

Healthy eating newsletter inserts – information for schools

The School nutrition and healthy eating policy and guidelines¹ have been developed to ensure all students have access to healthy foods and drinks and a consistent approach to the availability and sale of food and drinks in Northern Territory (NT) Government schools.

School nutrition and healthy eating policy

The School nutrition and healthy eating policy and guidelines contain succinct, easy to use food category systems with opportunities for innovative, educational training. The guidelines are based on a system whereby foods are categorised to determine their suitability for a school environment.

Green – always on the menu

These foods and drinks are the best choices for a healthy school canteen. They should be available every day and be the main choices on the canteen menu. They contain a wide range of nutrients and are generally low in saturated fat, sugar and salt.

For example, a variety of vegetables can be added to a normal lean meat lasagne.

Amber – select carefully

These foods and drinks contain some valuable nutrients, moderate amounts of saturated fat, sugar and salt and if eaten in large amounts, may increase the amount of energy, or kilojoules, being consumed.

Foods and drinks in this category should be assessed carefully against the criteria to make sure that:

- the healthiest choices from this category are selected
- these foods and drinks do not take over the canteen menu
- the serve size is kept small.

Red – not on the menu

These foods and drinks may contain excess energy, or kilojoules, saturated fat, salt and sugar, and are low in nutritional value.

School nutrition and healthy eating policy explained

The School nutrition and healthy eating policy identifies the categories of food and drink items that will or will not be sold or provided in schools.

Children will have access to a variety of healthy foods and their choices will include products with fresh ingredients such as sandwiches and home cooked meals with vegetables, fruit, dairy and other core foods.

Foods in the **red - not on the menu** category will not be sold or provided in NT schools, unless part of a whole school event.

¹ <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/health-safety/school-nutrition-and-healthy-eating>

These contain excess energy, or kilojoules, saturated fat, salt and sugar, and are low in nutritional value. Examples are soft drinks, confectionery and any fruit juice item less than 99% juice.

The purpose of the School nutrition and healthy eating policy is to:

- provide criteria around what foods should and shouldn't be available to students
- promote nutrition education through the NT Curriculum framework. Teachers are encouraged to provide quality nutrition programs based on the NT Curriculum frameworks
- provide guidelines for classroom rewards, healthy fundraising, excursions and other school activities.

Fundraising must also comply with the updated School nutrition and healthy eating policy. Sausage sizzles will still be allowed if Heart Smart meats are used. Schools can access ideas for fundraising from the Department of Education website.

Using food as a reward

We often use food as a reward for good behaviour, or as a persuasive tool. Although in the short term this may work, in the long term it can have negative consequences as unhealthy foods are often used as the reward, which sends contradictory messages to a child. Children need to hear consistent messages from adults.

This is why non-food reward ideas often work better, for example try:

- attention, praise, hugs, a gift such as a book, skipping rope, colouring pencils
- a special day out with a parent.

For more information on healthy lifestyles and heart health, use the website: www.heartfoundation.org.au

Physical activity

Physical activity is important for the growth and development of the body. It reduces the risk of children developing diseases like cardiovascular disease and diabetes in the future. Children who exercise regularly also tend to have a more positive body image and higher self-esteem. It also improves social skills and hand eye coordination.

Current research recommends children to take part in physical activity for at least 60 minutes a day. You can encourage your child to exercise more by walking to the shops instead of driving in the car, walking the dog, going bike riding or swimming. Teaching your child basic skills like throwing, jumping and catching will help develop their confidence. It will also make them more likely to find team based activities enjoyable and rewarding.

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Role modelling

Children learn from watching what others do, particularly parents and friends. Eating healthily and being active are good habits to learn from a young age and you can encourage them in your children by doing them yourself. You won't just be benefiting your child, but you will be improving your health through positive role modelling.

Other ways you can set the example to children for good eating habits are:

- having structured mealtimes where the family sits down together without distractions, such as the television
- try new foods to encourage your child to be curious about new tastes.

Involve children in shopping, food preparation and cooking. This is a great way to discuss healthy foods and their importance for growing bodies with children.

Healthy food options

Alternatives to chips and muesli bars

Snack size potato chip packets and muesli bars are convenient options for lunch boxes; however, they are not nutrient rich foods. Chips are high in fat and salt, while muesli bars are high in sugar. Instead try one of these suggested alternatives for healthier eating:

- rice cakes or crackers
- pretzels
- prawn crackers cooked in microwave
- mini toasts
- pappadums cooked in microwave
- pita chips
- bread sticks
- wholegrain crackers with low or reduced fat cheese
- unsalted popcorn
- dried fruit
- unsalted nuts and seeds
- small tins of corn
- small bag of breakfast cereals that meet nutrient criteria for example high fibre, low sugar varieties like fruity bites, fruity bix.

Reference: Tasmanian Community Nutrition Unit, The Great Aussie Lunchbox Dilemma.

Put the 'snazz' back into the simple sandwich

The following ideas can help make sandwiches more exciting:

- use three slices of bread and two fillings to make triple deckers
- cut pita bread in half to make pockets and add filling

- use whole wheat sandwich size crackers instead of bread.

Or try one of the following filling ideas:

- chicken, avocado and lettuce
- apple and cream cheese
- egg and lettuce.

