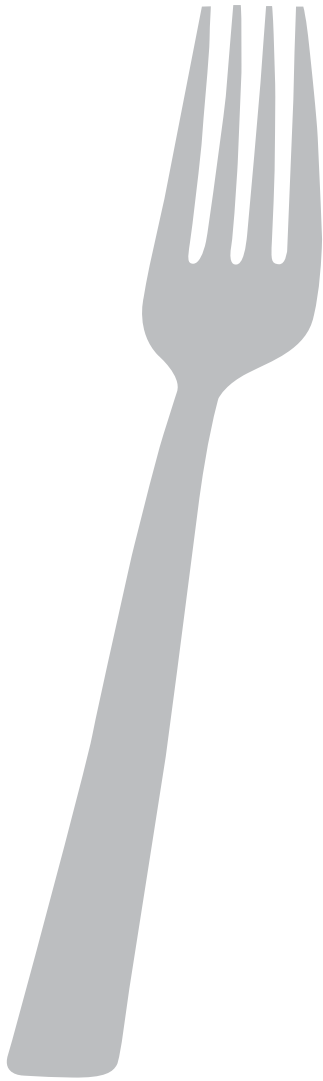
Two serving quantities are provided for each food - 'half serving' and 'one serving'. One serving of food is the quantity of a food that health professionals recommend that parents and caregivers provide for children aged one to five years. Beside the visual for each serving size is a description of the actual weight of the serving in grams/mLs and the equivalent household measure for example two tablespoons.

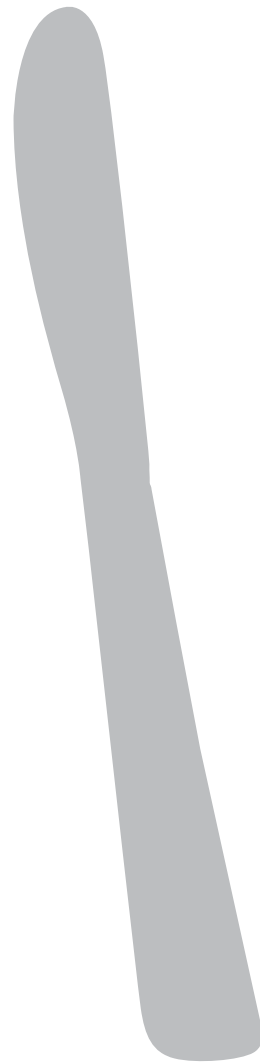
In the case of the protein foods, different serving sizes are recommended for one to three years and three to five years. Only the visual of the serving sizes of protein foods recommended for the three to five year old are provided. However, quantities for the one to three year olds are provided under the picture.

For dairy foods all pictures presented are for one serving.

## Understanding measurements

All foods shown in this guide were photographed on a standard dinner plate.





26cm

The cooking measures provided in this document use standard weights and spoon sizes.



Dessert spoon

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Table spoon

---

Large cook's serving spoon

---

Ladle

---





## Setting the scene at mealtimes

### **The benefits of family style meal service**

A family style meal service provides a great environment for children to develop skills around food as well as supporting motor and social skills. It also has very positive effects on picky eaters.

Family-style service does take time to introduce. Role playing and practicing through play can help to introduce the idea to children. However, once established, it will result in children being more relaxed and a more pleasant mealtime for everyone.

The development of happy childhood associations with mealtimes and food will encourage children to eat more healthily over time.

**Getting involved**

Get the children involved in 'grown up' activities like setting the table, serving themselves, preparing food and clearing up.

**Guiding the children's food choices**

Adults guiding children in their food choices. For example encouraging them to take a bit of everything and talking about the food with the children and encouraging children to feed themselves.

Giving children foods that they are familiar with – children love familiarity and routine with food, so when you present a 'new food' relate it to a familiar food. Remember, be patient, it may take ten or more times before a child will try a 'new' food.

Providing foods that challenge eating skills. For example offering foods that need to be spread, cut, broken, speared or spooned out of a bowl. Ensuring that the appropriate child sized utensils and cutlery are available to allow skill development.

