

Nutritional standards for school lunches

Every lunch service must contain the stated portions from these four food groups:

- Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods;
- Fruit and vegetables;
- Milk and dairy foods;
- Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein.

Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy food

- 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.



Fruit and vegetables

- 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) 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 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.

Milk and dairy foods

- 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.



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

- 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.

Salt and condiments

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

Food and drinks high in fat and/or sugar

Fried and other high fat foods

- 1) Fried foods or other high fat products, such as chips, roast potatoes, other fried potatoes, garlic bread, 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, breadcrumbed 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 a week without any meat or chicken products, fried foods, foods cooked in batter, breadcrumbs or foods containing pastry. 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 when offering fried and other high fat foods.
- 8) The only savoury snacks available should be nuts and seeds with no added salt or sugar. Savoury crackers or breadsticks may be offered if they are served with fruit or vegetables or a dairy food.

Confectionery and other sweet foods

- 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.

Drinks

- 1) The only drinks available in school should be:
 - plain water (still or sparkling);
 - milk;
 - unsweetened fruit or veg 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.
- 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.