

Nutritional standards for school lunches

A guide for implementation

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Section 1:

Introduction

Introduction

This publication details the nutritional standards for school lunches, which all grant-aided schools must adhere to. It has been produced under the School food: top marks programme, which is a joint venture by the Department of Education (DE), the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), and the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland (HPA).

The programme recognises the important role of schools in contributing to childhood nutrition and the development of the knowledge and skills necessary to make healthier food choices. It also forms part of the Assembly's Investing for Health strategy, which is committed to improving children's health and wellbeing.¹

Following a pilot of nutritional standards for school lunches in 2004/2005 the DE in agreement with the education and library boards (ELBs) and other school authorities introduced new nutritional standards for school lunches which were made compulsory from September 2007. In April 2008 the nutritional standards were extended to include all other food and drinks provided in school such as breakfast clubs, tuck shops and vending machines.²

However, with this publication and its companion, *Nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools*, the standards have been updated to take account of recent developments in nutrition and healthy eating in schools.

This publication provides details on the nutritional standards for all food and drinks served at school lunches. It also explains the reasons why nutritional standards have been introduced and offers practical advice on how to implement the standards.

A key resource in helping schools to implement the standards is *School food: the essential guide*, which is also part of the School food: top marks programme. This resource provides practical guidance in a series of booklets aimed at supporting all health professionals, teachers, pupils, caterers and others in implementing healthier eating and drinking in schools. *School food: the essential guide* has been sent to all schools and is also available from the HPA website: www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk

Where the standards apply

The standards are compulsory in all grant-aided nursery, primary and post-primary schools, and apply to all free and paid lunches. Exceptions to the standards may be made:

- where a pupil needs a special therapeutic diet and this has been certified by a doctor or a dietitian;
- during temporary emergencies at the school itself or at the central supply kitchen caused by fire, flood, power failure, the failure of suppliers to deliver certain foods or the kitchen being closed on health grounds;
- on school trips where food is not provided by the school or ELB, such as when catering is provided by a residential field studies centre.

The standards do not apply to special one-off functions such as discos or club parties or fundraising events like school fairs or jumble sales. Neither do they cover food such as packed lunches brought from home by pupils, which is a matter for parents and schools to decide at local level. **Packed lunches provided by the school must, however, comply with the standards.**

Why nutritional standards are being introduced

Diet is central to health, and what children eat is an important influence on their health now and in the future. Good nutrition in childhood can help protect against chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease and cancer in later life. Cardiovascular disease and cancer are our biggest killers and a poor diet is the biggest contributor to cancer deaths after smoking, and may be responsible for up to a third of all cancer deaths.^{3,4} A healthy diet rich in fruit and vegetables is protective against cardiovascular disease, including heart disease and stroke and cancer.⁵

As pointed out below, there are other important reasons for implementing nutritional standards in school lunches:

- Obesity levels in children are increasing. Nearly a quarter (22%) of all children starting primary school are being classed as overweight or obese.⁶ Recent studies that measured children's weight and height at home and in primary school suggested that this figure remains steady with age and is likely to increase rather than decrease.^{7,8}
- Dental decay in children continues to be a significant public health problem. Three fifths (61%) of five year olds show signs of dental decay compared to the UK average of 43%.⁹ The main cause of tooth decay is related to the frequency and amount of sugars consumed in both foods and drinks.

- A survey that looked at children's eating patterns indicated that nearly three quarters (73%) of children had biscuits daily with half of all children eating confectionery (47%) and savoury snacks such as crisps (52%) at least once a day.¹⁰ Only 1 in 10 children (11%) achieved the target of five portions of fruit and vegetables a day with one fifth (20%) not having any fruit or vegetables on a regular basis.

These concerns led the Ministerial Group on Public Health to establish the Fit Futures Task Force which published a report in 2006.¹¹ The report sets out a clear vision with six priorities for action and over 70 recommendations. Two of the priorities for action are supporting healthy early years and, creating healthy schools.

As well as being part of the School food: top marks programme, *Nutritional standards for school lunches* is intended to support the Public Service Agreement target to halt the rise in levels of obesity in children and young people by 2011.¹²

The key players and their responsibilities

All organisations and individuals involved with food in schools, including health authorities, catering professionals, schools, parents and pupils, have an important role to play in helping to create the healthiest possible environment.

Department of Education

In conjunction with the HPA, the DE determines and promotes appropriate nutritional standards in all schools. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) has appointed two nutritional associates who monitor and promote improvement in the implementation of the nutritional standards.

Education and library boards

ELBs operate the school meals service in controlled and maintained schools and provide advice and guidance on the implementation of the nutritional standards. (As part of the Review of Public Administration the ELBs will be replaced by the Education and Skills Authority.)

Voluntary grammar and grant-maintained schools

In voluntary grammar and grant-maintained schools the boards of governors are responsible for operating the school meals service and ensuring the implementation of the nutritional standards.

Parents

Parents advise and encourage children about healthy eating habits. It is only with the cooperation of parents that good eating habits can be developed. Parents' efforts will be reinforced by schools and catering staff.

Pupils and students

Pupils and students develop healthy eating habits, making sensible and informed choices where applicable. All schools should ensure that nutrition and healthy lifestyle choices are taught through the curriculum and pupils at all ages have the knowledge to make informed healthy choices.

A whole school approach

All schools are encouraged to work with or through their schools' council or school nutrition action group (SNAG) (a school based alliance consisting of staff, caterers, pupils and parents and supported where appropriate by health professionals).

Training and implementation

Training has been provided for catering staff on how to translate the nutritional standards into menus. A series of vocational qualifications have also been provided to enhance the knowledge and skills of school caterers.

Monitoring the standards

The ELBs and schools' boards of governors will be responsible for ensuring that the standards are met. To enable schools to observe and gauge their own progress a useful checklist for monitoring compliance with the nutritional standards can be found on page 60 of this booklet. Schools may complete the checklist for every new menu, or every term, whichever is more frequent.

The DE will also monitor the position through the ETI, which will be evaluating compliance to the nutritional standards in schools and examining schools' general approaches to promoting healthy eating.

Section 2:

The basis of the standards

The basis of the standards

The eatwell plate

The nutritional standards presented in this publication are based on the five food groups in the eatwell plate.

The eatwell plate, reproduced here with the kind permission of the Food Standards Agency, makes healthy eating easier to understand by providing a visual representation of the types and proportions of foods people need for a healthy and well balanced diet. It shows how much of what people eat should come from each food group.



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The eatwell food groups

The following definitions indicate the kind of foods to be found in each of the eatwell food groups, but are not exhaustive.

	Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods such as bread, breakfast cereals, pasta, noodles, rice and potatoes.
	Fruit and vegetables: fresh, frozen, canned, dried and juiced fruit, vegetables and salads.
	Milk and dairy foods: milk (including flavoured milks and milkshakes), cheese, yogurt (including drinking yogurt), fromage frais, custard and other milk products except butter and cream.
	Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein: meat and fish in all forms (whether fresh, frozen or canned), including meat products (such as sausages and bacon), nuts and beans (such as haricot beans, baked beans, kidney beans, soya products) and pulses (such as lentils and chickpeas).
	Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar: spreading and cooking fats and oils, oily salad dressings, mayonnaise, salad cream, gravy, ice-cream, cream, sugar, pastry, chocolates, sweets, sweetened soft drinks, crisps, puddings, cakes, biscuits, jam and jelly.