**During and after mealtimes**

Give children plenty of space at the table – young children are learning to control their muscles and more space may help prevent many spillages or messiness.

Adults should be sitting down and eating the same food as the children, so that adults are able to discuss the taste and texture of the food, as well as the food origin and associations.

Let the children serve themselves – an adult's role is to encourage the passing of the food around the table to everyone, in small child friendly containers, so that every child learns independence and is included in the process.

Let children eat until they are satisfied – this will encourage children to learn and understand feelings of hunger and fullness /satiation; an important skill in the fight against overweight and obesity in later life.

Clearing away **only** when everyone has finished eating at the table.

### Step 1: Be prepared



Make sure you have all the necessary utensils, delph and serving bowls

### Step 2: Make it fun



Let the children help to set the table

### Step 3: Join in



Have adults sitting and eating with the children

**Step 4: Help themselves**



Supervise as the children serve themselves the correct portion sizes

**Step 5: Serve themselves**



Allow the children to pour their own drinks

**Step 6: Tidy up**



Get the children involved in tidying up after the meal

## Starchy foods

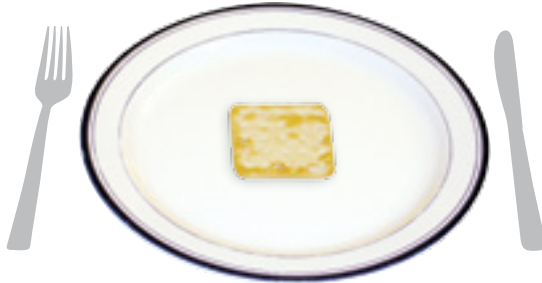
A young child with long hair is sitting at a table, focused on eating from a white bowl with a polka-dot pattern. The child is wearing a dark-colored top with a large floral brooch. The child's right hand is holding a spoon, and their left hand is holding a fork. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a dining area with other people. The entire image has a warm, yellowish tint.

To provide little bodies with the energy to grow, learn and play

½ Serving

1 Serving

CRACKERS AND OATCAKES



**Household Measure:** 1 cracker or oatcake

**Household Measure:** 2 crackers or oatcakes

MASHED POTATO



**Household Measure:** 1 heaped dessertspoon  
**Weight:** 30gms

**Household Measure:** 2 heaped dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 60gms

PASTA



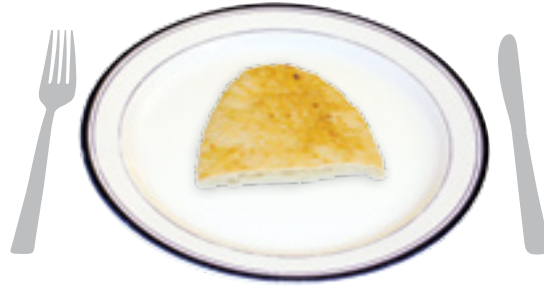
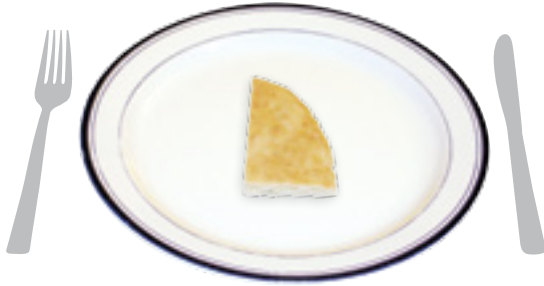
**Household Measure:** 1 heaped large plastic cook's serving spoon  
**Weight:** 40gms

