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# **NEW NUTRITIONAL STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL LUNCHES AND OTHER FOOD IN SCHOOLS**

**February 2008**

## NUTRITIONAL STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL LUNCHES

Food group	Standards
<b>Group 1: Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods eg noodles and cereals.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Every school lunch must contain a portion or portions of food from this group.</li><li>• Rice and pasta must be offered <b>at least once a week</b>. In a single choice menu, rice <b>or</b> pasta must be served at least once a week.</li><li>• Bread should be available on a daily basis in all schools.</li><li>• Also see additional requirements on fried foods – see Group 5a.</li></ul>
<b>Notes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Starchy foods are usually inexpensive and provide energy, fibre, vitamins and minerals.</li><li>• Offering rice and pasta provides variety and encourages children to try foods they might not get the chance to try at home.</li><li>• Bread is a healthy source of carbohydrates.</li><li>• Nearly all types of bread are acceptable: white, brown, wholemeal, wheaten, granary, high-fibre white bread and rolls, homemade bread, bagels, pitta bread, chapattis made without fat.</li><li>• Bread should be provided without spread, which should be freely available.</li><li>• Bread is additional to, and not a replacement for, the main meal accompaniment and should be positioned at the end of the servery.</li></ul>	

Food group	Standards
<p data-bbox="289 258 456 352"><b>Group 2: Fruit and vegetables.</b></p> <p data-bbox="289 394 483 632"><b>This group includes fresh, frozen, canned and dried varieties and fruit juices.</b></p>	<ul data-bbox="513 258 1331 1052" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="513 258 1331 352">• Not less than <b>two portions</b> of fruit and vegetables should be available per day per child throughout the lunch service.</li> <li data-bbox="513 394 1331 489">• Of this, at least one portion should be vegetables or salad and at least one portion should be fruit (fresh, tinned in juice, fruit salad, fruit juice or dried fruit).</li> <li data-bbox="513 531 1331 604">• Pies, crumbles and other composite fruit dishes must contain at least <b>one portion of fruit per serving</b>.</li> <li data-bbox="513 646 1331 772">• Pies, casseroles, stews and other composite main course dishes must contain <b>a minimum of half a portion of vegetables per serving</b>, in addition to a separate serving of vegetables or salad.</li> <li data-bbox="513 814 1331 951">• Baked beans must not be served as a vegetable more than <b>once a week</b> in a primary school. Baked beans must not be the only vegetable option on any day in a post-primary school.</li> <li data-bbox="513 993 1331 1052">• If beans or pulses form the protein part of a main course, another vegetable must be available.</li> </ul>
<p data-bbox="289 1098 375 1129"><b>Notes</b></p> <ul data-bbox="289 1161 1331 1507" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="289 1161 1331 1266">• 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 the following table.</li> <li data-bbox="289 1308 1331 1339">• Spaghetti tinned in tomato sauce does not count as a vegetable.</li> <li data-bbox="289 1371 1331 1402">• Unlike most vegetables, baked beans do not contain vitamin C.</li> <li data-bbox="289 1444 1331 1507">• Serving a separate, non-pulse vegetable with pulse-based vegetarian options provides variety for vegetarians.</li> </ul>	

**What is a portion?**

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, (ie 40g) to nursery pupils, moving towards an adult portion (ie 80g) for primary/post-primary pupils. The table below gives examples of how these portions translate into kitchen servings.

	Nursery	Primary/Post-Primary
	One portion	One portion
Cooked vegetables	1-2 tablespoons (tbsp)	2-3 tablespoons (tbsp)
Salad vegetables	½ dessert bowl	1 dessert bowl
Fresh fruit	½ -1 fruit	1 fruit
Fruit salad, fruit tinned in juice	1-2 tablespoons (tbsp)	2-3 tablespoons (tbsp)
Fruit juice	150ml	150ml
Dried fruit	½ -1 tablespoon (tbsp)	1 tablespoon (tbsp)

Food Group	Standards
<p data-bbox="289 258 464 352"><b>Group 3: Milk and dairy foods.</b></p> <p data-bbox="289 394 493 594"><b>This group includes milk, cheese, yogurt and milk puddings.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="521 258 1292 321">• Every school lunch must contain a portion or portions of food from this group.</li> <li data-bbox="521 363 1292 426">• In addition, drinking milk must be available as an option every day.</li> <li data-bbox="521 468 1312 531">• Cheese must not be served as the only vegetarian option more than <b>twice a week</b>.</li> <li data-bbox="521 573 1230 604">• Cheese may be used as a topping more frequently.</li> </ul>
<p data-bbox="289 646 375 678"><b>Notes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="289 720 1304 814">• Milk and milk products are excellent sources of several nutrients including calcium, which is important for good bone development, protein and vitamins.</li> <li data-bbox="289 856 1320 951">• Milk, plain or flavoured, is a good drink option. Semi-skimmed milk has the same amount of calcium as whole milk. Skimmed milk is not appropriate for children under five years.</li> <li data-bbox="289 993 1260 1056">• Alternatives to cheese provide variety for vegetarians. Recommended alternatives include beans, pulses and lentils.</li> <li data-bbox="289 1098 1328 1161">• Where a portion of cheese is served as the main protein item, it also counts as a portion of food from Group 4.</li> </ul>	

