

A CORE GUIDE

Nourished Littles

*Steady energy & real nourishment for your children — from first foods to the
lunchbox.*

BETTER OUT CO.

The foundation we give them

Everything a child becomes is built, quite literally, from what they eat. Their growing brain, their bones, their immune system, their moods, the very way their body learns to handle food for the rest of their life — all of it is laid down now, in these early years, one meal at a time.

That's not a pressure. It's a gift — because it means the ordinary, everyday food you give them is some of the most powerful medicine they will ever receive. You don't need to be a perfect parent or a trained chef. You just need to know a few things most of us were never taught.

Because the modern world makes it genuinely hard. The shelves aimed at children are a wall of sugar, synthetic colours and clever marketing — sold to us as “for kids” precisely because no discerning adult would touch them. Picky eating, the after-school meltdown, the constant snacking, the colds that never end — so much of what we're told is “just how children are” is, quietly, a food story.

Feed the foundation, and so much else falls into place.

This little guide walks from a baby's very first spoonful right through to the school lunchbox — with the simple principles that matter and a generous handful of real, doable ideas. Nothing fancy. Just real food, given with love, that sets a child up for a steady, thriving life.

The little rollercoaster

If you've read *Steady* – my free guide to eating for calm, steady energy – you already know this story, and it matters even more for children, because their small bodies ride the waves harder and feel them faster. **If you haven't read it yet, go and download it first, then come back here** – this guide builds directly on it, and it'll all make richer sense that way.

When a child eats sugary or refined food on its own – juice, cereal, a plain biscuit, white toast – their blood sugar shoots up fast. The body floods in insulin to cope, overshoots, and their blood sugar comes crashing down below where it started. And a child in that dip doesn't calmly mention they need a snack. They melt down. They can't focus. They cry, rage, cling, or bounce off the walls.

SOUND FAMILIAR?

The after-school meltdown. The witching hour before dinner. The kid who “can't concentrate” mid-morning at school. The endless “I'm hungry” an hour after eating. So often these aren't behaviour problems at all – they're blood-sugar crashes, set up by what (and how) the child ate a couple of hours before.

The fix is exactly the same gentle principle as for us grown-ups, and it's the heart of this whole guide: **never serve a carb naked – and choose the carb well**. Two things together. First, always pair anything sweet or starchy with *protein, fat, or fibre* to slow the rise. And second, make the carb itself a *real* one – whole, unprocessed, the kind that grew rather than the kind a factory built. An apple with nut butter; a slice of proper sourdough with egg and avocado; roasted sweet potato with a stew. Not white bread, sugary cereal or additive-filled snacks dressed up – those crash a child even paired. Real carb, properly partnered: that's the whole secret.

Get this one idea into your bones, and calmer mornings, steadier moods and an easier dinnertime tend to follow all on their own.

Build every plate & box the same way

Once you have this little formula, you never have to wonder again – it works for a toddler's plate, a lunchbox, or a snack. Aim for three things together, every time:

1 A protein

The steadier and the builder. Egg, chicken, slow-cooked meat, smaller fish, beans, lentils, nut or seed butter. (Dairy too – *if* you can source it grass-fed and unpasteurised; if not, it's better skipped.) This is the piece most meals forget, and the one that holds a child together till the next.

2 A good fat

For the brain (which is largely fat) and lasting fullness. Avocado, olive oil, butter or ghee, nuts and seeds, coconut, the fat on good meat, egg yolks. Fat is not the enemy for a growing child – it's rocket fuel.

3 A colourful plant

For fibre, vitamins and living goodness. Vegetables, a little fruit, veg sticks – and don't forget the two-second scatter of fresh herbs or micro greens (see *The Kitchen Apothecary*, my free guide to herbs and natural medicine). Colour is nourishment.

IF THERE'S A CARB, CHOOSE IT WELL

Carbs aren't banned – but choose **whole, real** ones over processed: roasted sweet potato, pumpkin or butternut, oats (with hemp seeds stirred in), quinoa, lentils, real slow-fermented sourdough. Skip the white bread, sugary cereal and additive-filled snacks. A whole carb plus the three above is a steady, happy meal; a refined carb on its own is a rollercoaster ticket.



SECTION ONE

First Foods

*The very beginning – where a lifetime's palate,
and so much health, is quietly written.*

Start as you mean to go on

A baby beginning solids is a completely blank slate – they have no idea yet that food is “supposed” to be sweet, beige and bland. What you offer in these first months quietly teaches them what food *is*. It’s the single best chance you’ll ever have to build an adventurous, well-nourished eater.