**Household Measure:** 2 heaped large plastic cook's serving spoon  
**Weight:** 80gms

½ Serving

1 Serving

PITTA BREAD



**Household Measure:** ¼ large pitta bread

**Household Measure:** ½ large pitta bread

POPCORN



**Weight:** 7gms

**Weight:** 15gms

POTATO WEDGES – HOMEMADE



**Household Measure:** 3 wedges  
**Weight:** 20gms

**Household Measure:** 5 wedges  
**Weight:** 40gms



½ Serving

1 Serving

RICE



**Household Measure:** 2 heaped dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 40gms

**Household Measure:** 4 heaped dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 80gms

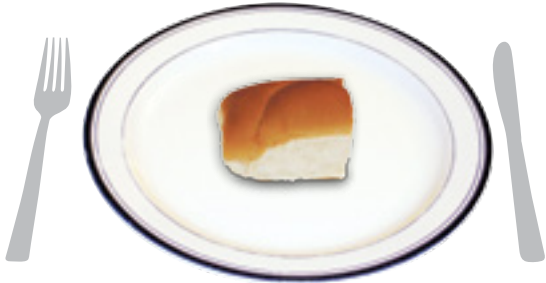
RICE CEREAL



**Household Measure:** ~ ¼ bowl  
**Weight:** 7gms

**Household Measure:** ~ ½ bowl  
**Weight:** 15gms

SOFT ROLL



**Weight:** ½ roll

**Weight:** 1 roll

½ Serving

1 Serving

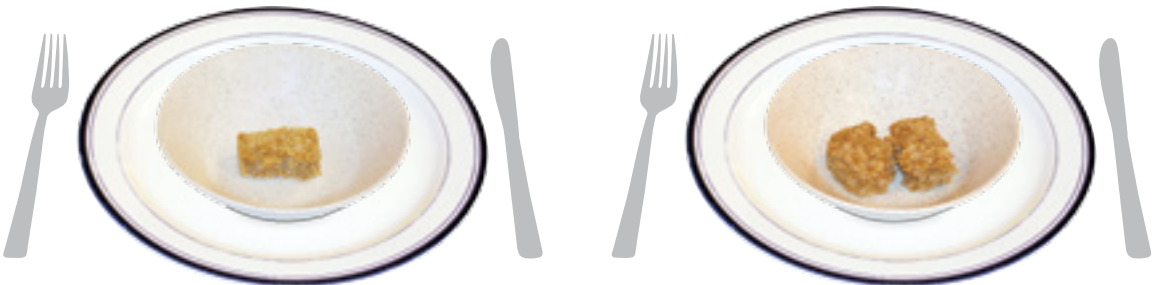
SPAGHETTI (TINNED)



**Weight:** 40gms

**Weight:** 80gms

WHEAT BISCUITS



**Household Measure:** < ½ wheat biscuit  
**Weight:** 7.5gms

**Household Measure:** ¾ wheat biscuit  
**Weight:** 15gms

WHITE BREAD



**Household Measure:** ½ slice

**Household Measure:** 1 slice

## Protein foods

To help support growth and provide iron

½ Serving

1 Serving

**BEEF PIECES**



**Household Measure:** 6 pieces **Weight:** 30gms  
 ½ Serving for the 1-3 yrs: 4-5 pieces, 23gms

**Household Measure:** 13 pieces **Weight:** 60gms

**CHOP (LAMB/PORK)**



**Household Measure:** ½ chop **Weight:** 30gms  
 ½ Serving for the 1-3 yrs: 1/3 chop 23gms

**Household Measure:** 1 chop **Weight:** 60gms

**COOKED CHICKEN BREAST**



**Household Measure:** ¼ breast / 5 slices  
**Weight:** 30gms  
 ½ Serving for the 1-3 yrs: 3-4 slices, 23gms

**Household Measure:** ~ ½ breast / 10 slices  
**Weight:** 60gms

½ Serving

1 Serving

FISH FINGERS



**Household Measure:** 1 fish finger **Weight:** 30gms  
 ½ Serving for the 1-3 yrs: ¾ fish finger, 23gms

**Household Measure:** 2 fish fingers **Weight:** 60gms

LENTILS



**Household Measure:** 4.5 dessertspoons/3 tablespoons  
**Weight:** 45gms  
 ½ Serving for the 1-3 yrs: 3 ¼ dessertspoon or  
 2 ¼ tablespoons 33gms

