

**School food  
Changing for  
the better!**

**New school food standards  
and healthier packed lunches –  
a guide for parents and carers**

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## What the timetable looks like

The new standards*	Timetable for meeting the new standards
Part 1: Food-based standards for <b>school lunches</b>	<b>All</b> schools by September 2006
Part 2: Food-based standards for <b>all other school food services</b>	<b>All</b> schools by September 2007 (schools are recommended to adopt these from September 2006)
Part 3: Nutrient-based standards for <b>school lunches</b>	<b>Primary</b> schools by September 2008 at the latest. <b>Secondary</b> schools by September 2009 at the latest

\*These standards apply to all state schools in England

We all want the best for the children in our lives, whether we are parents or carers, relatives, guardians or teachers.

Healthier eating is especially important for children as they grow up. To help make this happen there is now a push to make all food in schools healthier. The good news is that in May 2006, the Government announced new standards for school food – these tough standards are law so it has to happen.

We all know that encouraging most children to eat healthier is a challenge. Some have no idea what a healthy meal looks like and getting them to try something different – or even eat a vegetable with their meal – can be a struggle.

But, if we all work together these changes will benefit our children's health.

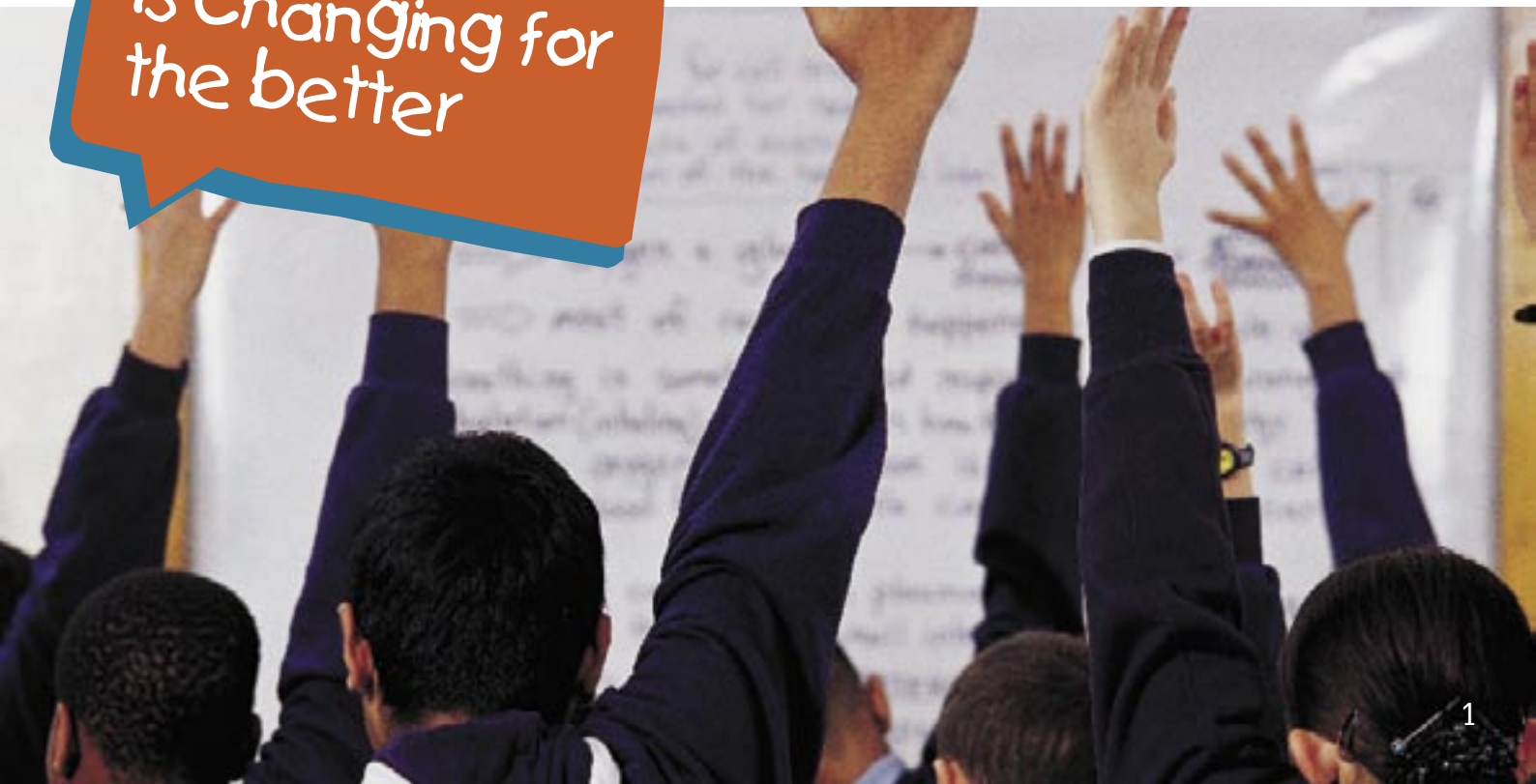
School food  
is changing for  
the better