THE TRUTH ABOUT POUCHES

Those squeeze pouches and jars are convenient, but most are a nutritional shadow of real food: heat-processed to last a year on a shelf, often startlingly high in sugar (even the “savoury” ones lean sweet), and sucked through a plastic spout that trains a baby to associate food with sweetness and speed. The occasional one for travel is no tragedy – but they were never meant to be the foundation.

The wonderful news is that real first food is almost laughably simple – far simpler than a recipe. A roasted sweet potato, mashed with a little broth. Soft-cooked egg yolk. Mashed avocado. A slow-cooked stew, blended smooth. Whatever the family is eating, made soft. Babies don’t need special “baby food” – they need *real* food, gently prepared.

And here is the part I feel most strongly about: **flavour from day one**. A baby’s palate is being formed right now – so give it the full, beautiful range. Herbs, gentle spices, savoury depth. The blandness we think babies “need” is the very thing that breeds the picky eater later.

Savoury first, sweet much later

Here is something I feel strongly about, and it goes against almost everything the baby-food aisle sells: I would **never make sweet fruit pouches** for a baby. Pureed sweet fruit sends a little one's blood sugar spiking, and worse, it hooks them on the sweet taste from the very start – so that real, savoury, nourishing food then tastes “boring” by comparison. We accidentally train the picky eater on day one.

So I'd begin **savoury, and stay there a good while**. A baby's first foods can be some of the most mineral-rich, deeply nourishing meals they'll ever eat:

CHICKEN LIVERS Gently cooked with herbs and turmeric, then blended smooth – nature's multivitamin, extraordinarily rich in iron, B12 and vitamin A for a fast-growing body.

BEEF MARROW BROTH A mineral-rich, collagen-rich broth (see *Steady*) to mix into mashes or sip – deeply nourishing and gentle on a new gut.

OXTAIL & VEG STEW Slow-cooked oxtail with vegetables and herbs, blended soft – collagen, minerals and real savoury depth in every spoonful.

WHEN SWEETNESS DOES COME

The sweetest I'd go early on is a few **organic blueberries** or a little **papaya** – gentle, low-spike, full of goodness. The really sweet fruits – banana, apple, pear – I'd introduce *much* later, once baby can eat actual pieces (not puree), and always **mixed with, or right after, a fat or protein** so it never hits alone.

Introduce sweetness late, and gently, and you protect their palate and their blood sugar at once.

Herbs & spices from the very start

This is the gift almost no one tells new parents about. From a baby's very first foods, you can gently weave in herbs and mild spices – and in doing so, you give them two things at once: a wide, adventurous palate, and a daily dose of real, gentle medicine.

Blend them straight into purees, broths and soft mashes. There's no need to wait and no need to keep it bland – and you can be more generous than people think: around **½ to 1 teaspoon** of soft herbs or mild ground spice in a portion brings real, meaningful nutrients, not just a hint of flavour. This is how you build a child who, years later, happily eats the herbs and vegetables their friends won't touch.

TURMERIC Stirred into savoury purees with a little fat to absorb it – gently anti-inflammatory. See *The Kitchen Apothecary*.

PARSLEY & BASIL Soft fresh herbs blended into savoury mashes and broths – mineral-rich and palate-building.

SAUTÉED GARLIC Gently softened in a little fat and blended in – mellow, not sharp, with real antibacterial, immune-supporting goodness.

SAGE & THYME Cooked into slow-simmered, blended meals – savoury depth and gentle immune support.

MICRO GREENS Finely blended into purees for a concentrated hit of nutrients – the easiest goodness of all.

GENTLY DOES IT

Keep it *mild* – soft herbs and gentle spices, never anything hot or sharp (skip chilli, and go very easy on strong warming spices that can sting a little mouth). Introduce new foods one at a time, watching for any reaction. And never honey before age one. Beyond that – let their little world taste of something real.



SECTION TWO

The Lunchbox

The daily masterpiece – small, doable, and quietly shaping how your child feels all afternoon.

How to build a steady box

A lunchbox is just the plate formula, packed in a box – and it's the meal you don't get to supervise, so it matters that it holds them. The classic crash-box is all beige carbs: a white sandwich, crisps, a cereal bar, a juice box. Delicious for ten minutes, then a long foggy afternoon.