**Household Measure:** 9 dessertspoons/6 tablespoons  
**Weight:** 90gms

MINCED MEAT



**Household Measure:** 3 dessertspoons **Weight:** 30gms  
 ½ Serving for the 1-3 yrs: 2 ¼ dessertspoons 23gms

**Household Measure:** 6 dessertspoons **Weight:** 60gms

## ½ Serving

## 1 Serving

## PEAS



**Household Measure:** 4.5 level dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 45gms  
 ½ Serving for the 1-3 yrs: 3¼ level dessertspoons 33gms

**Household Measure:** 9 level dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 90gms

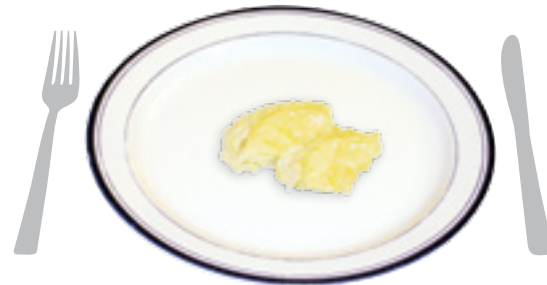
## TUNA AND SALMON – FRESH AND TINNED



**Weight:** 30gms  
 ½ Serving for the 1-3 yrs: 23gms

**Weight:** 60gms

## SCRAMBLED EGG



**Household Measure:** 1 large cook's serving spoon  
**Weight:** 30gms  
 ½ Serving for the 1-3 yrs: ¾ large plastic cook's serving spoon 23gms

**Household Measure:** ~ 2 large cook's serving spoons  
**Weight:** 60gms

½ Serving

1 Serving

WHITE FISH



**Weight:** 30gms  
½ Serving for the 1-3 yrs: 23gms

**Weight:** 60gms

## Dairy foods

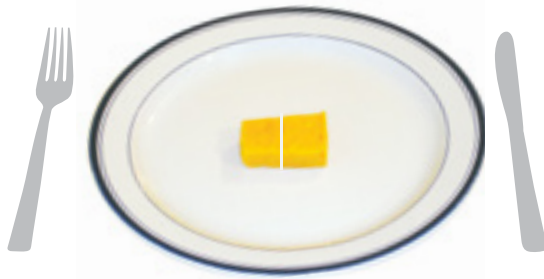
To help bones grow





All dairy foods presented are for one serving

### CHEDDAR CHEESE



**Household Measure:** 2 squares  
**Weight:** 30gms

### CHEESE SLICES



**Household Measure:** 2 cheese slices  
**Weight:** 40gms

### CUSTARD



**Household Measure:** 4 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 60gms

### FROMAGE FRAIS



**Household Measure:** 2 pots  
**Weight:** 2 x 50gms

### MILK



**Household Measure:** 1 glass  
**Volume:** 200mls

### YOGHURT



**Household Measure:** 1 pot  
**Weight:** 125gms

## Fruit and Vegetables



To provide vitamins and minerals

**FRUIT SERVINGS**

½ Serving

1 Serving

**APPLE**



**Household Measure:** ¼ apple / 4 pieces  
**Weight:** 25gms

**Household Measure:** ½ apple / 7 pieces  
**Weight:** 50gms

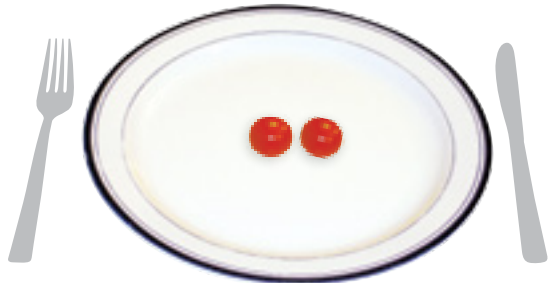
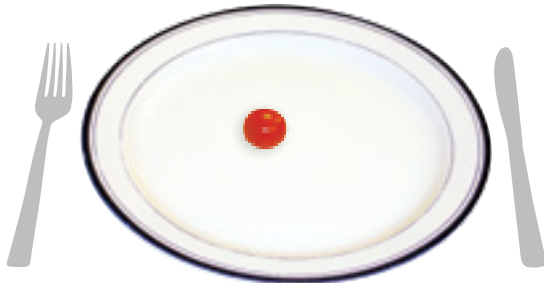
**BANANA**