## What does this guide cover?

The School Food Trust has put together this guide for parents and carers. It covers the first two parts of the Government's new package of standards, which are food-based standards for school lunches and for all other school food, including breakfast, mid-morning break, tuck shops, vending machines, and after-school clubs. In this guide you'll learn about:

- why we need the new standards
- what they look like and what it will mean for schools
- what role you can play in all this
- how to use the new standards to pack a healthier lunch for your child

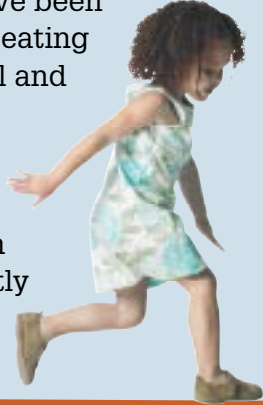
We hope you find this guide useful. It's packed with ideas and tips from experts, parents and carers, on helping children to eat a more balanced diet. If you would like to find out more about the new standards you can visit [www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk](http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk), or use some of the useful links included at the back of this guide.



# What's all the fuss about?

What children eat plays a vital role in their growth and development. For some time many people have been arguing that what children are eating needs to change, both at school and at other times during the day.

The Government supports this view and school food will now be an example for children to follow. This change is urgently needed – just look at the facts!



Parents,  
carers and  
Government  
agree



## Facts about children's health

**1.**

It is estimated that 1 in every 3 children in England will be overweight or obese by 2010 (Source: Department of Health, 2006).

**2.**

In 2003, a third of 12 year olds and half of 15 year olds were found to have had some dental decay experience (Source: Children's Dental Health Survey, Office for National Statistics, 2003). Dental decay is associated with a high level of sugar in the diet such as eating sugary foods and sipping sugary drinks, particularly between meals.

**3.**

Many children are not getting the vitamins, minerals and antioxidants they need for healthy bodies. For example, nearly half of adolescent girls have inadequate iron intakes, around one fifth do not get enough calcium, and zinc intakes are lower than recommended in boys and girls of all ages. (Source: NDNS 4-18 years 2000).

**4.**

Much of the above can be linked to poor eating habits. A UK survey shows that 4-18 year olds eat less than half the recommended '5 a day' of fruit and vegetables, with 1 in 5 eating no fruit at all! (Source: NDNS 4-18 years 2000). Many are consistently choosing foods which are too high in fat, salt, sugar and calories.



## WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

Fatty and sugary foods such as crisps, chocolate and fizzy drinks should be eaten occasionally rather than regularly. They are high in energy but contain few nutrients (they supply 'empty calories'). Children should be encouraged to take regular daily exercise. This can take many forms: playing football, walking or cycling to school, swimming etc.

### So what's the answer?

**We know it's not enough to provide children with healthier choices alongside foods they usually choose – studies have shown that the majority will always go for the latter no matter how hard you try to tell them about healthier eating – bad habits are ingrained. All our research tells us that:**

- children need lots of guidance to help them put healthier eating into practice
- education can help but children need to be directed towards the sorts of foods they need to eat more of every day
- the foods that children see around them need to be consistent with the messages they receive in class

The new standards take on board these important lessons. That's why they apply to all school food services, not just school

lunches. Research shows that consistent enforcement is necessary to ensure healthier eating becomes a learned behaviour. It won't be easy, but for the sake of our children's health we have to succeed.