A healthy diet for children

For children aged five and over a healthy diet broadly means:

- a balanced diet with plenty of variety and enough energy for growth and development;
- plenty of starchy (carbohydrate-containing) foods such as bread, rice, pasta and potatoes;
- plenty of fruit and vegetables;
- moderate amounts of milk products;
- moderate amounts of meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein;
- not eating too many foods containing a lot of fat, especially saturated fat;
- not having sugary foods and drinks too often.

The eatwell plate does not apply to children under two years of age because they have different nutritional needs. Between the ages of two and five, however, there should be a gradual transition to a healthy diet.

Presentation of the nutritional standards

An important message communicated by the eatwell plate is that children should take small amounts of foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar. Accordingly, the standards deal with foods that belong within this group under the separate categories:

- fried and other high fat foods;
- confectionery and other sweet food.

Sweetened and soft drinks are now not permitted in schools. Drinks that are permitted in schools are discussed within a separate section.

Meat and chicken products

It may be obvious that meat and chicken products come under the eatwell category of Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein. While this is true, because of their high fat content the standards deal with meat and chicken products under Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar.

Butter and ice-cream

Although butter and ice-cream are frequently thought of as dairy products, because of butter's fat content and ice-cream's fat and sugar content the standards deal with them within the Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar section of this publication.

Eggs

Although eggs are also frequently thought of as dairy products, in fact they are not. The standards deal with eggs under Meat, fish eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein.

Salt

Although not specifically dealt with within the eatwell plate, there are limits to the amount of salt children should have in a day. It is not recommended to add salt to food in school, and the standards now reflect this.

Section 3:

The nutritional standards for school lunches

Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods

The standards

- 1) Every lunch service must contain a portion or portions of food from this group.
- 2) Rice and pasta must be offered at least once a week. In a single choice menu, rice or pasta must be served at least once a week.
- 3) Bread should be available every day in all schools.

Notes to the standards

- Starchy foods are usually inexpensive and provide energy, fibre, vitamins and minerals.
- Offering rice and pasta provides variety and encourages children to try foods they might not get the chance to try at home.
- Bread is a healthy source of carbohydrates.
- Nearly all types of bread are acceptable: white, brown, wholemeal, wheaten, granary, high fibre white bread and rolls, home-made bread, bagels, pitta bread, chapattis made without fat.
- Bread should be provided without spread, although this should be available at the servery.
- Bread is additional to, and not a replacement for, the main meal accompaniment and it should be positioned at the end of the servery.

For starchy foods that are fried, please refer to Fried and other high fat foods on page 32.

Practical guidance

Be generous with foods from this group and serve according to appetite.

Offer a variety of these foods over a week.

Menu suggestions

Bread

For sandwiches, try different types of bread and rolls, including wholemeal brown and white.

Filled pitta bread, paninis and wraps are popular.

Include low-fat sandwich fillings, eg egg, ham, and chicken salad.

Increasing the bread portion size (eg larger rolls with burgers) can be an inexpensive way to increase the proportion of starchy foods in the meal.

A sandwich bar where pupils design their own sandwiches can be popular.

'Grab bags' where pupils order and pay in advance are good for those in a hurry.

Cooking and serving tips

Try thicker slices of bread for those with big appetites.

Serve pizzas with a thicker base.

Use breadcrumbs as a crunchy topping on pies instead of pastry.

Why not add bread to dessert such as bread and apple pudding.

Menu suggestions

Potatoes

Offer mashed, new, boiled and baked potatoes.

New potatoes in potato salad with a low-fat dressing are an interesting alternative, adding variety.

Cooking and serving tips

Boil potatoes in the minimum amount of water and for the shortest amount of time to retain vitamins.

Do not glaze boiled potatoes with butter, margarine or oil as this adds fat. Instead, sprinkle with pepper, herbs or spices for added colour and flavour.

When cooking roast potatoes brush the cooking tray and raw potatoes with oil instead of sitting them in oil.

Why not roast without added fat or using a silicone mat in the oven? Or why not try oven baked wedges?

If you are frying potatoes, remember:

- large pieces of potato or thick-cut chips absorb less fat than thin ones.
- straight-cut chips absorb less fat than crinkle cut chips.
- oil that contains less than 20% saturated oils is the preferred choice.
- have the oil at the correct temperature, change it regularly and drain it off well.

Menu suggestions

Pasta, rice and cereals

Pasta can be purchased in different varieties, including wholemeal, shapes and colours. It can be served cold, as part of a salad.

Rice can be white, brown or flavoured. You can serve it hot or cold as part of a salad.

Cous cous can be served hot or cold as part of a salad or main meal.

Include high fibre, low sugar breakfast cereals, which are fortified with nutrients such as iron and folic acid. The iron in these foods is absorbed better into the body if they are served with a source of vitamin C, such as unsweetened fruit juice.

Cooking and serving tips

When serving pasta with a sauce be generous with the pasta and serve less sauce.

As a gradual approach mix the white and brown rice.

Use tomato-based sauces rather than cream or cheese-based to keep the fat down.

Cous cous is bland so add flavour to it by adding spices, fruit such as raisins and chopped up colourful vegetables such as peppers, onions or garlic.

Use some breakfast cereals in baking; eg use porridge oats when making crumbles or pie bases.

Fruit and vegetables

The standards

- 1) No fewer than two portions of fruit and vegetables should be available per child throughout the lunch service.**
- 2) Of these, at least one portion should be vegetables or salad and at least one portion should be fruit (fresh, tinned in natural juice, fruit salad, fruit juice or dried fruit).**
- 3) Pies, crumbles and other composite fruit dishes must contain at least one portion of fruit per serving.**
- 4) Pies, casseroles, stews and other composite main course dishes must contain a minimum of half a portion of vegetables per serving, in addition to a separate serving of vegetables or salad.**
- 5) In nursery and primary schools a fruit based dessert, such as fruit tinned in natural juice, fruit salads, fruit crumble, fruit fool or fruit pie, must be offered at least three times a week.**
- 6) Baked beans must not be served as a vegetable more than once a week in a primary school. They must not be the only vegetable option on any day in a post-primary school.**
- 7) If beans or pulses form the protein part of a main course, another vegetable must be available.**

Notes to the standards

- Fruit and vegetables provide vitamins, minerals and fibre. It is recommended that we eat five or more portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Information about portion sizes is included in Appendix 2, on page 54.
- Spaghetti tinned in tomato sauce does not count as a vegetable.
- Unlike most vegetables, baked beans do not contain vitamin C.
- Serving a separate non pulse vegetable with pulse based vegetarian options provides variety for vegetarians and ensures that a mixture of nutrients is provided.

What is a serving of fruit and vegetables?

For adults, a portion of fruit or vegetables is 80g, but there are no recommendations for children. Practically, we suggest a good guide would be to serve at least half an adult portion (40g) to nursery pupils, moving towards an adult portion for primary and post-primary pupils. The table below gives examples of how these portions translate into servings.

