

# Healthier breakfast clubs

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## Introduction

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This healthier breakfast club guidance offers advice and support for your school whether you are planning to set up a breakfast club that promotes healthier eating, or wanting to change the emphasis of an existing club to promote healthier eating.

Breakfast clubs can create a positive atmosphere and help to include new and interesting foods that will help to improve attitudes towards healthy breakfast, as well as creating a positive rapport between teachers and pupils. Teachers report that children have improved attendance, attention, behaviour and levels of concentration as a result of healthier foods being provided in the morning. In addition, it has been suggested that this provision can also contribute to improved academic performance.

## Benefits of healthier breakfast clubs

A healthier breakfast club:

- provides an opportunity for pupils and staff to eat breakfast in a stimulating environment;
- has a positive effect on pupils' concentration and performance throughout the day;
- engages pupils in making healthier choices about their diet by providing them with encouragement, knowledge and support;
- can help improve pupils' attendance and punctuality;
- can lead to better social interaction and skills between pupils;
- increases the contact between teachers and parents;
- can improve pupils' motivation and self-confidence through relationships with adults other than teachers;
- can benefit low income families by providing no-cost or low-cost breakfast.

# What is a healthier breakfast club?

A healthier breakfast club provides a good balance and variety of food and drinks on its menu over a period of time. It ensures that the needs of pupils and staff are being met, and encourages the whole school community to eat breakfast and try something new.

Research carried out by the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland (HPA), *Eating for health? A survey of eating habits among children and young people in Northern Ireland*, showed that almost one third of 12–17 year old girls did not eat breakfast during the school week.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Sodexo school meals and lifestyle survey 2005, 8% of children have nothing to eat before school, and this rises to 12% for 15–16 year olds (17% for 15–16 year old girls).<sup>2</sup> Breakfast clubs can help to change these statistics and give children a healthier start to their day.

A systematic review carried out by the British Nutrition Foundation in 2007, entitled *Are people who regularly eat breakfast cereals slimmer than those who don't* concluded that children who eat breakfast cereals regularly tend to have a lower BMI and are less likely to be overweight than those who eat breakfast cereals infrequently.<sup>3</sup>

## **Case study**

In a post-primary school situated in a deprived area with high unemployment, a breakfast club was launched to kick-start a whole school approach to healthier eating.

A drop in café was created, called 'Switch on to breakfast', where pupils could eat breakfast, listen to music and watch TV. The informal environment was liked by pupils and made the club feel less like school.

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# Step by step plan

## 1. Getting started

A useful start could be to review your whole school food policy or develop one by conducting an audit of the school's current provision (see booklet two: *Establishing a whole school food policy*). If you already have a breakfast club, the school nutrition action group (SNAG) or school council could consider how to make it healthier. Involve the whole school community (pupils, parents, teachers, caterers, governors, health and wellbeing coordinator, health professionals), to ascertain whether a club is needed and would be used. Working with partners in the local community, eg community dietitian and dental health teams, will also ensure that the school has support to achieve its aims. They can help with menu suggestions. It is essential to involve the school's senior management team from the outset. By incorporating the club into your whole school food policy, you will ensure that it:

- is linked to other health initiatives at school;
- provides consistent information on healthier food and drink choices;
- becomes part of your school's development plan.

Try to keep it simple. The club can develop in time, but at the early stages it is better to avoid being too ambitious. Visit some established clubs at local schools. Find out what has worked well for them and what has not. They may provide useful information on funding, staffing and resources.

Schools have different ways of operating breakfast clubs, and you will need to review what facilities you have available and select the most appropriate approach to meeting the needs of pupils.

### What are your aims?

Will the club be open to all pupils or will it target specific pupils, eg by year group? What do you want to achieve from the club? This will depend on the needs of your school community and the facilities and budget available. Your school may be in an area where there are families with low household income, which means that they may have a limited amount of money to spend on food. Some clubs invite parents and staff to participate. For example, find out what parents and pupils need and want from a healthier breakfast club, eg additional activities or services other than food.

