

School nutrition and healthy eating – guidelines

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Read this document with the School nutrition and healthy eating policy.

1. Introduction

In order to improve access to healthy food and drink choices in Northern Territory Government schools, the Department of Education (department) requires all schools to use the food categories in the National healthy school canteen guidelines when providing any food or drinks to students.

The department acknowledges the complexities behind providing nutritious food and drinks to students however, in the interest of the current and future health of our students, all efforts must be made to ensure compliance with these guidelines. Food and drinks are classified according to the amount of nutrients they provide and are based on the National healthy school canteen guidelines, the Federation of canteens in schools, as well as the Australian guide to healthy eating.

School canteens, vending machines, nutrition education, fundraising, excursions, school sport events, school nutrition programs, classrooms including classroom rewards, preschools, early childhood services, breakfast programs, afterschool programs and outside of school hours care services involving food and drinks must comply with the food and drink categories.

While all schools are encouraged to provide **green - always on the menu** choices in all school settings, there are some situations that are exempt. Refer to the School nutrition and healthy eating exemptions section in the School nutrition and healthy eating policy. All exemptions may still provide an opportunity to provide healthy eating options, and schools are encouraged to provide **green - always on the menu** foods wherever possible.

All staff are encouraged to play an active role in supporting healthy eating and nutrition in schools by ensuring all foods and drinks provided at school are consistent with these guidelines, and by actively role modelling and promoting healthy eating and good nutrition.

2. Understanding and using healthy food and drink categories

The food and drink categories outlined below are the types of food and drinks that can or cannot be provided in schools.

2.1. Green - always on the menu

A large variety of these foods and drinks must be available every day and be the main choices on canteen menus or instances where schools provide food or drink.

Foods and drinks	Examples
Drinks	Low or reduced fat milk and soy drinks, plain and flavoured: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may contain intense or artificial, sweeteners • suggested 375 ml serve size or less • plant based milks for example almond, must be calcium fortified. Water including plain tap, spring, mineral or sparkling with nothing added.
Bread and alternatives	Bagels, wrap style breads, crumpets, english muffins, focaccia, gluten free, lavash, lebanese, multigrain, pita, rye, tortillas, turkish, wholegrain, wholemeal and white high fibre. Raisin and fruit bread, un-iced fruit buns and glazed hot cross fruit buns.

Foods and drinks	Examples
	Plain and savoury scones, pikelets and pancakes.
Breakfast cereals	Wholegrain, whole wheat flakes, wholegrain puffed cereals, porridge, whole wheat biscuits and without added confectionary. Must meet nutrient criteria.
Rice, grains and pasta	Plain rice, noodles, pasta, burghul, cracked wheat, polenta and couscous. Plain air popped popcorn with nothing added.
Yoghurt, custard and cheese including soy alternatives	Low or reduced fat cheese without added confectionery. Low or reduced fat plain or fruit yoghurt and custard without added confectionery. Dips that meet nutrient criteria. May contain intense or artificial sweeteners.
Fruit	Fresh in season is the best choice. Frozen pureed or canned in natural juice, does not include dried fruit.
Vegetables including legumes	Fresh in season is the best choice. Frozen or canned without added flavourings. Chickpeas, kidney beans, lentils, baked beans, including dried or canned, lentil patties and falafels including grilled or baked. Dips that meet nutrient criteria.
Lean meat, fish, poultry and alternatives	Unprocessed lean beef, chicken, lamb, pork, turkey and fish. Canned tuna, salmon and sardines. Eggs, nuts including unsalted, unroasted and dry roasted nuts.*

*Check your school policy regarding the use of nuts and products containing nuts.

Note: Water is the preferred option for students in all school settings. All schools and preschools must ensure that children have access to and are encouraged to access drinking water at all times, particularly in hot weather.

2.2. Amber - select carefully

These foods and drinks must be assessed carefully against the Nutrient criteria tables and must not dominate the menu. Please refer to the National healthy school canteen guidelines for more details.