### How will the new standards affect schools?

- healthier foods like fruit and vegetables will have to be provided more often
- less healthy foods like confectionery, crisps and sugary or sweetened soft drinks can no longer be served or sold to children in schools at lunchtime from September 2006 and at all other times by September 2007
- by September 2009 (by September 2008 for primary schools) school lunches will need to meet precise nutritional standards, so children will benefit from healthier, more balanced meals

# What do the new standards look like?

This table shows a summary of the key standards which school food will have to meet.

	At lunchtime	At other times (including breakfast, mid-morning break, tuck shops, vending machines, after-school clubs)	Why has this standard been introduced?
<b>More fruit and vegetables</b>	At least one portion of fruit and one of vegetables available every day	A variety available in all outlets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To increase children's fruit and vegetable intake – currently many eat less than half the recommended '5 a day'</li> <li>▪ Fruit and vegetables are vital sources of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and fibre; they also replace less nutritious foods</li> </ul>
<b>More oily fish</b>	Available once every 3 weeks		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To increase the intake of beneficial omega 3 fatty acids</li> </ul>
<b>Bread</b>	Available every day as an extra		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ So children can fill up on starchy food which is a healthier source of calories than fat or sugar</li> </ul>
<b>Drinking water</b>	Free, fresh water to be available at all times		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To help children switch to drinking water instead of less healthy sugary or sweetened soft drinks</li> <li>▪ Water promotes hydration and has no calories</li> <li>▪ To promote water availability in schools so children do not have to rely on taps in toilets for a drink</li> <li>▪ Children do not have to pay for tap water, so it is a drink which is equally accessible to all</li> </ul>
<b>Healthier drinks</b>	Only plain water (still or sparkling), skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, pure fruit or vegetable juices, soya drinks enriched with calcium, yoghurt or milk with artificial sweeteners or less than 5% added sugar, or combinations of these (artificial sweeteners or less than 5% added sugar permitted only in combinations containing at least 50% milk or yoghurt). Also tea, coffee, low calorie hot chocolate		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To remove sugary or sweetened drinks which have limited nutritional value and can cause tooth decay</li> </ul>

	At lunchtime	At other times (including breakfast, mid-morning break, tuck shops, vending machines, after-school clubs)	Why has this standard been introduced?
<b>No confectionery</b>	No sweets, chocolate, items containing chocolate, cereal bars, processed fruit bars		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ These products tend to be high in sugar and calories. Many are also high in fat. They are not nutritionally valuable</li> <li>▪ Children tend to choose sweet things in preference to more nutritious food – some even swap a balanced meal for sweets or chocolate at lunchtime</li> </ul>
<b>No savoury snacks</b>	No packets of crisps or crisp-like products. Nuts* and seeds with no added salt, sugar or fat are allowed		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To remove products, such as packets of crisps, which tend to be high in fat and salt. These types of snack products, like confectionery, displace more nourishing foods</li> <li>▪ To encourage children to eat a balanced meal at lunchtimes</li> </ul>
<b>No salt; condiments restricted</b>	No salt on tables or at the counter; condiments, e.g. ketchup and mayonnaise, in small portions only		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To reduce the amount of salt children eat – most consume more than they need</li> <li>▪ High salt intake increases the risk of high blood pressure, which can lead to heart disease</li> </ul>
<b>Deep-fried foods restricted</b>	No more than twice a week across all school food services		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To cut down on the number of times that deep fried food is served in order to reduce the amount of fat children eat. This will help to control calorie intake as fat is a very concentrated source of calories</li> </ul>
<b>Meat products restricted</b>	Foods such as burgers and sausage rolls can only be served infrequently at lunch and infrequently at other times, and must meet standards for minimum meat content		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To improve the quality of meat and poultry products in schools</li> <li>▪ To cut down on how often they are served, as many tend to be high in salt and fat</li> </ul>
<b>Cakes and biscuits restricted</b>	Available as part of a meal; can be bought in or made by caterers	Not available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ These products tend to be high in fat, sugar and calories – often as high as confectionery – and so they are best eaten as part of a balanced meal</li> </ul>

\* Be allergy aware, see page 6 of this guide

# What does it mean for school lunches?

School caterers will be encouraged to use healthier recipes and raw ingredients to provide freshly cooked meals.