	Nursery	Primary and post-primary
	One portion	One portion
Cooked vegetables	1–2tbsp	2–3tbsp
Salad vegetables	1/2 dessert bowl	1 dessert bowl
Medium sized piece of fruit	1/2–1 fruit	1 fruit
Fruit salad, fruit tinned in juice	1–2 tbsp	2–3 tbsp
Fruit juice	150ml	150ml
Dried fruit	1/2–1tbsp	1–2tbsp

Practical guidance

Be generous with foods from this group. Serve at least two portions of vegetables, salad or fruit with every lunch.

Over a week provide a variety of vegetable, salad and fruit items that children enjoy and, particularly for younger children, which are easy to handle.

Be creative so that you find ways of incorporating vegetables into dishes which are acceptable to your pupil customers.

If using fresh fruit and vegetables, remember that using produce in season is cheaper.

Menu suggestions

Fruit

Try baked apples or stewed fruit.

Apricots, prunes, figs and raisins contain iron. The iron may be absorbed into the body more easily if they are eaten at the same meal as a source of vitamin C such as a glass of unsweetened fruit juice or citrus fruits.

Dates, sultanas, raisins, ready to eat or stewed apricots and figs provide some calcium.

Offer unsweetened fruit juice as a drink option. This counts towards one of your five a day target.

Cooking and serving tips

Serve a variety of fresh, frozen, canned and dried fruit.

Canned fruit should be tinned in natural fruit juice.

Present fresh fruit cut into ready-to-eat slices so that it can be eaten easily.

Consider serving fruit with custard or include in jellies. This is particularly popular with young children and easier for them to manage.

Present fruit so that it looks attractive.

Offer a selection of fresh fruits as a dessert, served with a choice of fromage frais, yogurt, including frozen, or a milk pudding.

Add dried fruits or puréed fruits to sponges and biscuits for added iron and fibre.

Add a piece of fruit or a carton of unsweetened fruit juice to packed lunches for school trips.

Menu suggestions

Vegetables

Offer a variety of fresh, frozen, canned and dried vegetables. Vary the choices between root vegetables, green leafy vegetables and salads.

Dark green leafy vegetables and broccoli contain iron.

Try to serve vegetables containing iron at least twice a week.

Cauliflower, broccoli, dark green leafy vegetables, green beans and peas contain folate.

Dark green leafy vegetables, broccoli and peas provide some calcium.

Soups can be a healthy choice.

Remember that spaghetti hoops and other canned pasta in tomato sauce are not a vegetable. They are included in the Bread, rice, pasta and other starchy foods group.

Cooking and serving tips

Cooking vegetables with the minimum amount of water helps to prevent vitamin loss.

Do not add salt to vegetables when cooking.

Steaming vegetables helps to retain nutrients, keeps them crispy and full of colour and avoids adding fat.

Do not add bicarbonate of soda when cooking green vegetables. It retains the colour at the expense of vitamins.

Incorporate vegetables such as tinned tomatoes into meat dishes such as casseroles.

Some vegetables such as cucumber, carrots and peppers, can be served raw as part of salads and with dips.

Try poaching or steaming mushrooms and onions instead of frying them. Add lemon juice or Worcester sauce to the poaching liquid for extra flavour.

Avoid serving vegetables in high fat sauces (such as creamy mushrooms).

Why not purée vegetables into dishes such as curries and bolognese?

Menu suggestions

Salads

Keep salad options simple, especially for younger children.

You can provide salad cream, dressings and dips but they are not essential.

Condiments should only be provided from the service counter and should be controlled by the kitchen staff.

Salad bars are often very popular. Offer a choice and use a combination of traditional salads and raw vegetables such as crudités and coleslaw and even fruit and nuts* to vary the taste, colour and texture.

* Some pupils may have a severe allergic reaction to nuts, and whole nuts should not be served to under fives in case they choke. See Catering for special circumstances on page 44 for further advice.

Cooking and serving tips

For younger children provide bite-sized food that is easy to eat, eg lettuce, tomato, cucumber slices, celery sticks and sliced carrots.

Try offering the components of a salad separately and allow pupils to select the items they prefer.

Serve salads 'undressed' where possible.

Milk and dairy foods

The standards

- 1) Every lunch service must contain a portion or portions of food from this group.
- 2) In addition to standard 1, drinking milk must be available as an option every day.
- 3) Cheese must not be served as the only vegetarian option more than twice a week.
- 4) In non vegetarian dishes cheese can be used as a topping more than twice a week.

Notes to the standards

- Milk and milk products are excellent sources of several nutrients including calcium, which is important for good bone development, protein and vitamins.
- Milk, plain or flavoured, is a good drink option. Semi-skimmed milk has the same amount of calcium as whole milk and is the preferred choice in primary and post-primary schools. Skimmed milk is not appropriate for children under five years.
- Alternatives to cheese provide variety for vegetarians. Recommended alternatives include beans, pulses and lentils.
- Where a portion of cheese is served as the main protein item, it also counts as a portion of food from Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein.

Practical guidance

Serve moderate amounts of foods from this group.

Try to use lower fat options.

Menu suggestions

Milk

Milkshakes are popular and can encourage children to drink milk.

Milk pudding is a good dessert option.

Cheese

Cheese is a source of protein and a great favourite for sandwiches. You can also use cheese spreads.

Cheese is high in fat. Consider how much cheese you are using over a week to see if it needs to be reduced – don't forget there might be cheese in quiches and sauces too.

Cooking and serving tips

Serving milk cold makes it more pleasant to drink.

Use skimmed and semi-skimmed milk instead of whole milk in cooking sauces, milk puddings, custard or milkshakes, for example. But if you use semi-skimmed milk powder for sauces, check that the variety doesn't have added vegetable fat.

Do not serve cheese and biscuits more than once a week.

A little bit of strong-flavoured cheese goes a long way in cooking and adds lots of extra taste.

Offer a choice in sandwiches including lower fat versions like half-fat Cheddar, Edam and cottage cheese.

Make sure you do not rely too much on cheese as the main protein item (eg for vegetarians). Do not serve it more than twice a week as the only vegetarian option.

Menu suggestions

Yogurt

Yogurts are a popular dessert option with children.

Fromage frais also comes into this food group.

Frozen yogurt is a good alternative to ice-cream.

Cooking and serving tips

Serve low-fat yogurts.

Include a yogurt or yogurt drink in packed lunches.

Plain yogurt, served in a 50:50 mix with reduced fat salad cream or mayonnaise, makes a delicious salad dressing.

Try plain yogurt instead of cream in sauces such as stroganoff. Add cornflour to stop the yogurt curdling when heated.

Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein

The standards

- 1) Every lunch service must contain a portion or portions of food from this group.
- 2) In nursery and primary schools meals containing red meat must be served a minimum of twice a week and a maximum of three times a week. In post-primary schools this must be a minimum of three times a week and a maximum of four times a week.
- 3) Fish should be available at least once a week in primary schools and at least twice a week in post-primary schools.
- 4) Oily fish should be available at least once every four weeks.

