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food in schools

-a short guide
for parents
and carers





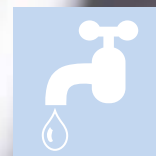
a whole school approach

to improvement

School meals have recently come in for a lot of attention. It is understandable that parents and carers are anxious about the quality of food their children eat, and want to know more about what they can expect from schools.

As the latest step to encourage healthy eating, the government recently announced additional funding to enable schools to spend more on lunches, amongst other measures. However, we recognise that there is still a lot of work to do before healthy and attractive food and drink is available in every school, and to do this we need your help as parents and carers.

This guide is designed to give you a greater understanding of what your child should be eating and drinking, and learning about food at school. It also tells you where you can find out more information and how you can get more involved both in what's being served at school and what you can do at home.



Why is healthy school food so important?

- Parents and carers want their children to have the best possible start in life – and a healthy, well-balanced diet is a key part of that.
- Child obesity levels are still rising; eating and learning about healthier diets at school and at home, as well as being more active, can play a role in tackling this problem.

food what's on the menu?

When many of us think about food in schools, the first thing that comes into our heads is school meals.

All schools should offer a balanced meal each day, and variety through the week, and must provide a lunch for children entitled to free school meals. There are rules about what schools should be providing for lunch – and a new School Meals Review Panel is looking to take these further.

In order to provide a balanced meal, all schools should make different types of food available. These should include starchy foods (potatoes, rice and pasta), fruit and vegetables, milk and dairy foods, and meat, fish and vegetarian alternatives. **Is there a wide choice in your child's school? Is the choice of food in your child's school maintained until the end of lunchtime?**

Your child's school may operate a breakfast club. **Does your child ever have breakfast at school? If so, you can ask about the menu: are there healthier options available?**

Primary schools

Most primary schools offer one or two meal choices each day.

- Your school should be able to inform you about what's on the menu each day, whether there is any choice, what drinks are available, how healthier options are promoted and how lunchtimes are managed.

Secondary schools

Secondary schools typically offer a wider choice of meals, but these must still meet key standards for healthy eating.

One of our main goals is to encourage more pupils to choose healthy options, by making them more appealing and educating children about the benefits of healthy eating.

- Your school should be able to tell you more about the food it offers, what's on the menu each day and how they are promoting healthier eating.

Studies suggest that by improving the dining room environment, children can be encouraged to spend more time there and to choose healthier food. Suggestions of how to do this can be found on www.foodinschools.org

If you are not happy with what your school is providing, or feel that it doesn't meet the required standards, find out more about what you can do on page 11.





snacks

beyond lunch



Children need to eat and drink at break times as well as at lunchtime and, perhaps, after school if they are staying for after school activities. There are various different ways food and drink can be provided, some are compulsory and some are optional.

Water



Easily accessible fresh drinking water should be available at convenient points throughout the school and in every building.

Dispensers should **not** be located in the toilets. Children should be able to get a drink of water at any time during the school day – many schools allow children to carry water bottles with them. **Ask your child if they have access to water throughout the day.**

Tuck shops



Many secondary schools run a tuck shop during break times.

Your school should be able to tell you what is for sale, who runs it and when it is open. Tuck shops should sell healthier food such as fruit, smoothies, sandwiches and pure fruit juice. **Ask your child if there is a tuck shop in their school. If so, what kind of food does it sell?**

Vending machines



Many secondary schools have vending machines selling snacks and drinks. Vending machines should be stocked with healthier

products such as bottled water, fruit juice, yogurts and low fat snacks. **Ask your child if there are vending machines in their school. If so, what food and drinks are sold from these machines?**

educate

learning about



There are different subjects that your child will do at school that include food and help to educate children about nutrition, digestion, food preparation, cooking and food production.

Food Technology At primary school, children learn to use equipment & tools and understand the importance of food hygiene as well as developing cooking skills. Around 90% of secondary schools offer food technology and more pupils now take food technology GCSEs than ever took either Domestic Science or Home Economics.

Science gives children an opportunity to learn about different types of food, their nutritional composition, the digestive system and the ways different nutrients keep us in good health. Your child will also learn about how diet, exercise, smoking and drugs affect health.

Personal, Social and Health Education helps children to recognise what they like and dislike, and encourages them to make healthy choices.

Geography provides an opportunity to consider the impact our food choices have on the environment and people who make their living from farming or fishing.

Citizenship offers the chance to explore moral and ethical issues such as food and drink advertising and sustainable development.

What should my child know?

- In infant school (age 5-7), children should learn that food comes from plants and animals and understand that people must eat a wide variety of foods in order to grow and be healthy.
- In junior school (age 7-11), children should gain a deeper understanding of food, health and hygiene and be able to cook simple dishes.
- In secondary school (age 11-16), children should develop a more thorough awareness of nutrition, health, food safety and preparation, learn what constitutes a healthy diet and be able to make informed choices about food.

Ask your child about what they are learning about healthy eating in school.



inform

what can I do?

As a parent interested in what your child eats, there are a number of things you can do to support healthy eating.

...at home

- The most important thing of all is to develop a healthy lifestyle at home, providing your children with a balanced diet and eating well yourself.
- Help your child get interested in cooking and eating. Watch food programmes and involve your child in your cooking. Take your child food shopping.
- You can also help by talking to your child about what they eat and drink at school, what food and drink is on offer, whether they eat different types of food and what they've learned about food.
- Check that your child understands how important it is to eat five portions of fruit or vegetables a day.



...at school

- You can find out more about what food and drink is being provided at school, or what your children should be learning about food, by asking your child's teacher, the head or the parent governors.
- Find out how your school spends money on school meals, what the school contributes to the cost and what parents contribute, and the cost of ingredients per plate, by asking your child's teacher, the head or the parent governors.
- Does your child's school have any rules on food that is included in packed lunches? Find out what the school is offering before you give your child a packed lunch, which may be healthier than the school lunch.
- In some cases, where meals are provided by the local authority, your school may put you in touch with the relevant people there.
- If you would like to see changes made, talk to the head or parent governors, explaining your concerns. If you do not think your concerns are being dealt with write to the Chair of the Governing Body.
- If you are not happy with the result, from Autumn 2005 you will be able to contact the new School Food Trust* for more assistance.

*The School Food Trust will bring together representatives from the food industry, caterers, nutritionists, food interest groups, schools and parents. It will play a key role in taking forward the Government's programme for improving school food. It will give independent support and advice to schools and parents to improve the standard of school meals and ensure that the issue of school food remains high on the agenda.



find out more...

- What should your school be providing for lunch? Visit www.foodinschools.org to find out how schools are being encouraged to promote healthy eating and drinking.
- Learn more about healthy eating at www.eatwell.gov.uk and www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk
- Does your child go to a Healthy School? Find out by asking your school or looking on www.lhsp.org
- What should your child be learning about food?
www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/healthyliving/curriculum
- Find out how to encourage your children to eat more fruit and vegetables at www.5aday.nhs.uk
- Find out what schools around the country are doing about their dinners through Jamie Oliver's website, www.feedmebetter.com
- To learn more about healthy eating you can contact your local primary care trust.

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