Flip it with one habit: **pack the protein and fat first, then build around them.** Here's the simple anatomy of a box that keeps a child steady, focused and full till home time:

PROTEIN Boiled eggs, leftover roast chicken, meatballs, cold roast beef or lamb slices, hummus, smaller fish (see below). Dairy like cheese only if grass-fed and unpasteurised – otherwise skip it.

GOOD FAT Avocado, nut/seed butter (or sunflower-seed butter for nut-free schools), olives, egg yolk, a drizzle of olive oil on the veg.

COLOUR Cucumber sticks, cherry tomatoes, carrot, pepper strips, a few berries – and a scatter of fresh herbs over the savoury bits.

A WHOLE CARB Roasted sweet potato, pumpkin or butternut wedges, or real slow-fermented sourdough – the side, not the star.

WATER Water, always – the drink matters as much as the food (more on this shortly).

CHOOSE THE RIGHT FISH

If you pack fish, choose **smaller** ones – sardines, mackerel, sole, cod, seabass. The big predators (tuna, salmon, yellowtail) live longer and eat smaller fish, so they concentrate far more *heavy metals* like mercury – the last thing a small developing body needs. Little fish, lower down the chain, are cleaner and beautifully rich in the same good fats.

A week of steady boxes

Not rules — springboards. Each already has protein, fat, colour and a whole carb built in, with herbs woven through and nothing processed. Mix, match and rotate.

Mini herb frittatas

Egg muffins baked with grated courgette, peas and a handful of chopped parsley & basil. Pack with avocado, cherry tomatoes and roasted sweet-potato wedges.

Chicken & herb meatballs

Make a batch with grated onion, garlic and parsley; serve cold with cucumber ribbons, olives and butternut wedges. A dunk of guacamole on the side.

The build-your-own platter

Boiled egg, leftover roast chicken, cucumber coins, pepper strips, a few blueberries and roasted pumpkin. Separate little piles — kids devour what a sandwich comes home untouched.

Sardine smash & sourdough

Mashed sardines with lemon and herbs on real sourdough (or scooped with veg sticks) — brilliant fats and minerals, none of the heavy-metal worry of tuna.

Sweet-potato & lentil fritters

Little fritters of mashed sweet potato, lentils and herbs, pan-fried in butter or coconut oil. Pack with avocado and crunchy veg — steady, savoury, filling.

Oxtail or stew cups

Leftover slow stew (the same one from baby days, grown up) packed in a little thermos with butternut — warm, deeply nourishing, and they'll be the envy of the lunch table.

Roast-veg & chicken skewers

Threaded cherry tomatoes, peppers and chicken on little skewers (fun to eat), with guacamole and a few berries. Colour, protein, joy.

Snacks that don't crash

Snacks are where most of the day's sugar quietly sneaks in — the cereal bars, fruit snacks, crisps and “kids” biscuits that are simply sweets in a wholesome costume. The fix isn't no snacks; it's two things together: **make the snack from real food, and never let sweetness travel alone.**

Creative snacks worth making

Ants on a log, reimagined

Celery or cucumber boats filled with nut or seed butter, topped with a few blueberries or raisins. Fun to make together, genuinely steadying.

Frozen nibbles

Frozen blueberries, or banana coins rolled in chopped nuts & frozen — a “treat” that's just fruit and fat. Brilliant for hot afternoons and teething gums.

Energy bites

Blitz dates, oats, hemp seeds, nut butter and a little cinnamon; roll into balls and keep a jar in the fridge. The wholesome answer to the cereal bar.

A proper snack plate

Boiled egg, cucumber, a few olives, avocado wedges, cherry tomatoes — a mini deconstructed meal, far more filling than anything from a packet.

Veg & dip

Carrot, pepper and cucumber sticks with hummus or guacamole — make the dip yourself and it's pure nourishment, fun to dunk.

Roasted chickpeas or seeds

Crunchy roasted chickpeas or pumpkin seeds with herbs — the satisfying, savoury crunch kids reach for, with none of the crisp-packet additives.

Pesto, for dipping & dolloping

Blitz a big handful of basil and parsley with olive oil, nuts and garlic — it's practically medicine, all those herbs in one spoon. Serve with roasted potato or pumpkin wedges, or as a dip for veggie sticks. Kids love the green.