Foods and drinks	Examples
Drinks	<p>Full fat milk and soy drinks, plain and flavoured:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may contain intense or artificial sweeteners • suggested 375 ml serve size or less • coffee style milk drinks including flavoured milk may only be sold in middle or senior schools, maximum 375 ml serve size • plant based milks such as almond milk, must be calcium fortified. <p>Fruit and vegetable juice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at least 99% fruit or vegetable juice including sparkling varieties, no added sugar, maximum 250 ml serve size • must not contain deionised juice. <p>Please note: for early childhood settings, refer to the School nutrition and healthy eating exemptions section in the School nutrition and healthy eating policy.</p>
Yoghurt, custard and cheese including soy alternatives	<p>Full fat cheese without added confectionery.</p> <p>Full fat plain or fruit yoghurt and custard without added confectionery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may contain intense or artificial sweeteners.
Dried fruit and fruit leathers	<p>All types.</p> <p>Fruit leathers must be 100% fruit.</p> <p>Keep the serve size small, less than 25 g.</p>
Fruit ice blocks, fruit jelly desserts, ice crushes and slushies	<p>At least 99% fruit juice and no added sugar, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ice slushies and fruit jellies, maximum 200 ml serve size • fruit ice blocks, maximum 125 ml serve size.
Meat products and alternatives	<p>Burgers, patties, strips, balls, nuggets, sausages, frankfurts, saveloys, crumbed and uncrumbed, stews, casseroles and curries.</p> <p>Lean processed luncheon meats, fritz, devon, chicken loaf, free flow chicken, cured meats, for example ham and bacon, chicken drumsticks and wings.</p>
Savoury hot food items	<p>Savoury pastries, filled breads, pasta dishes, pizzas, oven baked potato products, dim sims, spring rolls, rice and noodle dishes.</p>
Un-iced cakes, muffins and sweet pastries	<p>Some un-iced cakes and muffins that are small in serving size or have been modified to reduce the amount of saturated fat, sugar or with added fibre.</p> <p>Only filo or home made, margarine based pastry can be used in cooking.</p>

Foods and drinks	Examples
Ice creams, milk based ices and dairy desserts and frozen yoghurts	Low or reduced fat ice creams, not chocolate coated, milk based ices, custards and dairy desserts. Milk must be listed as the first ingredient.
Prepacked smoothies, liquid breakfast and yoghurt drinks	Milk must be listed as the first ingredient.
Fats and oils	Choose polyunsaturated and monounsaturated oils and spreads and use sparingly such as sunflower, safflower, corn, soya bean, olive and canola.
Spreads, dips and relishes	Nut spreads*, fish, chicken, meat pastes, yeast spreads, dips, salsa and relishes. Use Sparingly and choose reduced fat mayonnaise.
Sauces	Low or reduced salt tomato sauce, tomato paste, barbeque, soy, satay, gravy and stock. Mustard and sweet chilli sauce. Use sparingly.
Toppings, syrup, jam and honey	Small amounts. Use sparingly.

*Check your school policy regarding the use of nuts and products containing nuts.

2.3. Red - not on the menu

These foods and drinks must not be sold or provided in schools unless part of a whole school event Please refer to the National healthy school canteen guidelines for nutrient criteria to assess foods.

Foods and drinks	Examples
Drinks	Soft drinks, iced tea, cordial, sports waters, sports drink, flavoured mineral water, energy drinks and sweetened waters.
Intense or artificial sweeteners*	Any product containing intense or artificial sweeteners with the exception of flavoured milk, fruit yoghurts and custards.
Caffeine and guarana	Any products containing guarana. Coffee style products, including flavoured, mocha, latte, cappuccino or similar. Coffee style milk drinks over 375 ml serve size.
Breakfast cereals	High sugar, high sodium or low fibre varieties that do not meet nutrient criteria.
Fruit or vegetable juice	Less than 99% juice, or added sugar, or greater than 250 ml serve size or contain deionised juice.
Jelly desserts, ice crushes and slushies	Less than 99% fruit juice or added sugar, or greater than 200 ml serve size.