Notes to the standards

- The standards for red meat apply to all food served across the whole school day, not just at lunch time. For example if a post-primary school provides a breakfast, break and lunch service then over the school week this provides 15 service opportunities within which red meat will be allowed a maximum of four times.
- Red meat includes beef, pork and lamb and meals made from them.
- Red meat is a good source of iron.
- Meat, fish, eggs, beans, pulses and meat alternatives such as textured vegetable protein (TVP), are major sources of protein.
- Sausages are not classed as red meat but as a meat product. Burgers are also classed as a meat product unless they contain at least **95% lean** mince meat and then will be classed as red meat. Composite dishes made from mince containing less than 95% lean meat are classed as a meat product. See page 32, Fried and other high fat foods for further information on meat products.
- On days when red meat is being served at lunch, there can be more than one red meat meal choice as pupils will only choose one option.
- Offering fish provides variety and offers foods that children might not otherwise get a chance to try. This would include sandwich and baguette fillings such as tuna and salmon.
- An oily fish is one containing omega 3 fatty acids which help maintain a healthy heart. This includes fresh, canned or frozen salmon, sardines, pilchards, mackerel, herring and fresh or frozen tuna.
- Tuna only counts as an oily fish when it is fresh or frozen because the omega 3 fatty acids are removed during the canning process. However, canned tuna can be counted as one of the non-oily portions of fish.
- On a week when oily fish is provided this will meet the standard for fish for that week in primary schools. In post-primary schools fish will need to be offered once more that week.

Practical guidance

Serve medium-sized portions of these foods.

Offer a variety of foods from this group.

Menu suggestions

Meat and fish

Fish paste and canned sardines or salmon, mashed up with the bones, are good sources of calcium.

Consider replacing meat or fish dishes with TVP or another non-dairy source of protein.

Cooking and serving tips

Try to select the leanest cuts of meat you can afford.

Trim off any visible fat. Drain or skim the fat from casseroles and from mince wherever possible.

Take the skin off chicken.

Use fish such as tuna, tinned in water, brine or tomato sauce, rather than oil.

Try steaming or poaching fish rather than serving in a breaded coating.

If you fry fish or meat, use clean oil at the correct temperature to minimise absorption. Drain food well and change the oil regularly. Large pieces of fish and meat absorb less fat than small pieces.

Rather than sealing meat in oil, try: baking it on a rack or trivet; dry frying, stirring well; or basting it in its own juices.

Try not to add additional fat.

Try using silicone cooking mats, which don't require any added oil.

Dry frying helps to get rid of fat at the beginning of cooking and reduces the need to skim later.

Using a single crust for pies or adding a potato topping are useful ways of reducing fat.

Menu suggestions

Eggs

Eggs are a good source of iron, but iron is better absorbed if the meal contains a good source of vitamin C such as leafy vegetables, a citrus fruit or unsweetened fruit juice.

Beans and pulses

Dishes containing beans and pulses (eg kidney, baked and butter beans) are popular with vegetarians and non-vegetarians; offer them on the menu cycle.

Red kidney, haricot and pinto beans, and lentils and chickpeas are sources of iron. They are most beneficial if served with a source of vitamin C such as green vegetables, citrus fruits or unsweetened fruit juice.

Beans, lentils and chickpeas are moderate sources of calcium.

Sauces in casseroles and meat dishes can be thickened with lentils or split peas.

Cooking and serving tips

Serve eggs cooked in a variety of ways: poached, scrambled, or as an omelette.

Try not to serve eggs more than once a week as a vegetarian alternative.

Serve boiled or poached eggs rather than fried ones.

If beans or pulses are served as the main protein item (an alternative to meat or fish), a vegetable that is not beans or pulses must be available.

Food and drinks high in fat and/or sugar

Fried and other high fat foods

The standards

- 1) **Fried and other high fat food products, such as chips, roast potatoes, other fried potatoes, garlic bread, fried fish or meal choices such as quiche, apple pie and vol-au-vents containing pastry, may be served a maximum of twice a week.**
- 2) **In addition to standard 1, breadcrumb crumbed fillet of fish (oven baked) can be served once a week.**
- 3) **Meat or chicken products (such as burgers, sausages, chicken nuggets etc) may be served a maximum of once a week in primary schools and a maximum of twice a week in post-primary schools.**
- 4) **To allow choice for pupils on the days when meat or chicken products are available, schools should aim for 50% healthy meal options and they should be presented and marketed in a competitive way to other meal options. This standard does not apply to single choice menus.**
- 5) **There should be at least two days each week without any meat or chicken products, fried foods, foods cooked in batter, breadcrumbs or foods containing pastry such as fish in breadcrumbs, chips, sausages, vol-au-vents, quiche, apple pie etc. This is to encourage children to try a greater range of foods in their diets and explore new taste experiences.**
- 6) **When a high fat starchy food such as chips or garlic bread is served, an alternative without added fat must be available.**
- 7) **Lower fat desserts must be available on days when fried and other high fat foods are offered.**
- 8) **The only savoury snacks available should be nuts and seeds with no added salt or sugar. Savoury crackers or breadsticks may be offered provided they are served with fruit or vegetables or a dairy food.**

Notes to the standards

- The standards for fried and other high fat foods applies to all food served across the whole school day, not just at lunch time. For example if a post-primary school provides a break and lunch service then over the school week this provides 10 food service opportunities. This means that fried and other high fat foods can only be served twice and meat or chicken products are also limited to two times over the 10 service opportunities.
- Fried or other high fat foods include:
 - any food that is deep-fried, either in the kitchen or in the manufacturing process, even flash fried foods or foods such as roast potatoes, chips, oven chips, potato waffles and potato shapes that have been brushed or sprayed with oil;
 - pre-prepared coated, battered and breadcrumbed products such as chicken nuggets, fried fish, fish fingers, battered onion rings and doughnuts.
- Meat and chicken products are bought-in manufactured products that have been processed in some way and are generally ready for cooking/reheating:
 - on days when they are being served at lunch, there can be more than one meat or chicken product choice as pupils will only choose one option.
- Whole muscle meat or chicken, which is dipped in egg, coated in home-made breadcrumbs without the addition of any fat or oil and dry baked does not count as a meat or chicken product.
- Meat products must:
 - meet the legal minimum meat content levels set out in the Meat Products Regulations (NI) 2004 as amended or updated from time to time. Products not specifically covered by these legal minimal requirements must meet the same minimum meat content levels prescribed for burgers;
 - not be 'economy burgers' as described in the Meat Products Regulations (NI) 2004;
 - contain none of the prohibited list of offal.

- Offering lower fat desserts on days that fried and other high fat foods are on offer limits the fat content of lunches. Lower fat desserts should have 10% or less fat in the complete dish. Examples of lower fat desserts include:
 - fresh, stewed or tinned fruit (in natural fruit juice) or fruit salad, either on its own or served with low-fat yogurt or fromage frais;
 - baked apple with custard;
 - low-fat yogurt or fromage frais;
 - milk puddings: custard, semolina, rice pudding and tapioca served with fruit;
 - fruit crumble with custard;
 - fruit sponge made with egg or fatless sponge, eg Eve's pudding served with custard;
 - fruit crisp (breadcrumb topping) with custard;
 - fruit 'fool' made with custard, fromage frais or yogurt;
 - jelly and fruit;
 - ice-cream and fruit;
 - jelly, ice-cream and fruit;
 - instant dessert served with fruit;
 - bread and butter pudding with custard;
 - fruit flan (egg or fatless sponge) with fresh or tinned fruit and fromage frais;
 - wholemeal or flakemeal biscuit, half portion of fruit and semi-skimmed milk to drink;
 - muffin and orange juice (except choc-chip muffins).