Food Group	Standards
<p><b>Group 4: Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein.</b></p> <p><b>This group includes beef, pork, lamb, chicken, fish, eggs, pulses, eg peas, beans, lentils.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every school lunch must contain a portion or portions of food from this group.</li> <li>• Meals containing red meat must be served: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>a minimum of twice a week and a maximum of three times a week</b> in nursery and primary schools; and</li> <li>○ <b>a minimum of three times a week and a maximum of four times a week</b> in post-primary schools.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Fish should be available <b>at least once a week</b> in primary schools and <b>at least twice a week</b> in post-primary schools.</li> <li>• Oily fish should be available <b>at least once every four weeks</b>.</li> <li>• Meat or chicken products (such as burgers, sausages, sausage rolls, chicken nuggets etc) may be served <b>a maximum of once a week in primary schools</b>. In post-primary schools there should be at least three days on which these products are not available and on the days they are available sufficient healthy options should also be provided to allow a choice for pupils. This does not apply to single choice menus.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Notes</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On days when red meat is being served at lunch, there can be more than one choice as pupils will only choose one option.</li> <li>• Meat, fish and alternatives such as eggs, beans and pulses are a major source of protein.</li> <li>• Red meat is a good source of iron.</li> <li>• Red meat includes beef, pork and lamb and meals made from them.</li> <li>• Meat and chicken products are bought-in manufactured products that have been processed in some way and are generally ready for cooking/ reheating.</li> <li>• Whole muscle meat or chicken, which is dipped in egg, coated in home-made crumb and dry baked will not count as a 'processed' product.</li> <li>• Sausages are not classed as red meat. Burgers are not classed as red meat unless they are home-made with at least 95% <b>lean</b> meat. Composite</li> </ul>	

dishes made from mince which contain less than 95% lean meat are classed as a meat product.

- Limit the fat content of lunches by not offering too many foods from this group which have added fat, eg pastry toppings on pies or battered coating on fish.
- 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.
- Oily fish contains omega 3 fatty acids which help maintain a healthy heart.
- 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 the weeks when oily fish is provided this meets the standard for fish for that week.
- 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 must meet the same minimum meat content levels prescribed for burgers;
  - Not be “economy burgers” as described in the Meat Products Regulations (NI) 2004; and
  - Contain none of the prohibited list of offal.

Food group	Standards
<p><b>Group 5a: Fried and other high fat foods.</b></p> <p><b>This group includes cooking fats and oils, oily salad dressings, mayonnaise, salad cream, crisps, cream, pastry.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deep-fried foods or other high fat products, such as chips, roast potatoes, other fried potatoes or garlic bread, must not be offered, <b>in total, more than twice a week.</b></li> <li>• Menu choices containing pastry, eg quiche, apple pie, vol-au-vent, must not be offered more than one day a week.</li> <li>• There should be <b>at least 2 days each week</b> without any meat or chicken products (see Group 4), fried foods, foods cooked in batter, or foods containing pastry, for example fish in batter, sausages, vol-au-vents, quiche, apple pie, fruit fritters etc.</li> <li>• When a starchy food that is cooked in fat or oil is served, a non-fried alternative must be available.</li> <li>• Lower fat desserts must be available on days when chips and high fat foods are offered.</li> <li>• The only savoury snacks available should be nuts and seeds with no added salt or sugar. Savoury crackers or breadsticks can only be served with fruit or vegetables or a dairy food as part of the school lunch.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Notes</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Deep-fried or other high fat foods’ includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ any food that is deep-fried, either in the kitchen or in the manufacturing process, even flash fried foods or foods brushed with oil, eg roast potatoes, chips, oven chips, potato waffles, potato shapes;</li> <li>○ pre-prepared coated, battered and breaded products, eg chicken nuggets, fried fish, fish fingers, battered onion rings and doughnuts.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• On days when deep-fried foods or other high fat foods are being served at lunch there can be more than one choice as pupils will only choose one option.</li> <li>• Limiting fried and other high fat options helps to limit the overall fat content of lunches.</li> <li>• Schools should work towards limiting all fried or high fat foods to twice a week.</li> <li>• Offering non-fried options when fried or high fat options are on the menu</li> </ul>	



helps to ensure that a variety of other starchy foods are provided.