Foods and drinks	Examples
Icy poles and fruit ice blocks	Less than 99% fruit juice or added sugar, or greater than 125 ml serve size.
Cakes and slices	Iced cakes and slices, doughnuts, danishes, croissants, cream filled buns or cakes.
Confectionery	All types sold separately or added to products including: boiled lollies, carob, chocolate, including choc chips and chocolate coated, chocolate spreads, cough lollies, 100s and 1000s, juice jellies, icing, liquorice, soft lollies, yoghurt or carob coated.
Deep fried food	All types.
Sauces and spreads	Full fat mayonnaise. Tomato sauce, tomato paste, barbeque, soy, satay, gravy and stock that is not low or reduced salt.
Pastry	Puff and shortcrust pastry.
Fats	Cream, coconut cream, coconut milk, butter, cophera, ghee and lard.

*Code number and prescribed name for intense or artificial sweeteners include 950 acesulphame potassium, 951 aspartame, 952 calcium cyclamate or sodium cyclamate or cyclamate, 953 isomalt, 954 saccharin or calcium saccharin or sodium saccharine or potassium saccharine, 955 sucralose, 956 alitame, 957 thaumatin, 961 neotame, 965 maltitol and maltitol syrup or hydrogenated glucose syrup, 966 lactitol, 967 xylitol and 968 erythritol.

2.4. Confectionery in school settings

All types of confectionery are categorised as **red - not on the menu** and must not to be sold or provided in schools, unless part of a whole school event.

3. Understanding nutrient criteria tables for **amber - selected carefully** food and drink

If the food item being assessed has less than or equal to the numbers specified in the energy, saturated fat or sodium column, and more than or equal to the number specified in the fibre column in Nutrient criteria Table 1 - Hot food items and processed meats and Nutrient criteria Table 2 - Snack and hot food items, it may be sold or provided in the school. These foods and drinks contain some valuable nutrients, moderate amounts of saturated fat, sugar or sodium salt and serve sizes should be kept small to limit the energy (kilojoules) being consumed.

Note the differences for preprepared meals based on core foods which can be classified as **red - not on the menu**, **amber - select carefully** or **green - always on the menu**.

If the food being assessed is over the threshold for energy or saturated fat or sodium or under the threshold for fibre, if any criterion is not met, the food is categorised as **red - not on the menu**, and these foods and drinks must not be sold or provided in schools, unless part of a whole school event.

4. Nutrient criteria

4.1. Table 1 – Hot food items and processed meats

Hot food items and processed meats assessed per 100 g			
Category	Nutrient criteria		
	Energy (kJ) per 100 g	Saturated fat (g) per 100 g	Sodium (mg) per 100 g
Savoury pastries, filled breads, pizzas, oven baked potato products, dim sims and spring rolls	1000 kJ or less	5 g or less	400 mg or less
Meat products and alternatives crumbed and not crumbed including burgers, patties, strips, balls, nuggets, sausages, frankfurts and saveloys	1000 kJ or less	5 g or less	450 mg or less
Processed luncheon meats including fritz, devon, chicken loaf, free flow chicken products and cured meats, for example ham and bacon	1000 kJ or less	3g or less	750 mg or less
Preprepared meals based on core foods including rice and noodle dishes, sushi, pasta dishes, stews, casseroles and curries	greater than 1000 kJ	greater than 5 g or less	greater than 400 mg
	1000 kJ or less	5 g or less	400 mg or less
	750 kJ or less	3.5 g or less	300 mg or less

4.2. Table 2 – Snack food items assessed per serve

The following foods can be provided in schools however, Nutrient Criteria Table 3 - Sauces, dips and soups assessed per 100 g help to make the healthier choice. If the food being assessed has less than or equal to the numbers specified in the saturated fat or sodium column, it is **green - always on the menu**. If it is over either of the thresholds, it is **amber - select carefully**.