This means your children can expect:

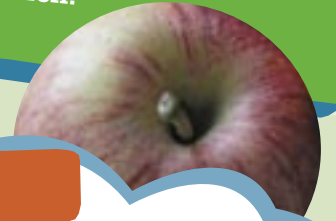
- better quality and more nutritious food
- less processed food
- healthier, more balanced meals
- better choices

There is huge investment being poured into school meals to encourage children to choose more balanced meals. These should contain a portion of both vegetables and fruit, making school lunches a great choice for your child. This is especially important in secondary schools where a packet of crisps, chocolate bar and fizzy drink can be a typical lunch for many children.



## EXAMPLE

In 2004/5 45% of children ate a school lunch and 14 – 18% of children were eligible for free school meals (Source: Uptake of School Meals, SFT 2006). Encouraging your child to eat a school meal will ensure they get a healthy, nutritionally balanced lunch.



## PARENT TIP

To prevent unhealthy snacking, leave a bowl of healthier snacks such as unsalted nuts, seeds and fruits within easy reach.

## DID YOU KNOW

Severe allergies present quite a challenge to both parents and schools. Many schools are finding that cases of peanut, milk, egg and other allergies are on the increase. The Anaphylaxis campaign states that even the most extreme form of allergy – anaphylaxis – is manageable in schools. Parents and carers may want to think about cross contamination when considering their child's lunch and how this can significantly lowered by washing hands with soap after handling or eating nuts. For access to accurate and reliable information, we recommend you visit the [www.allergyinschools.co.uk](http://www.allergyinschools.co.uk) website. However, all of us are different and individual cases need individual attention so please be guided by your GP or consultant.



For more information on this see [www.parentscentre.gov.uk](http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk)

## **A Free School Lunch – Go for it**

If you are on Income Support or receive certain other benefits (see below), your child is entitled to a free school lunch. It could be worth around £300 a year to you and your child. If you think that you may be entitled then we urge you to go for it – just follow the steps below:

**Step 1** – Gather your evidence together (e.g. your Income Support book)

**Step 2** – Contact the school secretary and talk through your entitlement and how best to make an application

**Step 3** – Complete the necessary forms. If you're not sure what to do, ask the school secretary for help

### **Do I qualify?**

Your child is entitled to a free school lunch if you receive any of the following:

- Income Support
- Income-based Job Seekers Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigrant and Asylum Act
- Child Tax Credit (but not entitled to Working Tax Credit) and annual income less than £14,155
- Guaranteed Element of the State Pension Credit

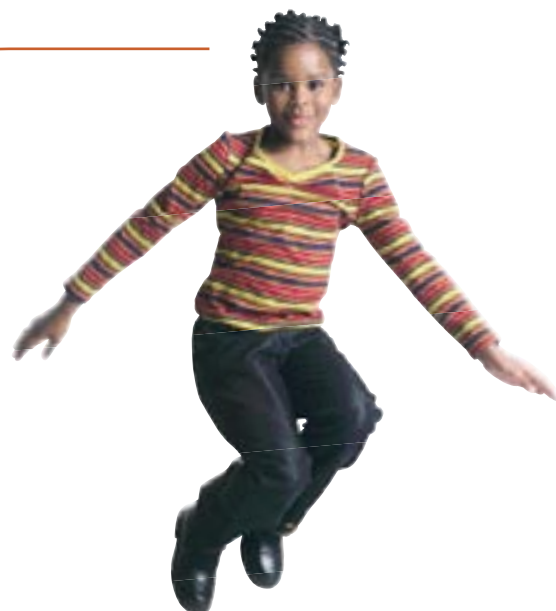
# What does it mean for other school foods?

Healthier snacks are IN  
Fatty and sugary foods are OUT

By September 2007, healthier foods and drinks will have to be available to pupils from all school food outlets. Although some existing snacks may have to be dropped, under the new standards there is a huge range of healthier items which caterers can choose from.