Send out questionnaires to parents in a newsletter, or hold a meeting. Find out what type of food and drink pupils like to eat for breakfast. Pupils could conduct a survey in their classes and report back to a school council or SNAG. Find out whether there are any restrictions due to cultural, religious or health requirements, eg allergies.

# Step by step plan

## 2. Setting up a healthier breakfast club

There are many ways of organising a breakfast club, depending on the individual needs of a school. Important aspects to consider include:

- the type of club that will best suit your school
- who will run the club?
- where and when will the club run?
- how will the club run?
- will there be a charge?
- will optional activities be provided as well as food, eg games and music?
- the name of the club
- the establishment of rules and procedures
- the involvement of the school community, eg parents and pupils.

### Case study

The vice principal of a primary school identified the need for a breakfast club following teachers' concerns that pupils were skipping breakfast and making unhealthy food choices instead.

The local health action zone funded a breakfast club for the school and five other local primary schools. Being part of a cluster system proved a successful strategy in helping them share best practice and overcome problems. The club acted as a catalyst to changing pupils' attitudes towards healthier eating.

The school has created an informal and relaxed club. Pupils find it appealing as it allows them to socialise with their friends while eating. They say: "*It's sociable to be sitting down and talking, it gives us somewhere to go.*"

There are two main approaches to setting up a healthier breakfast club.

	School run club	A dining servery style club
<b>Summary</b>	<p>This type of club is useful where access to catering facilities is limited, but where you are able to set up an area for food preparation. It is ideal for serving cereals, toast and juice or hot drinks.</p>	<p>These clubs use professional catering staff and resources. In most cases, they are staffed by the school catering service. These clubs operate either as a self-service buffet, or as a canteen type arrangement with staff serving pupils at a counter.</p>
<b>What you need to think about</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the club workers have appropriate training and qualifications in basic food hygiene, supervising pupils or healthier catering. You will need to consider whether club workers are paid employees or volunteers.</li> <li>• Make sure that the facilities include adequate storage and an area for preparing and clearing away food. This includes access to fridges, hot water and rubbish disposal.</li> <li>• If in a classroom, provide disposable cloths to cover tables.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The cost of paying for staff from the catering service will need to be reflected in the price of the food and drink served.</li> <li>• Market the club as a more informal setting that offers additional activities, including weekly events, special themes and breakfast specials to celebrate events.</li> <li>• Aim to set prices for a fixed period in agreement with catering services, in order to establish a stable charging policy.</li> </ul>



# Step by step plan

	School run club	A dining servery style club
<p><b>What you need to think about</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limit and control access to sharp knives, hot kettles and toasters, especially with younger pupils.</li> <li>• Ensure that food choices meet the nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools.</li> <li>• Get agreement from the school catering service about the use and cleaning of the area and dishwashing equipment, or check if the school staffroom can be used for this purpose. This will depend on the numbers attending.</li> <li>• Check that the school's public liability insurance is in place and that it covers your activities and the out of school hours timing of your club. Check specifically with the board insurance officer or the insurer to make sure you are covered.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the choices available reflect the healthy eating message, and meet the nutritional standards for other food and drinks in school. Discuss what you will include in your breakfast menus with the caterers, taking advice from health professionals. Integrate the club into the whole school approach. Engage the school council and other relevant groups to discuss the planning of the breakfast club menu, taking suggestions on board.</li> <li>• If the school is large or the club is very popular, think of strategies to reduce queuing and waiting times for pupils.</li> <li>• School dining areas often double as the school hall. You may need to work out how the club and school life will operate in parallel.</li> <li>• Consider the introduction of healthier vending machines that offer healthier breakfast choices.</li> </ul>