Snack food items assessed per serve				
Category	Nutrient Criteria			
	Energy (kJ) per serve	Saturated fat (g) per serve	Sodium (mg) per serve	Fibre (g) per serve
Sweet snack food, bars and biscuits	600 kJ or less	3 g or less	-	1 g or more
Savoury snack food, biscuits, crisp breads and crisps	600 kJ or less	2 g or less	200 mg or less	
Energy must be 1800 kJ or less per 100 g				
Snack packs, dip and biscuit packs, cheese and biscuit packs	500 kJ or less	5 g or less	300 mg or less	-
Dairy based ice creams, frozen yoghurt, dairy dessert	600 kJ or less	3 g or less	-	-
Milk must be listed as first ingredient				

Snack food items assessed per serve				
Prepacked smoothies, liquid breakfast and yoghurt drinks	900 kJ or less	3 g or less	–	–
Milk must be listed as first ingredient				
Un-iced cakes, muffins and sweet pastries	900 kJ or less	3 g or less	–	1.5 g or more

4.3. Table 3 – Sauces, dips and soups

Sauces, dips and soups assessed per 100 g		
Category	Nutrient Criteria	
	Saturated fat (g) per 100 g	Sodium (mg) per 100 g
Pasta sauces and simmer sauces	2 g or less	300 mg or less
Dips such as legume, dairy, vegetable or salsa	2 g or less	750 mg or less
Soups as prepared ready to eat such as condensed and instant soup	2 g or less	300 mg or less

4.4. Table 4 – Breakfast cereals

If the breakfast cereal being assessed has less than or equal to the numbers specified in the sugar, saturated fat or sodium column, and more than or equal to the number specified in the fibre column, it is **green - always on the menu**. If any criterion is not met the cereal is categorised as **red - not on the menu**.

Breakfast cereals assessed per 100 g			
Category	Nutrient Criteria		
	Fibre (g) per 100g	Saturated fat (g) per 100g	Sodium (mg) per 100g
Sugar (g) per 100 g			
Cereal without added fruit, 20 g or less	5 g or more	2 g or less	600 mg or less
Cereal with added fruit, 25 g or less			

For home or canteen made meals refer to the supporting documents at section 10.1 of these guidelines.

5. School based activities

The following advice provides specific guidance to support schools when planning school based activities, including activities outside of normal daily operations.

5.1. Fundraising

Student centered fundraising activities undertaken during the year must comply with food and drink categories. Any food or drinks categorised as **red - not on the menu**, must not be used in fundraising, with the exception of whole school events, for example sold at a school fete, carnival or disco.

5.2. Excursions including school camps

All excursions including camps, must comply with food and drink categories. The **green - always on the menu**, category must be available including all days on which the camp is scheduled and be the main choice on the selection of foods provided to students. Any food or drinks categorised as **red - not on the menu**, must not be sold or provided to students.

5.3. School sport events

All school sport events must comply with food and drink categories. A large variety of food and drinks from the **green - always on the menu**, category must be always be available as the main choice for students. Any food or drinks categorised as **red - not on the menu**, must not be sold or provided to students, unless part of a special whole school event.

5.4. School nutrition and breakfast programs

All school nutrition and breakfast programs must comply with food and drink categories. A large variety of food and drinks from the **green - always on the menu**, category must be available every day and be the main choices on the menu. Any food or drinks categorised as **red - not on the menu**, must not be sold or provided to students.

5.5. Outside of school hours care services

All OSHC services which are coordinated by the school or operated by outside providers on school grounds must comply with the food and drink categories. Food and drinks from the **green - always on the menu**, category must be available every day and be the main choice on the menu. Any food or drinks categorised as **red - not on the menu**, must not be sold or provided to students.

5.6. Food rewards

Food must not be used as a reward.

Sweet foods that are high in energy (kilojoules) particularly appeal to children and are frequently used as a tool to change children's behaviour. This practice can have negative consequences on students. Research shows that when children eat nutritious foods, they perform better at school and learn more effectively. Children should be given consistent messages about food from all adults. It is still important to reward children for positive behaviour and this can be done using non-food rewards.