**Household Measure:** ¼ banana  
**Weight:** 25gms

**Household Measure:** ½ banana  
**Weight:** 50gms

**CHERRY TOMATO**



**Household Measure:** 1 cherry tomato  
**Volume:** 15gms

**Household Measure:** 2 cherry tomatoes  
**Weight:** 30gms

## FRUIT SERVINGS (CONTINUED)

½ Serving

1 Serving

## GRAPES



**Household Measure:** 4 pieces  
**Weight:** 15gms

**Household Measure:** 9 pieces  
**Weight:** 30gms

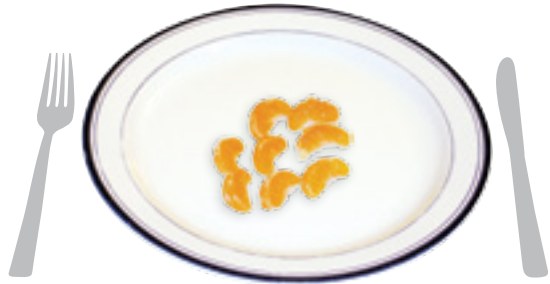
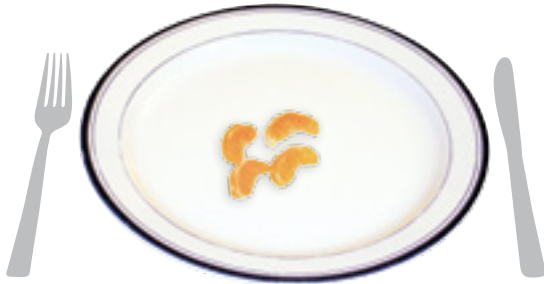
## KIWI SLICES



**Household Measure:** 3 slices  
**Weight:** 27gms

**Household Measure:** 6 slices  
**Weight:** 50gms

## MANDARIN



**Household Measure:** ½ mandarin / 4 pieces  
**Weight:** 26gms

**Household Measure:** 1 mandarin / 8 pieces  
**Weight:** 50gms

**FRUIT SERVINGS (CONTINUED)**

1/2 Serving

1 Serving

**MELON CHUNKS**



**Household Measure:** 2 melon chunks  
**Weight:** 24gms

**Household Measure:** 5 melon chunks  
**Weight:** 57gms

**PLUM SLICES**



**Household Measure:** 4 plum slices / 1/2 plum  
**Weight:** 24gms

**Household Measure:** 8 plum slices / 1 plum  
**Weight:** 50gms

**RAISINS**



**Weight:** 10gms

**Weight:** 20gms

**FRUIT DRINKS** $\frac{1}{2}$  Serving

1 Serving

**ORANGE JUICE****Household Measure:**  $\frac{1}{4}$  glass  
**Weight:** 50mls**Household Measure:**  $\frac{1}{2}$  glass  
**Weight:** 100mls**SMOOTHIE****Household Measure:**  $\frac{1}{4}$  glass  
**Weight:** 50mls**Household Measure:**  $\frac{1}{2}$  glass  
**Weight:** 100mls