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	School run club	A dining servery style club
<b>Advantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can be flexible in where you hold your club, eg a classroom, the school hall.</li> <li>• You can create a more relaxed atmosphere.</li> <li>• You can be more responsive to the needs of pupils with food choices and menu variety.</li> <li>• You have greater control over the type of breakfast foods on offer.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and safety, along with food ordering, storage, preparation and cleaning, are undertaken by school kitchen and catering staff.</li> <li>• The use of a school caterer enables other supervisory staff to fulfil other school duties without delay.</li> <li>• There are opportunities to provide a greater variety of foods, including a hot menu.</li> </ul>
<b>How much will it cost?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the club is not using the school kitchens, equipment may need to be purchased. The minimum is a toaster, a kettle, a fridge, a store cupboard, crockery, cups, cutlery, washing up equipment, and somewhere to wash up.</li> <li>• The other costs are the food, staffing and any administrative costs such as rent. If you are going to charge for the club, you will need to break down these figures so that you can work out how much pupils need to pay to keep the operation sustainable. You could decide to seek funding to run the club as a free enterprise, or to subsidise the costs to pupils.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You will need to negotiate a contract with your caterers, off-setting the income from sales against staff wages and food charges.</li> </ul>

# Step by step plan

## Healthier breakfast club activities

One of the main aims is to encourage healthier eating. Many of the clubs find that this, alongside the social aspect of sharing food and chatting, makes for an ideal start to the day. Some schools provide activities to run alongside their breakfast club. This has implications for staffing and opening hours. The pupils need enough time to join in the activities as well as eat breakfast, and supervision for the activities may be required. Whether pupils can eat first or have breakfast afterwards will depend on the nature of the activities.

In addition, it is important that the social aspects of eating together are not neglected, as a breakfast club can be an important way of promoting social and emotional wellbeing at school. For some pupils, it may also be the only meal of the day that is eaten at a table with others while engaging in conversation.

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### Top 10 activities for healthier breakfast clubs

1. Reading: creates an area where pupils can read books, newspapers and magazines.
2. Music: sets aside a place where pupils can listen to or make music, sing, or listen to a live performance from a visitor or a school band.
3. Board games: allocates some space and time for fun and educational pastimes.
4. Sport and keep fit: combines or integrates the club with supervised football, basketball, aerobics, yoga and so on.
5. ICT projects: Internet café: creates the look, feel and facilities of an internet café.
6. Homework: allows pupils time to catch up on their studies.
7. Hobbies: lets children follow their own interests.
8. Maths challenges: sets tasks such as maths investigations, puzzles and logical problem solving.
9. CD playing: creates opportunities to play both music and story.
10. Health promoting events: can encourage things like teeth brushing teeth and hand washing.

The type of school, style of service and resources available will dictate the additional activities that a healthier breakfast club includes. Be realistic and choose what works best for your school.

#### Case study

A small primary school found that their healthier breakfast club was an effective way of improving punctuality and attendance. They also noted that pupils' behaviour and table manners improved. The principal noted that successful strategies included starting with a manageable number of targeted pupils, researching the breakfast menu with pupils and asking staff to volunteer to keep costs to a minimum and help promote a friendly environment.

# Step by step plan

## Venue

This will depend on the type of club. If the club is run by the school caterer, then the dining room would be the most appropriate place. However, if the club is run by school staff or volunteers, you may choose the dining room, school hall, or find a room that is safe for pupils and workers, preferably with appropriate storage facilities. An area could be partitioned off, with posters and the club name on the dividers. In a small space, a café or bistro could be set up so that it looks different from other rooms in the school. Involve the pupils in this approach. Aspects of health and safety and food hygiene need to be considered carefully.

## Charging

You need to decide whether to charge a set price, variable price or nothing at all. Some pupils may not be able to afford to pay for breakfast and could therefore be excluded if charged. Try to keep costs to a minimum. Look for sponsorship and ways of raising funds so that you can subsidise prices. Vouchers towards the cost of a breakfast could be given as part of a school rewards scheme. Research suggests that charging helps to mainstream the service, contributes to its continuation and reduces the stigma and impression that the clubs are only for the disadvantaged.