5.7. Afterschool programs

All afterschool programs which are coordinated by the school or operated by outside providers on school grounds must comply with the food and drink categories. Food and drinks from the **green - always on the menu**, category must be available every day and be the main choice on the menu. Any food or drinks categorised as **red - not on the menu**, must not be sold or provided to students.

6. Food allergies and intolerances

Any food or drink provided in schools must have regard to the medical needs of all students. Schools are required to implement school based processes to ensure students at risk of anaphylaxis are safe. See the Anaphylaxis management in schools guidelines.

7. Resources for schools

To assist schools to successfully integrate the policy and guidelines, a range of resources have been developed that creatively introduce healthy food and drink choices into a range of early childhood and school activities and situations. These resources are available on the Department of Health's website under Nutrition and the supporting documents on the Department of Education website under School nutrition and health eating.

8. Roles and responsibilities

8.1. Principals

Principals are responsible for ensuring:

- all efforts are made for catering and food supplies contracted through the school to be consistent with these guidelines and associated policy
- all student centered fundraising activities are consistent with the policy and guidelines
- all members of the school community, including school representative bodies and canteen managers are made aware of, are familiar with, and comply with related aspects of the policy and guidelines
- the school canteen is appropriately registered by the Department of Health as a food business in accordance with the *Food Act 2004*
- canteen staff are encouraged to participate in training provided by the Department of Health to ensure awareness of current information
- parents are provided with regular updates and support materials via the school newsletters or websites in order to better support students food and drinks choices at home
- food and nutrition is taught to students from transition to year 10 as part of the Australian Curriculum through the Health and Physical Education learning area
- the preschool and outside of school hours care service is compliant with regulatory requirements under the *Food Act 2004* and Food Regulations 2014 by implementing the required procedures
- children with specific dietary and health requirements, as indicated in their enrolment form or medical management plan, are managed and catered for.

8.2. School representative bodies

School representative bodies are responsible for ensuring:

- all efforts are made for catering and food supplies contracted by the school to be compliant with the policy and guidelines
- any fundraising or events where food is sold complies with the *Food Act 2004*

8.3. Canteen managers

Canteen managers are responsible for ensuring:

- all efforts are made by canteen staff to meet the requirements of these policy and associated guidelines
- canteen menus actively promote the sale or provision of **green - always on the menu**, food and drinks

- their knowledge is current and are strongly encouraged to participate in training provided by the Department of Health.

8.4. Teachers and educators

Teachers and educators are responsible for ensuring:

- food and nutrition is taught to students from transition to year 10, and general nutritional advice and guidance is provided to all students
- education related activities involving food comply with the policy, including camps, excursions or sporting events
- food or drinks are not used as a reward in the classroom or school setting, regardless of category.

8.5. Preschools, early childhood services, breakfast programs, afterschool programs and outside of school hours care

Preschools, early childhood services, breakfast programs, afterschool programs and outside of school hours care (OSHC) services are responsible for:

- ensuring children have access to safe drinking water at all times and are regularly offered food and drinks throughout the day
- ensuring the healthy, hygienic and safe handling, preparation and storing of food and drinks, including those provided by families
- ensuring food is not used as a reward, regardless of category
- ensuring children with specific dietary and health requirements, as indicated in their enrolment form or medical management plan, are managed and catered for
- ensuring the preschool and OSHC service complies with regulatory requirements under the *Food Act 2004* and *Food Regulations 2014* and departmental policy and guidelines.

Please note: an OSHC service run by an external provider such as a school representative body is required to have policies and guidelines in place regarding nutrition for students in their care.

8.6. Parents

Parents are encouraged to:

- provide healthy food and drinks to their children for consumption at school
- inform the school if their child has any specific dietary requirements or food allergies.