**VEGETABLE SERVINGS**

1/2 Serving

1 Serving

**BAKED BEANS**



**Household Measure:** 1 1/2 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 40gms

**Household Measure:** 3 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 80gms

**BROCCOLI**



**Household Measure:** 2 pieces  
**Weight:** 20gms

**Household Measure:** 3 pieces  
**Weight:** 40gms

**CARROT STICKS**



**Household Measure:** 4 sticks  
**Weight:** 15gms

**Household Measure:** 8 sticks  
**Weight:** 30gms

## VEGETABLE SERVINGS (CONTINUED)

½ Serving

1 Serving

## CELERY STICKS



**Household Measure:** 3 sticks  
**Weight:** 15gms

**Household Measure:** 6 sticks  
**Weight:** 30gms

## CUCUMBER



**Household Measure:** 2 cucumber sticks  
**Weight:** 15gms

**Household Measure:** 4 cucumber sticks  
**Weight:** 30gms

## RAW PEPPER



**Household Measure:** 5 pieces  
**Weight:** 15gms

**Household Measure:** 10 pieces  
**Weight:** 30gms



## Composite Meals

Meals with more than one ingredient

**BEEF DISHES****½ Serving****1 Serving****BEEF CASSEROLE**

**Household Measure:** 4 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 112gms

**Household Measure:** 8 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 225gms

**BEEF LASAGNE**

**Household Measure:** ~ 1 large plastic cook's serving spoon  
**Weight:** 88gms

**Household Measure:** ~ 2 large plastic cook's serving spoon  
**Weight:** 176gms

**BOLOGNAISE SAUCE**

**Household Measure:** 2 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 54gms

**Household Measure:** 4 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 109gms

**BEEF DISHES (CONTINUED)****½ Serving****1 Serving****BURGER – HOMEMADE**

**Household Measure:** ½ hamburger – in pieces  
**Weight:** 30gms

**Household Measure:** 1 hamburger  
**Weight:** 60gms

**CHILLI CON CARNE**

**Household Measure:** 2 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 57gms

**Household Measure:** 4 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 115gms

**SHEPHERD'S PIE & BROCCOLI**

**Household Measure:** ~1 large plastic cook's serving spoon (for broccoli see p32) **Weight:** 79gms

**Household Measure:** ~2 large plastic cook's serving spoon (for broccoli see p32) **Weight:** 159gms

**BEEF DISHES (CONTINUED)**

1/2 Serving

1 Serving

**SPAGHETTI BOLOGNAISE**

**Weight:** 40gms spaghetti / 54gms (2 dessertspoons) bolognese

**Weight:** 80gms spaghetti / 109gms (4 dessertspoons) bolognese

**CHICKEN DISHES****CHICKEN & TOMATO RISOTTO**

**Household Measure:** 2 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 88gms

**Household Measure:** 4 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 156gms

**CHICKEN CASSEROLE**

**Household Measure:** 2 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 77gms

**Household Measure:** 4 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 156gms

**CHICKEN DISHES (CONTINUED)**

½ Serving

1 Serving

**CHEESY CHICKEN & PEAS**



**Household Measure:** 2 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 61gms

**Household Measure:** 4 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 121gms

**MILD CHICKEN CURRY**



**Household Measure:** 1 ½ – 2 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 57gms

**Household Measure:** 3 – 4 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 115gms

**FISH DISHES**

**FISH PIE**



**Household Measure:** 1 heaped large plastic cook's serving spoon / 3 heaped dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 120gms

**Household Measure:** 2 heaped large plastic cook's serving spoon / 6 heaped dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 240gms

**FISH DISHES (CONTINUED)****½ Serving****1 Serving****PENNE WITH TUNA TOMATO AND SWEET CORN**

**Household Measure:** 2 heaped large plastic cook's serving spoon / 6 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 139gms

**Household Measure:** 4 heaped large plastic cook's serving spoon / 12 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 279gms

**TUNA BAKE**

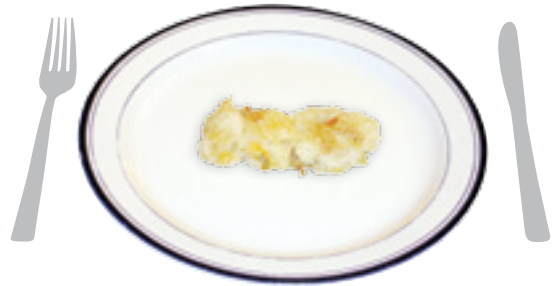
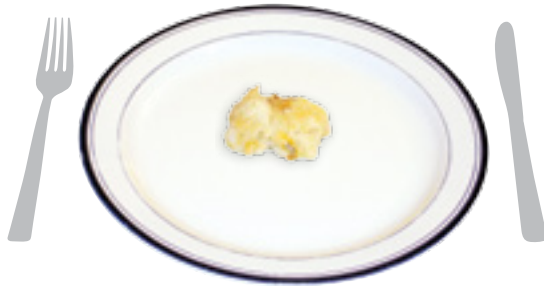
**Household Measure:** 1 heaped large plastic cook's serving spoon / 2 heaped dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 70gms