## Arrival times

Pupils arrive at school in many different ways. If they travel by bus, the control over when they arrive can be limited. Therefore, some of the potential customers may be excluded because they arrive too late. Try to include those who come by bus in one-off special events by arranging for an earlier arrival on one particular day or negotiating a slightly later start to the school day. You may be able to arrange a special event that combines the start of lessons with a learning activity that looks at healthy eating choices.

## Staffing

If the club is run by the school, use existing staff who may not mind coming in earlier. If they have children or grandchildren in the school themselves, they can bring them to the club. Make use of volunteers.

Parents and other family members may be able to help on a rota system if they cannot commit themselves to coming in every day. Contact local colleges to find out whether they have any students who would be willing to help with the club in order to gain experience of working with pupils in a community setting.

Check the ELB or school policy on who can work with children in school – this may need to involve police checks.

## Case study

The teacher responsible for the breakfast club in a medium sized suburban primary school felt that their club was successful because they kept it simple and promoted its social aspects to pupils.

*“I’m really surprised at the number of children who continue to come on a regular basis, it’s amazing. The atmosphere is a happy and calm one – there is no negativity.”*

The club has convinced the principal to ensure that there is a focus on healthier eating throughout the school.

# Step by step plan

## 3. Deciding what to serve

Following a parent-pupil survey, consultation with the school council or SNAG (which includes the school caterer), and reference to the *Nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools*, a sample menu should be drawn up.

Work with local health professionals for further advice. Provide clear factual information about the food, perhaps on a menu or an information sheet. Involve pupils in producing posters and factsheets to encourage healthier choices.

A healthier breakfast should provide a good variety and balance of foods, as recommended by the eatwell plate. To provide a healthier breakfast, clubs should try to include each of the following every day:

- a good portion of starchy food, eg low sugar, high fibre breakfast cereals, bread, toast, pancakes or bagels;
- plenty of fruit and vegetable choices, eg unsweetened orange juice, fruit (fresh, canned or dried), cooked tomatoes or baked beans;
- a portion of milk or dairy food, eg semi-skimmed milk on cereals or a low-fat yoghurt;
- a choice of drinks, eg water, unsweetened fruit juice, semi-skimmed milk.

One of the great things about a breakfast club is that it can encourage pupils to eat a wide variety of food by providing a different selection of foods each day, as well as limiting how often certain foods are offered. For example:

- offer a variety of fruit and vegetables each day, eg fruit pots, fresh fruit and juice;
- use a variety of breads for toast and toasties, including wholegrain, pancakes, soda, wheaten and potato bread;
- offer porridge when the weather is cold;
- provide different toppings for toast and bread, eg low-fat spread, low-fat cheese spread, bananas, cooked tomatoes or beans;
- offer hot food for variety, eg mushrooms, tomatoes, baked beans, poached, scrambled or boiled egg.

### Issues to consider

Before selecting the foods you provide in the breakfast club, check what cooking and serving facilities you have available. Assess whether there are any cultural or religious issues to be aware of relating to food and whether any pupils in the school have any special dietary needs, eg nut allergies. These need to be carefully considered when planning menus. When choosing foods and drinks for your healthier breakfast club, you should try to choose those lower in salt, fat and sugar.

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# Step by step plan

## Example 1

### Breakfast club menu

#### Breakfast cereals

Wholegrain cereals or puffed rice served with semi-skimmed milk

#### Toast

Toast with topping

#### Fruit options

Banana or apple

#### Yogurt

#### Drinks

Unsweetened orange juice

Water

Semi-skimmed milk

Breakfast cereals provide energy and important vitamins and minerals (as most are fortified, eg with iron).

Try to offer a selection of cereals – look for low sugar, low salt, high fibre alternatives.

Fruit provides a good source of vitamins and minerals. You need to provide a variety of fruit each day.

Try serving canned apricots or pineapple in natural juice, dried fruit (eg raisins, sultanas, apricots) apples, bananas and satsumas.

Try mixing plain cereals with wholegrain cereals to reduce overall sugar content.