For example, at mid-morning break:

What's IN under the new standards	What's OUT under the new standards
<p><b>Foods:</b>            Filled sandwiches, rolls, baguettes, bagels, pittas and wraps            Toasted sandwiches and paninis            Other bread-based items such as toast, crumpets, English muffins            Breakfast cereals with lower fat milk            Jacket potatoes, pasta and rice salads            Salads and vegetable sticks with dips            Yoghurts/fromage frais            Fruit – all types including tinned (in juice) and dried            Combinations of nuts*, seeds and dried fruit (with no added salt, sugar or fat)            Plain popcorn</p>	<p><b>Foods:</b>            Sweets/chewing gum (including sugar free)            Chocolate bars            Bars/biscuits containing or covered in chocolate            Processed fruit bars            Cereal bars            Packets of crisps and 'crisp like' products, e.g. tortilla chips, potato sticks, puffs, crackers, corn chips, pretzels, breadsticks            Rice crackers, bombay mix, salted popcorn            Cakes, pastries, sweet muffins, and biscuits</p>
<p><b>Drinks:</b>            Plain water (fresh tap water, still or sparkling bottled water)            Skimmed or semi-skimmed milk            Pure fruit or vegetable juices            Soya drinks enriched with calcium            Yoghurt or milk with artificial sweeteners or less than 5% added sugar            Drinks like smoothies made from combinations of the above (artificial sweeteners or less than 5% added sugar permitted only in combinations containing at least 50% yoghurt or milk)            Tea, coffee, low calorie hot chocolate</p>	<p><b>Drinks:</b>            Flavoured waters            Squash/cordials            Sweetened fizzy drinks like cola, lemonade            Sports drinks            Diet drinks</p>



## Case study



Ann Smith has been a parent and childminder for 18 years and strongly believes in helping to promote healthier eating. Ann involves the children in her cooking and baking to help raise their awareness of how food is made and teach them basic skills, but with a fun element. She believes gardening and trips to the allotment can get children excited about growing their own vegetables to eat. She has also found that children enjoy playing guessing games revolving around food; for example, she asks “what has more vitamin C, an orange or an apple?”

**Ann Smith, London**

## DID YOU KNOW?

A study found that a quarter of primary school-aged children could not correctly identify a cauliflower and 15% of 9–10 year olds could not correctly name broccoli. (Source: Fruit and vegetables – attitudes and knowledge of primary schoolchildren, 2005).

## TIP

Different ways to serve fresh fruit to children include adding chopped fruit to cereal or yoghurt at breakfast time, fresh fruit as a mid-morning or mid-afternoon snack, a portion of fruit salad or a banana sandwich for lunch or serving fresh or cooked fruit as a dessert.

# What about packed lunches?

Any packed lunches provided by your school (as part of lunch or for school trips) will have to comply with the new standards. If your child takes a packed lunch to school, you can support these standards by packing a healthy lunch. Your child's school may have introduced their own rules about what can be included in a packed lunch – check that your child's packed lunch fits in with this.

## What's in your box?

The news is not good. A recent Food Standards Agency survey showed that the average packed lunch contained far too much fat, particularly the unhealthy saturated fat (which clogs up arteries) and up to half the daily limit of salt (which pushes up blood pressure). Only half of packed lunches (52%) contained a portion of fruit or vegetables, and only one contained a salad!

## Most of the fat came from:

- crisps
- fat spreads
- cheese products
- chocolate bars
- biscuits

## Most of the salt came from:

- crisps
- processed meat, e.g. ham
- white bread





## A great packed lunch always contains the following things:

- **A starchy food to provide energy** – bread (preferably wholegrain), potatoes, pasta, rice, couscous, cereals.
- **A protein food for growth** – meat, fish (particularly oily fish containing essential omega 3 fatty acids), eggs, cheese (preferably lower fat), beans and peas (e.g. houmous) and nuts\*.
- **Fruit and vegetables/salad for essential nutrients such as antioxidants, vitamins and minerals** – fresh fruit (whole fruits or cut up into chunks), dried, or tinned in juice, salad in sandwiches or in a separate pot, sticks of carrot, cucumber, celery and pepper, cherry tomatoes.
- **A dairy food to provide calcium for growing bones** – milk or anything made from milk like cheese, yoghurt, and fromage frais. Lower fat versions are even better.
- **A drink for hydration (and additional nutrients)** – preferably water, semi-skimmed milk or fruit juice. Smoothies made from fruit, fruit juice and milk/yoghurt are also good.