To be considered as lower fat options it is essential that these dessert combinations are served as shown here, as it is the **OVERALL** fat content of each combination that was used to determine its suitability.

- Be aware that some pupils may have an allergic reaction to nuts, and whole nuts should not be served to under fives in case they choke. It will be for individual schools to decide on whether or not to provide nuts (see page 44).
- Remember fresh cream or imitation cream is classed as a high fat food and should not be used in lower fat desserts or as a topping.

Practical guidance

Menu suggestions

Sauces in casseroles and meat dishes can be thickened with lentils or split peas.

A number of proprietary sauces which are tasty and lower in fat are now available for the school market.

Plain yogurt, served in a 50:50 mix with reduced fat salad cream or mayonnaise makes a delicious salad dressing.

Yogurt or fromage frais is more nutritious than cream and can be used in place of it, eg as a topping on puddings and pies.

Cooking and serving tips

Use monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats wherever possible for cooking, spreading and in dressings. These include maize, corn, safflower, sunflower, soya, and rapeseed oils. Fats that contain less than 20% saturates are the preferred choice.

Make pies with a top crust only. Use a third wholemeal flour to make pastry.

Alternatively, top with mashed potato.

Grill or bake fish fingers, sausages and burgers rather than frying them.

Instead of a traditional roux (which relies on a high proportion of fat) try making it with half the fat to flour ratio.

Skim all visible fat off sauces and gravies prior to serving.

Thicken sauces by reducing the cooking liquid and adding potato flour (fecule) to give a quality end product.

Use creamy sauces and mayonnaise sparingly. Offer low-fat alternatives.

Do not glaze vegetables with butter or margarine.

For decoration make a reduced fat topping with half whipping cream and half yogurt.

Food and drinks high in fat and/or sugar

Confectionery and other sweet foods

The standards

- 1) Confectionery, chocolate and chocolate coated products should not be available throughout the lunch time.**
- 2) Cakes and biscuits can only be provided at lunch time and as part of a meal.**
- 3) Cakes, biscuits and puddings made with cocoa powder should only be available a maximum of two days per week.**
- 4) High fat and/or high sugar toppings used for decoration such as cream, buttercream and icing sugar should be kept to a minimum and only used if essential, eg to set fruit on top of a sponge. If used, an undecorated or healthier dessert should also be available.**

Notes to the standards

Confectionery, chocolate and chocolate coated products include:

- bars of milk, plain or white chocolate; chocolate flakes, buttons, or chocolate-filled eggs;
- chocolate coated bars;
- biscuits containing or coated in chocolate (including those with a chocolate drizzle, partly and fully-coated biscuits such as chocolate digestives, chocolate covered caramel wafers, chocolate fingers, choc chip cookies);
- sweets, eg boiled or chewy sweets, gum, liquorice, mint and other sweets, also sherbet, fudge, marshmallows, toffee and chewing-gum; this includes sugar-free sweets and sugar-free chewing-gum;
- cereal chewy bars, cereal crunchy bars, cereal cake bars, processed fruit bars;
- fresh or dried fruit that has been sugared or covered with a yogurt or chocolate coating;
- choc ices and other chocolate coated ice-cream.

Practical guidance

Serve small portions of foods from this group.

Menu suggestions

When you are preparing desserts, try to produce a range of puddings that are lower in fat and sugar.

Remember that fresh fruit can be an appetising option.

Dried fruit provides extra fibre.

Cooking and serving tips

Fresh, tinned and dried fruit should be incorporated into puddings.

If including fruit in desserts, try and reduce the amount of added sugar.

Do not dust cakes and pastries with sugar.

Drinks

The standards

1) The only drinks available in school should be:

- plain water (still or sparkling);
- milk;
- unsweetened fruit or vegetable juices;
- yogurt or milk drinks (with less than 5% added sugar);
- drinks made from combinations of the above (eg smoothies);
- tea, coffee and low calorie hot chocolate* (these drinks are not suitable for the nursery sector).

2) Combination drinks must contain at least 50% milk, yogurt or fruit juice. Artificial sweeteners are only permitted in combination drinks.

3) Fresh drinking water, ie tap water, must be provided free every day.

* Low calorie hot chocolate is defined as less than 20kcal/100ml.

Salt and condiments

The standards

- 1) Table salt should not be available within nursery or primary schools. It should not be on view in the post-primary school dining room but may be made available on request from the service counter.**
- 2) Condiments (tomato ketchup, brown sauce, salad cream, relishes etc) should only be provided from the service counter and should be controlled by the kitchen staff.**

Section 4:

Catering for special circumstances

Nutritional standards for special schools

Meals provided for pupils in special schools should follow the standards listed for primary schools. However, portion sizes should reflect the pupil's age.

It should also be noted that pupils in special schools often require special diets, and that some, eg autism sufferers, often have particular food aversions, or will only eat particular foods. Appropriate adjustments should therefore be made to the meals service. A diet sheet, prepared by a registered dietitian, or specific guidance in agreement with the child's doctor, parent and principal should be available for the children concerned.

Catering for children with diabetes

All children and young people with diabetes are advised to eat regular meals and snacks. The current guidelines are for a diet that is:

- high in starchy carbohydrate;
- high in fibre;
- low in sugar;
- low in fat;
- low in salt.

All pupils with diabetes will have been seen by a registered dietitian and been given specific advice regarding their diet. It is essential that this guidance is adhered to and it may be necessary, for example, to provide extra portions of starchy foods (see page 12).

Catering for children with allergies

Food allergies are estimated to affect up to 2% of the adult population and are more prevalent in infants and children. A number of foods have been linked to food allergy, the most common of which are milk, wheat, peanuts, fish, soya, eggs and shellfish. A wide range of symptoms, varying in severity from a mild reaction to a very rapid and severe response, have been reported.

Allergy to some foods, such as peanuts, peanut products, other nuts and shellfish can be particularly serious. People suffering from a severe food allergy need to know the exact ingredients in their food, because even a tiny amount of the allergenic food could kill them.

Many pupils who have been diagnosed as having a food allergy should have a detailed diet sheet prepared by a registered dietitian. This will indicate the range of foods that should be excluded as well as those that are suitable.

How can you help?

- Know which children suffer from an allergy and which food or foods they are allergic to.
- Ask all relevant pupils for a copy of their diet sheet.
- Be aware of the school's policies regarding first aid and administering medication, and be aware if there is a member of staff trained to administer anti-histamine or adrenaline (epiPen) following a pupil's allergic reaction. If you are in any doubt about the severity of an allergic reaction, call an ambulance.