For spreads and toppings, choose a monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fat spread, or a low-fat alternative, and encourage pupils to spread thinly. Offer a range of different toppings over the week, eg low-fat soft cheese, banana or beans.



Fresh fruit, fruit juice, canned fruit and dried fruit all count towards your five-a-day.

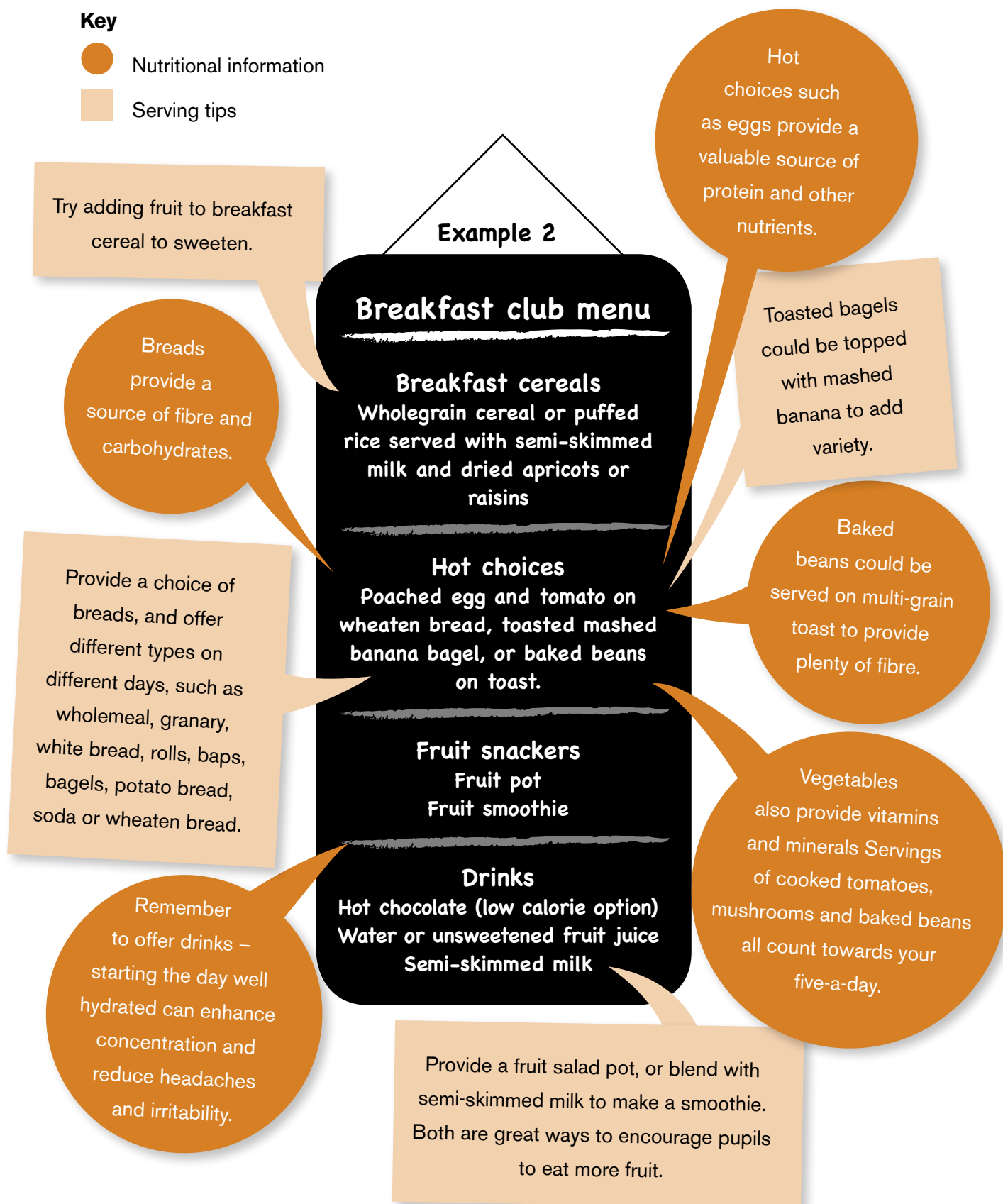
Semi-skimmed milk and dairy foods are good sources of protein, vitamins and minerals, especially calcium, which is important for healthy bones and teeth. Select semi-skimmed milk and low-fat dairy foods. Good ways to include milk and dairy foods at breakfast include:

- adding milk to cereals
- yogurt
- cheese toasties
- milk in your smoothies
- plain milk, drinking milk.