Or try these websites for new and easy ideas to spruce up the school lunchbox:

- <https://www.healthyliving.nsw.gov.au/food/healthy-recipes>
- https://www.sportsdietitians.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/School_Lunch_Box_Ideas.pdf

My child won't eat vegetables

Here are a few suggestions to try at home which may encourage your child to enjoy fruit and vegetables:

- growing – learning where food comes from and growing a few easy plants like tomato or zucchini may raise a child's enthusiasm. If space is a problem, try growing herbs or seedlings in pots.
- decision making – involve children in shopping and choosing recipes – experiment with new recipes which feature fruit or vegetables.
- food preparation – children are more likely to be interested in tasting different foods if they have been involved in the preparation. Involvement in cooking is also an opportunity to talk about hand washing and food hygiene practices.
- food presentation – consider balancing the different colours, textures, arrangements and shapes of the fruits and vegetables to encourage a variety of intake.
- tasting – young children may need to try a new food several times before liking it. If at first the child rejects a food, be encouraged to offer the food again at a later meal or snack time.
- role modelling – young children are great imitators, so parents and care givers who set good examples by enjoying a range of fruit and vegetables themselves are encouraging their children.

Reference: The SA Child Care Nutrition Partnership Food Matters Newsletter

Calcium for healthy bones and teeth

Calcium helps build strong bones and teeth, and the best sources of it are in milk, cheese and yoghurt. These foods are also sources of energy, protein and essential vitamins riboflavin and vitamin A. To meet calcium requirements, at least three serves of calcium a day is necessary.

One serve, approximately 300 mg calcium, is equal to:

- 250 ml full cream milk or calcium enriched soy milk
- 200 g tub yoghurt
- 200 ml custard
- 45 g cheese – 2 slices.

Easy ways to increase calcium in your child's diet

Easy ways to increase calcium in your child's diet include:

- offer milk instead of cordial and fruit juice
- offer breakfast cereals with milk as a snack
- use custard, low or reduced fat yoghurt or fromage frais for a healthy dessert
- try cheese sticks in the lunch box
- offer homemade milkshakes and fruit smoothies, made with fresh fruit and milk or yoghurt, as they make a great snack
- use low or reduced fat milk as much as possible in cooking, including in soups, sauces, mornay and milk based puddings. This is also a healthier alternative to coconut milk which does not contain calcium.
- use lots of grated cheese on pasta and pizza or sprinkle on vegetables
- try toasted cheese sandwiches for lunch.

Lunch box checklist

Lunch has a healthy wholesome main

- wholegrain or wholemeal sandwich, roll, bagel or wrap filled with:
 - protein source such as low or reduced fat cheese, tuna, chicken, eggs or beans
 - salads such as avocado, cucumber, carrot, tomato or lettuce
 - spreads such as peanut butter, avocado, hummus or cream cheese.

Health main lunch ideas

- tuna with corn and grated vegetables with sauce such as salsa, chutney
- roast beef with salad
- chicken with coleslaw and low or reduced fat dressing
- chicken with avocado and lettuce or alfalfa
- leftover roast veggies, for example zucchini, pumpkin, capsicum or eggplant with ricotta or low or reduced fat cheese and pesto
- grated carrot and sultanas with grated low fat cheese and alfalfa
- low or reduced fat cheese with salad and hummus
- ricotta with banana and honey or ricotta with sultanas and grated carrot
- English muffin with tomato and low or reduced fat cheese
- pita bread with tuna, lettuce and mayonnaise
- turkey, cranberry and spinach in Turkish bread
- vegetable soup with bread
- leftover homemade muffin pizzas

- pasta and tuna salad with vegetables.

Lunchbox contains some delicious dairy

Select at least one option:

- plain milk
- flavoured milk
- yoghurt
- frûche yoghurt
- creamed rice
- low or reduced fat cheese and biscuits
- low or reduced fat cheese stick
- drinking yoghurt.

Lunchbox has two fruity foods

Select at least one fresh fruit option:

- fresh whole fruit, try to have different varieties
- snack packs of tinned fruit
- fruit salad
- frozen oranges and frozen banana.

Other yummy ideas

- banana bread
- homemade fruit muffin
- popcorn
- mixed nuts and seeds
- half fruit scones
- fruit cake.

Tips to help promote healthy eating

- encourage children to bring their own water bottle with them to school each day as water is the best drink. Children should not bring sweet drinks such as juice, cordial or soft drink to school as these drinks may replace other more nutritious foods. Sweet drinks increase the risk of dental caries and are high in kilojoules.
- vary the fruit you buy each week for school lunches and try to buy fruits in season as they will often taste best.
- vary the breads and sandwich fillings each week.
- encourage children to bring along a bottle of milk if lunch is being stored in a fridge as dairy products are particularly important.

- bring yoghurt as it can be frozen and used to keep the rest of the lunch box cool.
- involve your child in selecting foods for their lunch box, giving them two options is plenty of choice to make them feel empowered.
- encourage your child to be involved in food preparation, such as making some high fibre fruit muffins.
- encourage your child to be involve in planting some tomatoes or lettuce to be included in their lunch.

For more tips and ideas refer to *The Secret of Healthy Children*, *The Secret of Healthy Children*, produced with Nutrition Australia and published by Focus Publishing, 2003.