THE PAIRING RULE, SHRUNK DOWN

If sweetness appears — fruit, a date, a square of real dark chocolate — always anchor it with a protein or fat alongside (a few nuts, a boiled egg, seed butter). Sweet paired never crashes; sweet solo always does.

A word on drinks

This is the one that catches everyone, because it hides in plain sight dressed as health: **fruit juice**. A juice box, even “pure” and “no added sugar,” is essentially sugar-water with the fibre stripped out — it hits a small bloodstream as fast as a fizzy drink, and it’s often the single biggest sugar hit of a child’s whole day.

WHOLE FRUIT, NEVER JUICE

An orange and a glass of orange juice are not the same thing to a child’s body. The whole orange comes wrapped in fibre that slows everything down; the juice is all the sugar with none of the brakes. Give the fruit, skip the juice — this one swap alone removes a huge amount of hidden sugar.

Make water fun instead

So skip the juices, the squash and the fizzy “vitamin” drinks altogether — water is the only drink a child ever really needs. But water doesn’t have to be boring. The loveliest trick is to make it *fun, colourful and quietly nourishing* — flavoured waters that look like a treat and secretly carry real goodness.

Try cucumber and mint, or lemon with a few berries muddled in. Stir a little **spirulina** powder through for an amazing blue-green colour, or a spoon of **açai** for deep purple — both packed with antioxidants. Add **chia seeds** and let them swell into a fun, bubbly texture kids adore (and a little fibre and omega-3 with it). A splash of real fruit for colour, a pretty glass bottle, and suddenly water is the exciting drink — doing real good while it’s at it.

THE BOTTLE MATTERS TOO

Pack it in a fun reusable bottle — glass or stainless steel, never plastic (see *Low-Tox Living*). A bottle they love does more for hydration than any sugary drink ever could. Thirst is for water; food is for nourishment.

A LITTLE MINERAL BOOST

Here’s a quiet truth: many children run low on minerals simply because they won’t eat the foods richest in them — and minerals are what little bodies use for steady energy, focus and mood. One gentle helper I love is **Quinton**, pure ocean-mineral electrolytes (up to 78 minerals in the natural balance of the body) with no sugar, colours or flavourings — so a few drops disappear into a water bottle unnoticed. Start with a small amount and check with your child’s doctor first. quintonstore.co.za/LAURA40955

The after-school meltdown

You know the scene. They climb into the car or burst through the door – and they're a puddle. Tearful, furious, ravenous, impossible. We call it tiredness, or "a long day." And sometimes it is. But very often, it's a *blood-sugar crash* arriving right on schedule.

If lunch was light or beige, and the afternoon snack was a sugary one, your child has been riding the rollercoaster for hours and is now in the deepest dip of the day – with an empty tank and no words for it. The behaviour isn't naughtiness. It's chemistry, and it's fixable.

Meet the crash with protein and fat – not more sugar.

The instinct is to hand over a quick sweet treat to stop the tears – but that just spikes them again and guarantees a second crash before (or during) dinner. Instead, have a **steady snack ready for the moment of pickup**: a boiled egg and fruit, apple with nut butter, a little box of leftovers, veg and hummus, energy bites. Protein and fat fill the tank properly and bring your child back to themselves within minutes.

THE PICKUP-BAG HABIT

Keep a steady snack and a water bottle in the car or bag for the school run.

Catching the dip *before* it becomes a meltdown is one of the kindest, most peace-keeping habits a parent can build – for them and for you.

About sugar & treats

Let's be human about this: sugar is part of childhood. Birthday cake, an ice cream in summer, a party – these are joys, not crimes, and a child raised to fear food is no healthier than one raised on sweets. The aim isn't a sugar-free child. It's a child whose *everyday* runs on real food, so treats can simply be treats.

THE TWO THINGS THAT MATTER MOST

First, keep sugar out of the *daily background* – the cereals, juices, flavoured yoghurts, snack bars and “kids' foods” that quietly sweeten everything. That's where the real damage hides, far more than the occasional obvious treat. Second, when treats do come, serve them **after a proper meal**, never on an empty tummy – a full, steady child handles a sweet far better than a hungry one.

And here's the joyful secret: a “treat” doesn't have to mean processed sugar at all. Some of the most exciting things you'll ever bake are made from real, nourishing ingredients – almond flour, dates, raw honey, coconut, dark chocolate – and children adore them. Turn the page for a few of our favourites.

Treats worth getting excited about

All made from real food – no refined sugar, no white flour, no additives. Proof that “healthy” and “delicious” were never enemies.