## Sample menus

### Key

-  Nutritional information
-  Serving tips



# Step by step plan

## 4. Promoting your healthier breakfast club

Before you begin, publicise the club to pupils, staff, parents and the community. Ensure that everyone knows when it will start, where it will be held, who can join in, what's on the menu and how much it will cost.

Promotion could include:

- displaying posters around the school, perhaps posters made by pupils;
- advertising the club on a school notice board or website;
- displaying the breakfast club menu prominently at school;
- keeping parents up to date through the school newsletter or website;
- inviting the local press to cover the opening and take photographs;
- talking about the opening of the club at assembly or at the school council or SNAG;
- sending special invitations to parents and pupils for the opening day;
- having a 'countdown to opening' calendar prominently displayed in the entrance hall or foyer;
- decorating the club on the opening day to remind people that the club is happening;
- running a first day raffle for those who attend.

Promotion of the club should be continuous and not just a one-off. Special events, tasting sessions and new menu items add interest and help to sustain the club.

### Top tips to make your breakfast club appealing

- Have a 'taster bar' once a week as part of your breakfast menu, with bite size pieces of fruit, vegetables and new foods.
- Have a 'healthier food challenge' to see who can choose the healthiest breakfast.
- Have 'knowledge challenge' days with special games and quizzes.
- Create or adopt a mascot that sits by the healthier options on offer.
- Have theme days at different times of the year or for special events.
- Have a reward system for choosing healthier options.
- Have 'bring a friend' days and offer two for the price of one.
- Have family days when the whole family is invited.
- Label your menu choices for younger children with special funny names.

## **5. Keeping up attendance**

If your club is fun and the food is tasty and well presented, you should find that the number of pupils attending stays the same or increases. Attract new customers to the club by:

- setting up a reward scheme linked to regular attendance;
- offering vouchers towards the cost of a breakfast;
- having an award for the breakfast club member of the week or month;
- offering free breakfast to someone who brings someone new to the club;
- giving special offers on some items to promote value for money;
- holding celebration days for cultural or school events;
- marketing the club through displays, newsletters, news in assembly, posters and word of mouth from happy customers.

## **6. Evaluating success**

It is important to review and monitor the club regularly to evaluate its success and establish whether it is meeting its original aims, such as providing healthier alternatives, helping attendance or improving concentration in class.

This might include recording attendance numbers, surveying opinions from the school community and discussing the operation at school council or at a SNAG. Surveys could be carried out by pupils as part of the formal school curriculum, eg home economics, mathematics and numeracy.

# Healthier breakfast club checklist

- ✓ Is there demand for a healthier breakfast club in your school?
- ✓ Have you identified the benefits of a healthier breakfast club for your school?
- ✓ Are you clear about what you want to achieve?
- ✓ Have you involved the school council or SNAG?
- ✓ Have you identified sources of funding or will you need to charge?
- ✓ Have you drawn up a list of who will run the club?
- ✓ Have you found out what pupils, parents and the school community want from their breakfast club?
- ✓ Are you clear about who will attend the healthier breakfast club?
- ✓ Do you know how the club will operate? Will it be a school run club or dining servery style?
- ✓ Have you decided where and when the club will run?
- ✓ Have you identified what food and drinks will be served?
- ✓ Have health and safety issues been addressed?
- ✓ Have you identified any pupils with allergies?
- ✓ Have you planned a strategy to promote your healthier breakfast club?
- ✓ Have you planned how you will monitor and evaluate the impact of your healthier breakfast club?