**KEEP 'EM OUT!**

Please support the new standards for school food by not including the following foods in your child's packed lunch:

- sugary or sweetened soft drinks
- sweets
- chocolate or items covered in chocolate
- crisps
- cereal bars



## Fresh ideas for packed lunches

There are lots of ways you can keep your children's packed lunches nutritious as well as tasty. The examples opposite are from the Food Standards Agency's website [www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk) where you can find more packed lunch menus. The website also explains how to interpret the nutritional information and has suggestions on portion sizes for different age groups.

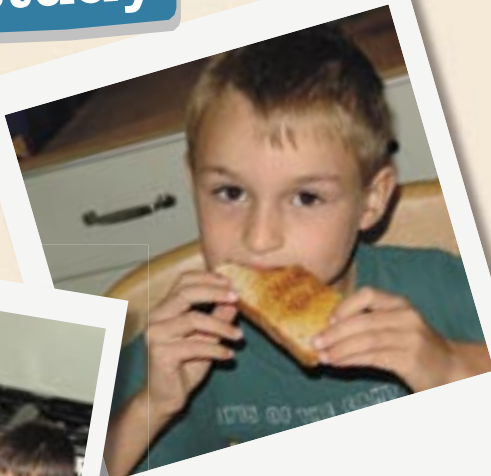
\* Be allergy aware, see page 6 of this guide

## WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

Water is the best drink for children to have to quench their thirst, so encourage them to drink water when thirsty. Pure fruit juice is another option.



## Case study



The Leeming family from Lancashire has three young sons. Sam attends a village primary school while Nathan and Daniel attend junior school. Mum, Jo, has encouraged her “picky eaters” to try new foods by introducing them little by little. She has found fruit pieces to be easier for the children to manage than a whole fruit, and she encourages them to try tiny portions of what she is eating for dinner. She also persuades her younger boys to copy their big brother’s healthy eating with lots of praise and encouragement. Finally, Jo adds that, “if all else fails there is always persistence; taste buds do change over time.”

**Jo Leeming, Lancashire**

## Case study



The Tariq family from Surrey has three children at secondary school. Mum, Christel says that she and her husband always eat healthily so the children are more likely to copy them, and she always leaves out a bowl of healthy snacks such as nuts\*, seeds and fruit. Inventing new, tasty and healthy snacks has also challenged her children's perception that healthy food is boring, and she always encourages them to try new things. For example, frozen banana chunks make a good alternative to ice cream and lollies!

**Christel Tariq, Surrey**

\*Be allergy aware, see page 6 of this guide





## HEALTHY RECIPE IDEAS

If you want some ideas on healthy meals that you can cook quickly and easily at home visit the British Dietetic Association's new teenage website at [www.teenweightwise.com](http://www.teenweightwise.com)

# What parents and carers can do to help

**There's a lot that you can do to make the new school food standards work. In fact, anything you can do to support your child on the road to healthier eating is a good thing.**

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- make sure your child knows you think healthier school food is a great move
  - encourage your child to eat a school lunch – they are far more likely to try new foods where they can see their teachers and friends doing the same
  - be an advocate for school food improvements within your school community
  - if you have time, offer to help your school make the necessary changes
  - make sure the governors in your school know about these standards and have an action plan worked out to make them happen
  - don't be afraid to check that the new standards are being met – and if not, talk to the headteacher or caterer to work out how to put things right
- try to send your child to school with food or drink that matches the new standards
  - if you give your children money to spend on the way to school encourage them to buy healthier snacks rather than the usual fizzy drinks, crisps and chocolate or provide something healthy for them to take



# If you think healthy, your kids think healthy

**Of course it's not just about eating better school meals. There is a lot you can do to help your children eat more healthily all the time. Here are a few tips. Why not try a few and see which ones work for you and your children?**