- Offering lower fat desserts on days that fried or high fat foods are on offer limits the fat content of lunches. Examples of lower fat desserts include:
  - fresh, stewed or tinned fruit (in 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, eg custard, semolina, rice pudding, tapioca – served with fruit;
  - fruit crumble with custard;
  - fruit sponge (made with egg/fatless sponge) with custard;
  - fruit crisp (breadcrumb topping) with custard;
  - fruit 'fool' made with custard/fromage frais/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/fatless sponge) with fresh or tinned fruit and fromage frais;
  - wholemeal/flakemeal biscuit, fruit and milk to drink;
  - muffin and orange juice (except choc-chip muffins).

NB It is essential that the dessert combinations are as shown here for them to be considered as lower fat options, as it is the OVERALL fat content of the menu item that was used to determine their suitability.

- Be aware of nut allergies. It will be for individual schools to decide on whether or not to provide nuts.

Food group	Standards
<b>Group 5b: Confectionery and Other Sweet Foods:</b>  <b>Sugar, Sweet pastry, Chocolate, Sweets, Sweetened Soft Drinks, Puddings, Cakes, Biscuits, Jam, Jelly, Ice-cream.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confectionery, chocolate and chocolate-coated products should not be available throughout the lunchtime.</li> <li>• Cakes and biscuits can only be provided at lunchtime and as part of a meal.</li> <li>• Cakes, biscuits and puddings made with cocoa powder should only be available a maximum of 2 days per week.</li> </ul>

### Notes

- Confectionery includes:
  - Chocolate and chocolate products, for example: 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, for example: boiled, chewy, gum, liquorice, mint and other sweets, also sherbet, fudge, marshmallows, toffee and chewing-gum; this includes sugar-free sweets and 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 yoghurt or chocolate coating.
  - Choc ices and other chocolate coated ice-cream.

NB This does not include cocoa powder used in cakes, puddings, biscuits or low calorie drinking chocolate or combination drinks made with yoghurt or dairy equivalents.

## **OTHER REQUIREMENTS**

### **Drinks**

The only drinks available should be:

- plain water (still or sparkling)
- milk
- pure fruit juices
- yoghurt or milk drinks (with less than 5% added sugar)
- drinks made from combinations of the above (eg smoothies)
- low calorie hot chocolate } these drinks are
- tea } not suitable for
- coffee } the nursery sector

Combination drinks must contain at least 50% of the milk, yoghurt or fruit juice as appropriate.

Low calorie hot chocolate is defined as 20 calories per 100 millilitres.

Drinking water, ie tap water, must be provided free every day.

### **Salt and Condiments**

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.

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.

## **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 those suffering from autism, 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, should be available for the children concerned.

## STANDARDS FOR FOOD OTHER THAN LUNCH IN SCHOOLS

The following standards apply to food sold or served in schools through vending machines, tuck shops, breakfast clubs, after school clubs and at break times and should be read in combination with the food-based lunch standards:

- (i) no confectionery should be sold in schools;
- (ii) no savoury snacks other than nuts\* and seeds (without added salt or sugar) should be sold in schools;
- (iii) a variety of fruit and vegetables should be available in all school food outlets. This could include fresh, dried<sup>^</sup>, frozen, tinned and juiced products;
- (iv) children and young people must have easy access at all times to free, fresh, preferably chilled, water in schools so that children do not have to depend on going to the lavatory to get water;
- (v) the only other drinks available should be bottled water (still or sparkling), milk, pure fruit juices, yoghurt and milk drinks (with less than 5% added sugar) or drinks made from combinations of these, eg smoothies, low calorie hot chocolate, tea and coffee. Combination drinks must contain at least 50% of the milk, yoghurt or fruit juice as appropriate. Low calorie hot chocolate is defined as 20 calories per 100 millilitres.

\* Be aware of nut allergies. It will be for individual schools to decide on whether or not to provide nuts.

<sup>^</sup> Dried fruit has a higher concentration of sugars. Therefore, in terms of dental health, it is not regarded as a suitable snack between meals. It is best taken as part of a meal.

## INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS

Until April 2008, there will be some flexibility with regard to the nutritional standards. The following concessions may be applied:

- In post-primary schools there must be two days on which meat products (such as burgers, sausages, sausage rolls etc) are not available at lunch time. On the days they are available sufficient healthy options should also be provided to allow a choice for pupils.
- In addition to the allowance for high fat/fried foods fish may be offered as a fried option **a maximum of once a week** until April 2008.
- As an interim measure towards removing all chocolate items, a small drizzle of chocolate may be added to, for example, plain oatmeal biscuits until April 2008.
- Salt may be on view in the post-primary school dining room until April 2008.
- Food served at break time should work towards the standards by April 2008.