# Integrating with other school food projects

There are many natural links that can be made to other school food projects, depending on your school. Links to healthier breakfast clubs could include:

- Ensuring that the breakfast club menu and healthy break menu complement each other by providing a range of healthy options.
- Making dishes that can be eaten as part of a healthier breakfast, eg porridge, beans on toast. This could involve cooking different breakfast dishes from around the world.
- Discussing the importance of fluid intake and ensuring that water is freely available at the breakfast club.
- Displaying breakfast menus in the dining room to encourage attendance.
- Making the club welcoming and attractive to enhance the positive social atmosphere.

## **Case study**

The breakfast club at a small special school was set up via the school council as part of a whole school approach. Pupils were responsible for setting up the club, naming it the Chill Out Zone, and now run it with support from the catering staff.

The catering supervisor helps pupils prepare and serve the food. She also trained pupils in food hygiene. The school values the cooperation of the school caterers.

Successful strategies have included involving pupils from the start, working in partnership with the school caterer and establishing links to the formal curriculum.

# Curriculum links

Healthier breakfast clubs provide a context for a wide variety of curriculum links.

## Primary

### **Language and literacy**

There is a good opportunity for speaking and listening, including group discussion and interaction, which also helps writing skills.

### **Mathematics and numeracy**

Pupils can collect and record financial contributions and calculate charges, eg number of servings of cereal in a packet.

### **The arts**

Pupils can design menus for the healthier breakfast club, or look at ways to use art to brighten up the club.

### **Personal development and mutual understanding**

Individuals and groups can take and share responsibility; feel positive about themselves; make real choices; meet and talk with other people and ask for help.

## Post-primary

### **Learning for life and work**

A survey of healthier breakfast club users can provide the stimulus for pupils to make available a wide range of breakfast options, such as traditional breads from around the world (pitta, chapatti, traditional rye) to help meet the dietary requirements of 11–14 year olds.

*Local and global citizenship* – pupils could look at themed breakfast days from other parts of the world.

### **Mathematics and numeracy**

Pupils can record attendance, income and popularity of breakfast options using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to predict future supply requirements.

### **Modern languages**

Pupils can design breakfast menus reflecting different languages.

For further advice and suggestions, go to:

[www.ccea.org.uk](http://www.ccea.org.uk)

[www.nicurriculum.org.uk](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk)



# References

1. Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland. Eating for Health? A survey of eating habits among children and young people in Northern Ireland. Belfast: HPA, 2001.
2. Sodexo. The Sodexo school meals and lifestyle survey 2005. London: Sodexo, 2005.
3. De La Hunty A, Ashwell M. Are people who regularly eat breakfast cereals slimmer than those who don't? A systematic review of the evidence. Nutrition Bulletin, May 2007; 32:118–128.

# Sources of further information

The following list provides links to further resources and information that may support you in developing your healthier breakfast club.

## **Food in schools**

[www.foodinschools.org](http://www.foodinschools.org)

The food in schools website contains materials such as templates, case studies and posters to support you in developing healthier breakfast clubs and other related healthier eating and drinking activities in your school. The most up-to-date materials can be found on the website.

## **Food Standards Agency**

[www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk)

This website provides information and advice on healthier eating, as well as healthier catering practices.

## **Scottish community breakfast clubs**

[www.dietproject.org.uk](http://www.dietproject.org.uk)

A step-by-step guide to the ups and downs of setting up and running a breakfast club.

## **New Policy Institute**

[www.npi.org.uk](http://www.npi.org.uk)

A number of reports concerning breakfast clubs are available to download at this website.

## **Newham Early Starts Breakfast clubs**

[www.teachernet.gov.uk](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk)

A useful study of one approach to breakfast clubs at the London Borough of Newham can be found at this website's case study section.

## **Sure Start**

[www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk)

Sure Start is the Government's programme to deliver the best start in life for every child by bringing together: early education, childcare, health and family support.

This resource was originally developed and produced by the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland as part of the School food: top marks programme. It was jointly funded by the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.