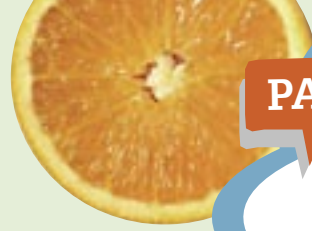
- involve your child in planning/shopping/cooking food – this provides an opportunity to add that extra bit of encouragement
- don't use sweets as rewards – for young children try a sticker reward system
- link new foods to a positive experience to help establish new tastes and habits
- small taster portions for new foods are a good idea, as researchers say it takes an average of 11 'tries' before children will accept a new food
- don't force a child to eat a food – simply provide healthier choices and no other options, so children learn to eat what is put in front of them
- be a role model for healthier eating – if they see you enjoying salad and fruit and drinking water, they will too
- only buy limited sweet stuff and snacks. When they're gone, they're gone



## WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

Diets containing substantial and varied amounts of vegetables and fruits will prevent 20% or more of all cases of cancer.

# Q&A



## PARENT TIP

Make cooking and preparing food fun – get the children involved and raise their general knowledge of basic ingredients and cooking skills.

# Your questions answered

The School Food Trust has found that parents and carers have lots of questions about how to help their children eat more healthily. Here are some answers to the most frequently asked questions.



## Question

Are the new standards law? And who will check that they are being implemented?  
All state schools have to comply with the new standards, and Ofsted will be monitoring a school's approach to healthier eating as part of their regular inspections.



## Question

Why are certain foods and drinks being banned?  
Research has shown that children tend to choose less healthy options, particularly foods high in fat, sugar and salt. The new standards encourage children to eat more healthily, and this is consistent with the messages they receive in the classroom.

## Question

What's the difference between food-based and nutrient-based standards?

The food-based standards will help to change children's eating habits by maximising access to healthier foods (like fruit, vegetables and bread), and removing the availability of less healthy foods (like confectionery, savoury snacks and sugary or sweetened fizzy drinks).

The nutrient-based standards will build on these changes. They specify the levels of a number of nutrients (energy, fat, saturated fat, protein, carbohydrate, non-milk extrinsic sugars, iron, zinc, sodium, vitamin A, vitamin C and folate) that, on average, a school lunch should provide. This means that children will be eating healthier, more balanced meals at lunchtime.



## Question

Do the new school food standards apply to special events?  
No – they do not apply to special one-off functions such as discos or club parties, or fundraising events like school fêtes or jumble sales.

## Question

What sort of treats should I include in a packed lunch and how often should I add them?

The standards for school food say no confectionery, no savoury snacks like crisps, and no sugary or sweetened soft drinks – so it's best to steer clear of these. In terms of cakes and biscuits, many of these are as high in fat, sugar and calories as sweets and crisps. So the best advice is:

- only include these once or twice a week
- go for lower fat varieties like scones, malt loaf, ginger nuts and fruit buns
- control portion sizes so children only get small amounts of calorie rich items



## Where to find more information

The **School Food Trust** is an independent organisation set up to make sure school food is healthier so children can do better. It has lots of advice and information on school food – particularly the new standards which are coming in this year. [www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk](http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk)

The **Department for Education and Skills** is the government department responsible for setting standards for school food and school food policy. [www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk)

The **Food Standards Agency** is an independent government department with public health and consumer interests at heart. It is a source of very practical help on healthy eating, including advice on decoding food labels and no-nonsense advice on children's diets. [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk) and [www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk)

The **National Healthy Schools Programme** has 150 local programmes that support schools to help them achieve healthy schools status. Schools work on a range of initiatives and activities involving healthy eating as well as physical activity, emotional health and wellbeing and personal and social health education. **Local Healthy Schools Coordinators** can be contacted on [www.lhsp.org](http://www.lhsp.org)

The **Food in Schools Toolkit** is a practical resource from Healthy Schools covering all aspects of food in schools and includes a specific section on healthy packed lunches. [www.foodinschools.org](http://www.foodinschools.org)

### Other useful websites

British Nutrition Foundation [www.nutrition.org.uk](http://www.nutrition.org.uk)

Health Education Trust [www.healthedtrust.com](http://www.healthedtrust.com)

Sustain [www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)

ParentsCentre [www.parentscentre.gov.uk](http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk)

British Dietetic Association [www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com)

Caroline Walker Trust [www.cwt.org.uk](http://www.cwt.org.uk)

National Governors' Association [www.ngc.org.uk](http://www.ngc.org.uk)

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