

Nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools

A guide for implementation



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Section 1:

Introduction

Introduction

This publication details the nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools, which all grant-aided schools should 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 Public Health Agency (PHA).

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 publication, *Nutritional standards for school lunches*, the standards have been updated to fully take account of recent developments in nutrition and healthy eating in schools.

This publication provides details of the standards as they apply to all food and drinks served outside of lunch time, which will include, breakfast clubs, break time services such as tuck shops, vending machines and after schools clubs. 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 PHA web site: www.publichealth.hscni.net

Where the standards apply

All grant-aided nursery, primary and post-primary schools are expected to adhere to the standards. They apply to all food and drinks provided outside lunch times in healthier breakfast clubs, break times, vending and water provision. 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 children's diet 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 for other food and drinks in schools:

- 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 other food and drinks in schools* 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 and practical action. A series of vocational qualifications have also been developed 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 that can be used to monitor compliance with the nutritional standards can be found on page 22 of this booklet.

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 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 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.

Section 3:

The nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools

Standard 1: Confectionery

No confectionery should be sold in schools.

Confectionery, chocolate and chocolate products include:

- bars of milk, plain or white chocolate, chocolate flakes, buttons or chocolate filled eggs;
- fresh or dried fruit that has been sugared or coated in yogurt or chocolate;
- chocolate coated bars;
- ice-cream (except at lunch time as part of a meal);
- chocolate ices and other chocolate coated ice-cream;
- chocolate coated or flavoured biscuits;
- sweets, eg boiled or chewy sweets, gum, liquorice and mint. 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 and processed fruit bars.

Standard 2: Cakes and biscuits

No cakes and biscuits.

Cakes and biscuits must not be provided (except at lunch time as part of a meal).

Cakes include:

- manufactured bought in products and home-made tray bakes, cakes, biscuits and buns made in the school kitchen;
- sponge cakes, Madeira cake, Swiss roll, fruit cake, banana loaf, apple cake, carrot cake, gateaux and American muffins;
- pastries such as croissants, Danish, jam tarts and mince pies.

Biscuits include:

- all types of sweet varieties, eg Rich tea, Digestive, Ginger Nuts, flapjacks, shortbread and wafers.

Savoury crackers and breadsticks can be provided, but they must be served with fruit or vegetables or a dairy food such as cheese.

Standard 3: Savoury snacks

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

Savoury snacks include:

- crisps or 'crisp like' products eg potato, corn and cereal snacks;
- nuts, seed, fruit or vegetables with added salt, sugar or fat eg salted nuts, honey roasted nuts and fruit coated in sugar, chocolate or yogurt.

* Some pupils may have 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.

Fruit and vegetables can include:

- all varieties of fresh fruit and vegetables;
- fresh fruit salad;
- fruit tinned in natural juice;
- unsweetened fruit juice (100% fruit juice);
- baked beans;
- salad vegetables;
- vegetable sticks.

* 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 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.

* Low calorie hot chocolate is defined as 20kcal/100mls.

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.**
In addition, breadcrumb fillet of fish (oven baked) can be served once 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.**

Fried and 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 brushed or sprayed with oil;
- chips, roast potatoes, other fried potatoes, oven chips, potato waffles and potato shapes;
- garlic bread;
- pastry dishes eg quiche, meat pies, fruit pies and vol-au-vents;
- fried fish products.

Meat and chicken products include:

- burgers;
- sausages, sausage meat and sausage products;
- any shaped or coated meat product, eg chicken nuggets, escallops and goujons.

It is expected that foods covered by this standard will mainly be served at lunch time. However if they are to be served at other times, eg at breakfast or break time the standard must be applied across the entire school week. For further guidance please see the standard for Fried and other high fat foods in Section 3 of this document's companion publication *Nutritional standards for school lunches*.

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.

- Red meat includes beef, pork and lamb and meals made from them.
- Red meat in sandwiches or paninis is not restricted by this standard outside of lunch time. The only exception is bacon. Although bacon is classed as a red meat it should only be served as part of a main meal such as breakfast or lunch. Bacon will be required to comply with the standard for red meat. Bacon is not a suitable sandwich filling because of its high salt content.

Section 4:

Implementing the standards

This section provides information on the types of food and drinks that may be offered outside the school lunch time. It also describes the foods that do not comply with the standards and therefore should not be served at these times.

Additional information and guidance is available in *School food: the essential guide* resource, which every school will have received, and which is also available from the PHA website: www.publichealth.hscni.net

Breakfast clubs

Breakfast is probably the most important meal of the day. It is needed to kick-start the body after a long night's rest. By skipping breakfast, pupils may be missing out on essential vitamins and minerals. Research conducted by the HPA shows that almost one third of 12–17 year old girls do not eat breakfast on school days.¹⁰

Eating a breakfast high in fibre can help prevent hunger pangs mid-morning, which means there is less likelihood of pupils snacking on foods containing fat and sugar.

Good choices to offer at breakfast can include both hot and cold items. Hot choices can add variety to a menu. Suitable hot choices include beans, eggs (boiled, scrambled or poached), omelettes, grilled tomatoes and mushrooms and freshly made pancakes.

Breakfast cereals

Breakfast cereals are a great way to start the day. They are fortified with vitamins and minerals that help children meet their daily requirement. Cereals should be served with semi-skimmed milk. Skimmed milk may be used but it is not suitable for children aged under five. Choose high fibre, lower sugar cereals.

Suitable cereals

- Porridge (good in the winter);
- Weetabix;
- Oatabix;
- Shredded Wheat;
- Shreddies;
- Ready Brek;
- All Bran.