Allergy to gluten (coeliac disease)

- Pupils who are allergic to gluten must exclude wheat, barley, rye and oats and foods containing them, such as all flour products (bread, pastry, sponges, biscuits, pasta, porridge oats and wheat based cereals such as Weetabix, Shredded Wheat and puffed wheat).
- Less obvious sources of gluten include processed or convenience foods like some packet soups, sauces and sausages. These include foods like chicken kiev, and cauliflower cheese that are coated in batter or breadcrumbs or filled with sauce.
- Foods that are naturally gluten free include meat, poultry, fish, eggs, pulses, milk, fruits, vegetables, nuts, potatoes, rice and maize.
- Remember to check pupils' diet sheets for detailed information.
- Gluten free products are available for cooking.

Milk free diets

- If children are unable to drink cow's milk, a calcium-enriched dairy substitute should be used instead.
- They may also need to avoid yogurt, cheese, fromage frais and foods containing them. Always check the diet sheet for details.
- Hidden sources of milk may be present in processed foods. It will therefore be necessary to check labels.

Nut allergy

- Through training sessions or notices, for example, all staff should be aware of the significance of the use of nuts and nut products.
- If you use nuts or nut oils in a recipe, ask whether a susceptible student or member of staff will be able to identify them. If their presence is not clear from the name of the dish, find other ways of passing the information to the customers such as labelling it as 'contains nuts'.
- Beware of accidentally transferring food from one dish to another. Cooking equipment can be a means of cross-contaminating foods with peanut or nut protein. Allergy sufferers can react to the smallest amount of protein and even the minute amounts transferred through cross-contamination could cause a reaction.
- Remember also that any oil that has previously been used to cook products containing nuts can carry minute traces of nut proteins and thus have the same effect as nut oils.
- Ask the catering supplier to provide information as to whether the ingredients or flavourings used in their products contain nuts or seeds.
- If you prepare food, check the complete recipes of all your products so you can answer questions if asked.
- If customers ask if there are nuts in a food and you don't know, tell them and suggest they try something else.

Catering for religious beliefs

Some religions require that particular foods be avoided. The points below are a guide of food choices for specific religious groups. Some families and children within these faith groups may not observe the dietary practices stated below and they may also vary within a particular faith depending on the denomination. Please use for guidance only.

- Hindus do not eat beef and most are vegetarian. Periods of fasting are common.
- Sikhs do not eat beef and many are vegetarian. Meat must come from other animals killed by 'one blow to the head'.
- Muslims do not eat pork or shellfish. Meat from other animals must be halal. Regular periods of fasting are observed, including Ramadan, which lasts for one month.
- Jews do not eat pork. All other meat must be kosher. Meat and dairy foods must not be consumed together. Only fish with scales and fins are eaten.
- Rastafarians do not consume any animal products except milk. No canned or processed foods may be eaten and no salt may be added to food. Food should be organic.

Section 5:

Healthier cooking practice

The earlier sections provide guidance and advice on the content of meals, but it is also important to consider the way food is prepared, cooked and how it is presented to your customers. This section therefore offers advice and makes recommendations on healthier cooking methods, food presentation and encouraging healthier eating among children and young people.

Low salt cooking

Try cutting down the amount of salt used in cooking gradually so that it is not noticed. Herbs and spices, onions and peppers, vinegar, celery and garlic powders, lemon juice and mustard can all enhance the flavour of foods.

Offer fewer of the foods that tend to be high in sodium, eg savoury snack foods, packet soups and sauces. Bouillon can be particularly salty: try a salt reduced variety, or make sure that the bouillon does not become too concentrated.

Cooking methods: recommended

Method	Comment	Guidance
Baking	Recommended, as no additional fat is required.	<p>Preheat the oven to the required temperature before adding the food.</p> <p>Use evenly sized pieces of food to ensure even cooking.</p> <p>Fish and poultry fillets, meat and kebabs can be marinated in a fat free marinade before cooking and brushed with marinade during cooking to prevent them drying out.</p>
Barbecuing	Recommended	<p>Extra care should be taken to ensure that all food is thoroughly cooked.</p> <p>Partial pre-cooking is not recommended because of the associated increased risk of food poisoning.</p> <p>When using a grill plate simply brush the plate with the bare minimum of oil before heating.</p>

Cooking methods: recommended

Method	Comment	Guidance
Blanching	Recommended, provided food is blanched in water and not fat or oil.	<p>Once the food is blanched in hot water, it must be drained and refreshed in cold or iced water immediately to prevent further cooking.</p> <p>Once refreshed, do not leave food in the water as this will cause loss of nutrients and will soften the texture of the food.</p> <p>Drain the food immediately and use or chill for later use.</p>
Boiling	Recommended	<p>Use as little water as possible to minimise the loss of nutrients.</p> <p>Drain the cooking water off as soon as the food is cooked to prevent overcooking.</p> <p>The cooking liquid from many vegetables can be used for stocks, sauces and casseroles.</p>
Braising	Recommended, if food is first stir-fried or sweated in the minimum of oil.	<p>Extra care should be taken to ensure that all food is thoroughly cooked.</p> <p>Partial pre-cooking is not recommended because of the associated increased risk of food poisoning.</p>
Casseroling or stewing	Recommended, as fat is not required.	<p>Remove any excess fat before cooking.</p> <p>Cover the dish with a close fitting lid or aluminium foil to prevent moisture loss.</p>
Grilling	Recommended	<p>Make sure the grill is hot before adding the food, to ensure the outside of the food is quickly sealed and the juices retained.</p> <p>Place food on a rack so fat can drain away.</p>

Cooking methods: recommended

Method	Comment	Guidance
Poaching	Recommended	<p>Try adding herbs or spices to the poaching liquid rather than salt or sugar.</p> <p>The poaching liquid may be used in the finished dish or in other recipes.</p>
Roasting	Recommended when food is cooked without adding fat or when only a small amount of fat is brushed onto the surface of the food.	<p>Put meat onto a rack or trivet.</p> <p>Baste meat in its own juices.</p> <p>Trim fat prior to cooking.</p> <p>Oil that contains less than 20% saturated oils is the preferred choice.</p>
Simmering	Recommended	<p>Do not allow the cooking liquid to remain at boiling point or the food may break up.</p> <p>Cover the pan to prevent loss of moisture.</p>
Steaming	Recommended, as fat or oil is not needed and flavours and nutrients are retained.	<p>Cut the food into even sized pieces to ensure even cooking.</p>
Stir-frying	Recommended because only a small amount of fat is used.	<p>Cut food into even sized pieces to ensure even cooking.</p> <p>Soak food in a low-fat marinade before cooking.</p> <p>Use spray oil or a pastry brush to coat the pan with a minimum of oil.</p> <p>Heat the pan over a moderately high heat.</p> <p>Add the food in batches and stir-fry over the heat until it is just cooked. Vegetables should be brightly coloured and crunchy.</p> <p>If food sticks to the pan during cooking, add a little stock, tomato puree or water rather than oil. The food will continue to cook in the steam produced by the added moisture.</p>

Cooking methods that use a lot of fat or oil (like blanching in hot fat or oil, sautéing shallow frying, deep frying and roasting in fat) are not recommended and should only be used occasionally. It is essential to follow the nutrient standards as stated in the Fried and other high fat foods section.