**Household Measure:** 2 heaped large plastic cook's serving spoon / 4 heaped dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 141gms

**SOUP****½ Serving****1 Serving**

**Household Measure:** 1 ¼ ladles  
**Volume:** 124g

**Household Measure:** 2 ½ ladles  
**Volume:** 248g

**VEGETARIAN DISHES****½ Serving****1 Serving****CHEESE AND ONION PIE**

**Household Measure:** 1 ½ dessertspoons /  $\frac{3}{4}$  large plastic cook's serving spoon **Weight:** 57gms

**Household Measure:** 3 dessertspoons / 1 ½ large plastic cook's serving spoon **Weight:** 113gms

**CHINESE NOODLE AND VEGETABLE**

**Household Measure:** 1 ¼ large plastic cook's serving spoon / 4 dessertspoons **Weight:** 82gms

**Household Measure:** 2 ½ large plastic cook's serving spoon / 8 dessertspoons **Weight:** 165gms

**MACARONI CHEESE**

**Household Measure:** 1 large plastic cook's serving spoon / 3 dessertspoons **Weight:** 91gms

**Household Measure:** 2 large plastic cook's serving spoon / 6 dessertspoons **Weight:** 182gms

**VEGETARIAN DISHES (CONTINUED)****½ Serving****1 Serving****PIZZA – HOMEMADE****Weight:** 46gms**Weight:** 97gms**SPANISH OMELETTE****Household Measure:** ~ 1 large plastic cook's serving spoon **Weight:** 69gms**Household Measure:** ~ 2 large plastic cook's serving spoons **Weight:** 139gms**VEGETABLE CURRY****Household Measure:** 1 large plastic cook's serving spoon / 3 dessertspoons **Weight:** 75gms**Household Measure:** 2 large plastic cook's serving spoon / 6 dessertspoons **Weight:** 149gms



**VEGETARIAN DISHES (CONTINUED)**

½ Serving

1 Serving

**VEGETABLE PASTA BAKE**



**Household Measure:** 1 large plastic cook's serving spoon / 3 heaped dessertspoons **Weight:** 123gms

**Household Measure:** 2 large plastic cook's serving spoon / 6 heaped dessertspoons **Weight:** 246gms

**VEGETARIAN LASAGNE**



**Household Measure:** 1 large plastic cook's serving spoon / 3-4 dessertspoons **Weight:** 78gms

**Household Measure:** 2 large plastic cook's serving spoons / 6-8 dessertspoons **Weight:** 156gms

**VEGETARIAN CROQUETTES**



**Household Measure:** 1 croquette

**Household Measure:** 2 croquettes

## Cakes, scones and desserts

To be enjoyed mostly as part of a meal

½ Serving

1 Serving

APPLE BREAD



**Household Measure:** ½ slice

**Household Measure:** 1 slice

BANANA MUFFIN



**Household Measure:** ½ muffin

**Household Measure:** 1 muffin

FRUIT CRUMBLE



**Household Measure:** 1–2 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 68gms

**Household Measure:** 2–4 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 136gms

**½ Serving****1 Serving****FRUIT SALAD**

**Household Measure:** 2 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 30gms

**Household Measure:** 4 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 60gms

**FRUIT SCONE**

**Household Measure:** 1 fruit scone

**Household Measure:** 2 fruit scones

**RICE PUDDING**

**Household Measure:** 1 dessertspoon  
**Weight:** 41gms

**Household Measure:** 2 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 82gms

½ Serving

1 Serving

STEWED FRUIT



**Household Measure:** 1 dessertspoon  
**Weight:** 15gms

**Household Measure:** 2 dessertspoons  
**Weight:** 30gms