Almond & orange cake

A moist, golden cake of almond flour, eggs and whole blended orange, sweetened with a little honey or coconut sugar. Naturally gluten-free and genuinely special.

Date-sweetened carrot cake

Grated carrot, almond flour, cinnamon and blended dates – no refined sugar at all, and somehow even more delicious for it.

Berry or apple crumble

Stewed berries or apple under a crumble of oats, hemp seeds, almond flour and coconut oil. Gluten-free, sugar-free, and a warm hug in a bowl.

Homemade bounty bars

Coconut bound with a little raw honey, dipped in melted dark chocolate, set in the fridge. Two ingredients of joy, none of the wrappers.

Homemade “Ferrero” bites

A whole hazelnut wrapped in date-and-nut-butter truffle, rolled in chopped nuts and dark chocolate. The grown-up favourite, made pure.

Real marzipan

Almond flour, raw honey and a drop of sweet orange oil, kneaded into a soft sweet dough. Roll into little shapes – an ancient treat, made with nothing but goodness.

TREATS, THE STEADY WAY

Even these are still treats – serve them after a meal, not on an empty tummy, and they land gently. But made from almonds, dates, honey and real chocolate, a treat becomes something that actually *feeds* your child. That’s a celebration worth having.

When they won't eat it

Even the most beautifully fed children go through fussy phases — it's developmentally normal, and rarely the disaster it feels like at the table. The worst thing we can do is turn meals into a battlefield. Here's what genuinely helps, gently.

- **Hide goodness in plain sight**

Blend herbs and veg into sauces, soups, meatballs and smoothies. The nourishment lands whether or not they “approve” of vegetables this week.

- **Pair new with loved**

Always serve a tiny bit of the new thing alongside something they already trust. No pressure to eat it — just let it become familiar.

- **Let them help**

Children eat what they grow, wash, stir and pack. A child who helped make the lunchbox is far likelier to eat it. Even a pot of basil on the sill works wonders.

- **Keep offering, calmly**

It can take a dozen exposures before a child accepts a new food. Keep putting it there, without fuss or force. Your calm is the most powerful ingredient.

PROTECT THEIR HUNGER

The simplest fix for a child who “won't eat dinner” is often to look at the afternoon: constant grazing and a sugary snack leave no real appetite. A genuinely hungry child is a far more adventurous eater.

How I fed my daughter

I'll never forget the choice I made at the very beginning. When my daughter started solids, I never reached for the pouches — those sugary purees in plastic, built to last a year on a shelf. It just never sat right with me that her first taste of the world would be something so lifeless.

So I cooked. Real, simple, powerful food — vegetables, good broths, gentle proteins — and I loaded it with herbs, then blended it soft. From her very first spoonfuls she had **turmeric, sage, basil, cinnamon** and more, woven right in. Not as an experiment — as the most natural thing in the world.

In ten years, she has not once been seriously sick. I don't think that's luck.

I share this not as a promise — every child is different, and no food is a guarantee — but as something worth sitting with. A body built from the very start on living, herb-rich, real food, instead of sugar and plastic, is a body given the strongest possible foundation. And those early flavours shaped her for life: she grew up genuinely loving real food, herbs and all. She's the proof, to me, that this works.

You don't have to do it exactly as I did. But if you're standing at the very beginning with a little one — or a baby on the way — know that it's the most beautiful place there is to start. The first foods we give become the blueprint a whole life is built on. Make them real. Make them alive. Make them with love.

— Laura



ONE LAST THING

Done, not perfect

You will not get this right every day, and you don't need to. There will be party food and beige days and the snack you grabbed in a rush – and your child will be absolutely fine. What shapes them isn't any single meal; it's the steady, loving pattern of the everyday.

Start with one idea – pair the snack, swap the juice, add the protein. Let it become normal, then add the next. You're already a wonderful parent for caring this much. The rest is just real food, given with love.

With love,

Laura

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This guide is for general education and encouragement only and isn't medical or nutritional advice for your individual child. Always introduce new foods one at a time and watch for allergies; take care with choking hazards for babies and toddlers (cut food appropriately, and note that whole nuts, whole grapes and similar are not suitable for young children); never give honey before age one; and follow your country's weaning guidance, starting solids around six months. For any concern about your child's growth, eating, allergies or health, please speak with your paediatrician, health visitor or a registered dietitian.