Cooking methods: not recommended

Method	Comment	Guidance
Frying (including shallow frying and deep frying)	Use alternative cooking methods where possible.	<p>Use a polyunsaturated or monounsaturated vegetable oil for deep frying rather than one rich in saturated fat.</p> <p>Always use the correct frying temperature and do not overload the fryer. Lower frying temperatures mean longer frying times and increased fat absorption.</p> <p>Fry as quickly as possible.</p> <p>Prepare chunky chips rather than French fries. Thicker chips and straight cut chips absorb less fat during cooking.</p> <p>Change oil regularly to prevent the build up of trans fatty acids which are harmful to health.</p> <p>Always drain foods thoroughly after frying and use absorbent kitchen paper to remove surface fat after draining.</p>
Sautéing	Use alternative cooking methods where possible.	<p>To keep fat to a minimum, the food can be sweated in a pan brushed with a small amount of oil.</p> <p>Keep a well fitting lid on the pan and cook over a low to moderate heat to prevent the food sticking.</p>

Healthier food choices

There are many ways to encourage children and young people to select the healthier choices you have on offer, and the way in which food is presented is very important in influencing their decisions. Some suggestions are:

- make sure healthy options are always on display. If children cannot see fruit, for example, they will not know it is available;
- always place healthy options at the beginning of the servery, so pupils see them first;
- make use of simple garnishes, eg parsley or lemon slices, as attractive presentation will increase the uptake of foods such as vegetables, fruit etc.

In addition, actively encourage children and young people to have a healthy diet. Offering a free sample of healthier choices or new dishes you are introducing to the menu will encourage children to try them. Also:

- work with other staff in the school (eg teachers). You may be able to offer healthy choices to reinforce healthy eating messages that have been taught in the classroom;
- introduce theme days linked to the curriculum or festivals, competitions and prizes;
- take part in national or local promotions on healthy eating;
- offer rewards or incentives to encourage pupils to choose the healthier option;
- display healthy options attractively and prominently on the menu;
- ask for the views of pupils on healthy meal choices.

Appendices

Appendix 1: The nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools

The following standards apply to other food and drinks served in schools through breakfast clubs, vending machines, tuck shops, after school clubs and at break times and should be read in combination with this guide. *The Nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools* is available from www.deni.gov.uk

Standard 1: Confectionery

No confectionery should be sold in schools.

Standard 2: Cakes and biscuits

No cakes and biscuits.

Standard 3: Savoury snacks

No savoury snacks other than nuts* and seeds (without added salt or sugar) should be sold.

*Be aware that some pupils may take a severe allergic reaction to nuts and whole nuts should not be served to under fives in case they choke. It will be for individual schools to decide on whether or not to provide nuts.

Standard 4: Fruit and vegetables

A variety of fruit and vegetables should be available in all school food outlets. This could include fresh, frozen, tinned, dried* and juiced products.

* Remember dried fruit has a higher concentration of sugars. Therefore in terms of dental health, it is not suitable as a snack between meals. It is best taken as part of a meal.

Standard 5: Water

Children and young people must have easy access at all times to free, fresh, preferably chilled water.

Standard 6: Drinks

The only drinks available should be:

- plain water (still or sparkling);
- milk (semi-skimmed is the preferred choice in schools);
- unsweetened fruit or vegetable juices;
- yogurt or milk drinks (with less than 5% added sugar);
- drinks made from combinations of the above (eg smoothies);
- tea, coffee and low calorie hot chocolate (these drinks are not suitable for the nursery sector).

Combination drinks must contain at least 50% milk, yogurt or fruit juice.

Artificial sweeteners are only permitted in combination drinks.

Standard 7: Foods high in fat

This standard must be applied in three parts:

- a) Fried and other high fat foods are restricted across the whole school day and should not be offered in total more than twice a week.
- b) Meat or chicken products are restricted across the whole school day and should only be offered a maximum of once a week in primary schools and a maximum of twice a week in post-primary schools.
- c) There should be at least two days each week without any meat or chicken products, fried foods, foods cooked in batter, breadcrumbs or foods containing pastry.

Standard 8: Red meat

Food choices or meals containing red meat must be served a minimum of twice a week and a maximum of three times a week in nursery and primary schools and a minimum of three times a week and a maximum of four times a week in post-primary schools. This standard applies across the whole school week.

For additional information on these standards and guidance on implementing them through the whole school day please refer to the publication *Nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools* available at www.deni.gov.uk

Appendix 2: Recommended portion sizes

The following pages set out recommended portion sizes for four of the food groups in the eatwell plate. Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar are not included.

The lists include portion sizes for over fives only. In nursery schools there should be a progression towards the proportions of the different foods in the eatwell plate. Caterers should find the recommendations for the 5–11 year old age group helpful.

Where a range is indicated, the lower amount is recommended for younger children and the higher amount for older children.

Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods

	Recommended portion size for 5–11 year olds	Recommended portion size for 11 year olds and over
Rice	35g	56g
Mashed and boiled potatoes and croquettes	84–168g	250g
Jacket potatoes	120–240g	355g
Chips, roast and other potatoes cooked in fat, eg jacket wedges and processed potato products	40–80g	120g
Bread: sliced, rolls, French stick	30–60g	90g
Pasta (dry weight)	40g	60g

Fruit and vegetables

	Recommended portion size for 5–11 year olds	Recommended portion size for 11 year olds and over
Cooked vegetables: peas, green beans, sweetcorn, carrots, mixed vegetables, cauliflower, broccoli, swede, turnip	60–80g	80g
Cooked cabbage, spinach, spring greens and other leafy vegetables	60–80g	80g
Raw vegetables and salad	40–80g	80g
Baked beans	70–90g	90g
Coleslaw	45g	45g
Medium sized fruit, eg apples, pears, bananas, peaches, oranges	$\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 fruit (50–100g)	1 fruit (100g)
Small fruit, eg satsumas, tangerines, plums, apricots, kiwis	1–2 fruits (50–100g)	2 fruits (100g)
Very small fruits, eg grapes, cherries, strawberries	$\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 cupful	1 cupful
Dried fruit (eg, raisins, sultanas, apricots)	1–2 tbsp	1–2 tbsp
Fruit salad, fruit tinned in juice and stewed fruit	2–3 tbsp including a little juice	2–3 tbsp including a little juice
Fruit juice	150ml	150ml

Milk and dairy foods

	Recommended portion size for 5–11 year olds	Recommended portion size for 11 year olds and over
Drinking milk	200ml	300ml
Milk puddings (including custard)	98g	98g
Cheese (including low-fat Cheddar)	28–42g	56g
Yogurts	125g (one pot)	125g (one pot)

Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein

	Recommended portion size for 5–11 year olds	Recommended portion size for 11 year olds and over
Red meat (in roast dinners); lamb, beef, pork, gammon	56g minimum	70g minimum
Minced: beef, lamb, pork and vegetarian mince (raw weight)	45g minimum (may reduce meat weight in composite dish in proportion if adding in another protein-based food such as beans or TVP)	70g minimum (may reduce meat weight in composite dish in proportion if adding in another protein-based food such as beans or TVP)
Burgers: beef, lamb, pork, bacon, vegetarian burgers (raw weight)	56g minimum	84g minimum
Sausages: beef, lamb, pork, vegetarian sausages (raw weight)	56–84g	125g
Poultry (in roast dinners)	56g	70g
Shaped chicken and turkey products, eg nuggets, burgers	70g	95g

	Recommended portion size for 5–11 year olds	Recommended portion size for 11 year olds and over
Poultry and fish in composite dishes	56g (weight of poultry or fish in the composite dish can be reduced proportionately if adding in other protein-based foods, eg beans or TVP)	56g (weight of poultry or fish in the composite dish can be reduced proportionately if adding in other protein-based foods, eg beans or TVP)
Fish cakes and other fish shapes	56–112g	112g
Fish fingers	56–84g	90g
White fish portions	40–60g	80g
Oily fish	30–45g	70g

Composite dishes using the caterer’s own recipes such as home-made pies, pasta bakes, lasagne, spaghetti bolognese and stew should supply the equivalent amount of meat, poultry, fish or vegetarian alternative per portion.