9. Definitions

Term	Definition
Afterschool programs	Programs such as homework centres and sporting programs which are coordinated by a school or an external service provider such as a school council on school grounds.
Classroom rewards	Incentives provided to whole classes or individual students as a form of positive reinforcement.
Dietary requirements	Refers to a child's allergy, cultural, religious or medical condition that requires special consideration in planning and providing food and beverages.
Excursion	An educational, sporting or cultural trip by students within or outside the Northern Territory, under the direction of teachers and activity leaders authorised by the department.
Exemptions	Activities where schools have discretion about the foods that they provide to students. These activities may involve the supply of red - not on the menu , foods however, schools are encouraged to provide green - always on the menu , foods wherever possible.
Food and nutrition	Is a focus area of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education for all year levels from transition to year 10 which addresses the role food and nutrition play in enhancing health and wellbeing. The learning outcomes support students to develop knowledge, understanding and skills to make healthy, informed food choices and to explore the contextual factors that influence eating habits and food choices.
Fundraising	An activity that staff, students or the school community coordinate inside or outside school hours to raise funds for the school.
Health	A state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. ¹
Outside of school hours care services (OSHC)	Provided for pre and school age children outside of school hours which are coordinated by the school, school council or operated by an external service provider on school grounds.
School canteen	The facility that provides food and drinks to students and staff. This includes traditional school canteens in urban settings, rural and remote provision of breakfast, snacks, lunches, and private providers supplying food and drink to school students.
School nutrition and breakfast programs	Breakfast or lunch services for students which support improved attendance and contribute to learning and engagement in education.
School representative bodies	An incorporated body under the Education Act 2015 and includes independent public school boards, school councils and joint school representative bodies.
School sport event	Any sporting event that staff, school sport coordinators, School Sport NT or the school community coordinate inside or outside school hours.

¹ Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948.

Term	Definition
Whole school events	Instances where a suspension of normal school activities or classes occurs for celebration or commemorative purposes and involve all students and the broader school community for example a school fete or disco.

10. Related documents, legislation, guidelines and resources

10.1. Supporting documents

The following supporting documents can be located on the Department of Education’s School nutrition and healthy eating webpage – <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/health-safety/school-nutrition-and-healthy-eating>

- Creating a healthier canteen menu information sheet
- Food and drink categories information sheet
- Healthy alternative to sausage sizzles information sheet
- Ideas for fundraising information sheet
- Ideas for healthy food based fundraising information sheet
- Newsletter inserts for healthy eating information sheet
- Recipe checklist for canteen managers and teachers information sheet
- School camp and barbeque catering ideas information sheet
- Sporting events, fundraising and non food reward ideas information sheet
- Suitable foods and drinks in school information sheet
- Tips for parents to promote healthy eating information sheet

10.2. Legislation

- *Food Act 2004* - <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/en/Legislation/FOOD-ACT-2004>
- Food Regulations 2014 - <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/Legislation/FOOD-REGULATIONS-2014>

10.3. Guidelines

- Anaphylaxis management in schools guidelines - <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/health-safety/anaphylaxis>
- National healthy school canteen guidelines - <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-healthy-school-canteens-guidelines-for-healthy-foods-and-drinks-supplied-in-school-canteens>

10.4. Resources

- Australian curriculum: health and physical education - <https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>
- Australian guide to healthy eating - <https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines/australian-guide-healthy-eating>
- Department of Health - Nutrition - <https://nt.gov.au/wellbeing/healthy-living/nutrition>

- Federation of canteens in schools - <https://www.focis.com.au/>
- National healthy schools canteen project 2010, National healthy schools canteen trainer’s manual, Australian Government Department of Health and Federation of canteens in schools nutrient criteria effective 1 July 2017 - <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/national-healthy-school-canteens-resource-collection>

Acronyms	Full form
g	gram
kJ	Kilojoule
mg	Milligram
OSHC	Outside of school hours care

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Version	Date	Author	Changes made
1	July 2009	Student Services Division	First version
2	October 2011	Student Services Division	Updated to reflect National healthy school canteen guidelines
3	July 2013	School Support Services	File 2017/545; EDOC2017/32452
4	October 2017	Student Wellbeing and Inclusion	File 2018/3857; EDOC:2018/96643
5	September 2023	Inclusion, Wellbeing Programs and Services	Administration amendments to align roles and responsibilities to the structural alignment in effect from 1 July 2022, including NTG template and minor formatting