The initials TVP refer to the meat substitute, textured vegetable protein.

Appendix 3: Sources of calcium, folate and iron

Children, in particular teenagers, are at risk from low levels of the above vitamins and minerals. Wherever possible, foods containing calcium, folate and iron should be encouraged daily. The following lists show the main sources of the vitamins and minerals.

Calcium

Good sources of calcium	Provides some calcium
Milk and yogurt	Broccoli, dark green leafy vegetables, turnip, carrots, cabbage, peas
Hard cheeses, cheese spread, soya cheese	Dates, sultanas, raisins, ready to eat or stewed apricots
Canned sardines or salmon, drained and mashed up with the bones, fish paste	Baked squash, sweet potato
Ice-cream	
Egg yolk	
Bread, (except wholemeal), crumpets, muffins, plain and cheese scones	
Beans, lentils, chickpeas	
Ready to eat or stewed figs	
Tofu (soya bean) steamed or spread	
Soya mince	
Soya drink with added calcium	

Folate

Rich sources of folate	Other good sources of folate
Fresh raw or cooked Brussels sprouts, cooked black-eyed beans	Fresh, raw, frozen and cooked broccoli, spring greens, cabbage, green beans, cauliflower, peas, bean sprouts, cooked soya beans, iceberg lettuce, parsnips, chick peas
Breakfast cereals (fortified with folic acid)	Kidneys, yeast and beef extracts
Liver	

Iron

Good sources of iron which are well absorbed

Lean beef, lamb, pork, mince, burgers, liver

Chicken or turkey (especially dark meat), liver

Canned sardines, pilchards, mackerel, tuna, shrimps, crab

Sausages

Fish paste

Other sources of iron (if you add sources of vitamin C, or meat or fish to the following foods it will help the iron to be absorbed).

Breakfast cereals with added iron

Breads

Red kidney beans, haricot beans, pinto beans, lentils or chickpeas boiled or canned

Baked beans or peas raw, cooked, frozen or canned

Apricots, prunes, figs or peaches ready to eat or stewed

Raisins, sultanas

Cauliflower, spring greens, broccoli, mixed vegetables

Appendix 4: Monitoring checklist

The checklist is designed to help schools and caterers to ensure they are complying with the Department of Education's nutritional standards for school lunches. Please use it when you introduce or amend a menu. Complete a checklist for every week in a menu cycle.

Nutritional standards for school lunches

PS = primary school standard

SS = special school standard

PPS = post-primary school standard

Our school promotes healthier food choices and a whole school approach to healthier eating in the following ways:

Our school ensures that at least one portion from each of the following food groups is served at every lunch:

		Compliant?	
Standard applies:		Yes	No
Bread and other starchy foods	At every lunch serving	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fruit and vegetables	At every lunch serving	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Milk and dairy foods	At every lunch serving	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meat, fish and alternatives	At every lunch serving	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Our school ensures that the following foods and drinks are offered at the right frequency during the school week:

			Compliant?	
			Yes	No
		Standard applies:		
Rice		Min: once per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pasta		Min: once per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rice or pasta (single choice menu)		Min: once per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bread		Min: every day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fruit		Min: one every day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vegetables or salad		Min: one every day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fruit based dessert	PS, SS	Min: three times per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Baked beans				
– as a vegetable	PS, SS	Max: once per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
– as the only vegetable	PPS	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drinking milk		Min: every day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drinking (tap) water		Min: free every day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cheese as the only vegetarian option		Max: twice per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Red meat	PS, SS	Min: twice per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Max: three times per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	PPS	Min: three times per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Max: four times per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fish	PS, SS	Min: once per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	PPS	Min: twice per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Oily fish		Min: once every four weeks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fried and other high fat products		Max: twice per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Breadcrumbs fillet of fish (oven baked)		Max: once per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meat or chicken products	PS, SS	Max: once per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	PPS	Max: twice per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No meat or chicken products, fried foods, or foods containing batter, breadcrumbs or pastry		Min: two days	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Confectionery, chocolate and chocolate coated products		Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cakes, biscuits and puddings made with cocoa powder		Max: twice per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Our school ensures that the following foods and drinks are offered in the right manner and frequency during the school week:

	Standard applies:	Compliant?	
		Yes	No
Pies, crumbles and other composite fruit dishes contain at least one portion of fruit per serving.	To all servings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pies, casseroles, stews and other composite main course dishes contain a minimum of half a portion of vegetables per serving, in addition to a separate serving of vegetables or salad.	To all servings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Another vegetable is available beans or pulses form the protein part of a main course.	To all servings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
50% healthy meal options are available on the days meat or chicken products are offered.	To all servings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The 50% healthy meal options are presented and marketed in a competitive way. (Not applicable to single choice menus.)	To all servings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When a high fat starchy food is served, an alternative without added fat (other than bread) is available.	To all servings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lower fat desserts are available on days when fried and other high fat foods are offered.	To all servings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The only savoury snacks available are nuts and seeds with no added salt or sugar.	To all servings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Savoury crackers or breadsticks only are served with fruit or vegetables or a dairy food (eg cheese).	Max: twice per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cakes and biscuits are only provided at lunch time and as part of a meal.	To all servings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Our school ensures that the following foods and drinks are offered in the right manner and frequency during the school week:

	Standard applies:	Compliant?	
		Yes	No
If high fat and/or high sugar toppings are used for decoration, they are kept to a minimum and only used if essential, eg to set fruit on top of a sponge. If used, an undecorated or healthier dessert is also available (eg fruit).	To all servings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The only drinks available are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plain water (still or sparkling); • milk; • unsweetened fruit or veg juice; • yogurt or milk drinks (with less than 5% added sugar); • drinks made from combinations of the above (eg smoothies); • tea, coffee and low calorie hot chocolate. 	To all servings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Combination drinks contain at least 50% milk, yogurt or fruit juice. Only artificial sweeteners are used.	To all servings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fresh drinking water, ie tap water is provided free every day.	To all servings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Table salt is not available. PS, SS		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Table salt in post-primary schools is not on view	To all servings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Condiments are only provided from the service counter and are controlled by the kitchen staff.	To all servings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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