Low fibre, low sugar cereals such as rice crispies and cornflakes can be offered.

Do not add sugar to cereal.

Bread at breakfast

Offer a variety of breads at breakfast. Try to include wholemeal and granary varieties.

Suitable bread choices

- Granary, wholemeal bread;
- Multigrain bread;
- 'Half-n-half' bread, ie half white, half wholemeal;
- White bread;
- Crusty bread;
- Pancakes;
- Bagels;
- Potato bread;
- Soda bread;
- Wheaten bread;
- Rolls.

Try to provide a margarine that is labelled high in monounsaturates or polyunsaturates, or choose a low-fat alternative. Encourage pupils to spread the margarine thinly.

Discourage the use of sugary toppings such as jam and marmalade. Offer alternative toppings for toast, eg banana or low-fat soft cheese.

Jam and marmalade can be provided, but only at the servery and on request from the children.

Fruit and vegetables at breakfast

They provide a good source of vitamins and minerals and count towards our five a day target. A variety of fruit must be provided at breakfast, and consider providing vegetables as well.

Suitable fruit and vegetables

- Unsweetened 100% fruit juice;
- Fresh fruit, eg pineapple, strawberries, melon, grapes, apples, bananas, pears and kiwi. Try cutting up fruit to make it easier for kids to choose a variety;
- Fresh fruit salad;
- Fruit tinned in natural juice;
- Fruit such as strawberries and bananas added to cereals;
- Dried fruit that has not been sugared or coated in yogurt or chocolate can be added to cereals;
- Grilled or baked tomatoes and mushrooms;
- Cherry tomatoes;
- Baked beans.

Milk and dairy foods at breakfast

They provide a good source of protein and a range of vitamins and minerals such as calcium, which is important for healthy bones and teeth. Choose low-fat dairy foods such as semi-skimmed milk, low-fat yogurt and half fat or light cheese.

Not allowed at breakfast

- Cereal coated with chocolate;
- Dried fruit that has been sugared or coated in yogurt or chocolate;
- Cereal bars;
- Fruit bars;
- Cakes and buns;
- All biscuits;
- Pastries such as croissants, Danish and tarts;
- Chocolate spread;
- Any type of confectionery, eg chocolate products and sweets (for more information, see standards 1, 2 and 3);
- Savoury snacks, eg crisps.

Restrictions that apply across the school day

- 1) Meat or chicken products and foods that are fried or high in fat. See standard 7.
- 2) There should also be at least two days each week without any meat or chicken products, fried and other high fat foods being served across the whole school day. For more information see standard 7.
- 3) 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. For more information see standard 8.

Breakfast menu suggestions

Wholemeal toast with sliced banana
Glass of semi-skimmed milk

Porridge with semi-skimmed milk
Glass of unsweetened fruit juice

Shredded Wheat with semi-skimmed milk
Toasted pancake with a light spread of margarine
Glass of unsweetened fruit juice

Toasted crumpets with scrambled egg
Fruit smoothie (made with fresh fruit and low-fat yogurt)

Toasted bread muffin with a thin spread of
low-fat soft cheese
Fruit salad
Glass of semi-skimmed milk

Weetabix with chopped banana and semi-skimmed milk
Glass of water or unsweetened fruit juice

Ready Brek with raisins
Pancake with a light spread of margarine
Glass of unsweetened fruit juice

Baked beans and grilled tomato
Toasted soda with a light spread of margarine
Glass of semi-skimmed milk

Wheaten bread with low-fat cheese
Fruit smoothie

Poached egg with grilled or baked tomato and mushrooms
Toasted potato bread
Glass of unsweetened fruit juice

Healthier breaks

This information in this section relates to all break time services that are profit making, including dining rooms, tuck shops and vending machines.

Many schools will have in place a healthier break scheme policy. This is good practice and should be encouraged in all schools.

Remember, a variety of fruit and vegetables must be provided in all school food outlets.

Suitable healthy break snacks

- Pieces of fresh fruit, eg banana or melon;
- Fruit pots of sliced or chopped fresh fruit;
- Canned fruit in natural juice;
- Salad pots;
- Vegetable sticks with a low-fat dip;
- Raw vegetables such as tomatoes, carrots, celery, peppers and cucumber;
- Nuts* and seeds (with no added salt or sugar);
- Bread or pancakes with a thin spread of margarine (refer to breakfast section);
- Scones (plain or wholemeal), dried fruit (not glace cherries) with a thin spread of margarine;
- Breakfast cereals with semi-skimmed milk (refer to breakfast section, page 14);
- Plain breadsticks or crackers with a dairy, fruit or vegetable portion;
- Sandwiches;
- Filled bagels, baguettes, pitta bread or rolls;
- Tortilla wraps;
- Toasted sandwiches, paninis;
- Pizza made from a bread base, eg vegetable and cheese and tomato.

* Some pupils may have 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.

Not allowed at breaks

- Any type of confectionery, eg chocolate products and sweets;
- Cereal bars;
- Fruit bars;
- Dried fruit that has been sugared or coated in yogurt or chocolate;
- Crisps and crisp-like products such as tortilla chips, potato sticks, corn chips, prawn crackers, puff crackers;
- Pretzels;
- Bombay mix;
- Nuts with added fat, salt or sugar;
- Cakes or buns of any kind;
- All biscuits;
- Pastries: croissants, Danish, tarts etc;
- Chocolate spread;
- Jams, marmalades and honey.

Restrictions that apply across the school day

- 1) Meat or chicken products and foods that are fried or high in fat. See standard 7.
- 2) There should also be at least two days each week without any meat or chicken products, fried and other high fat foods being served across the whole school day. For more information see standard 7.
- 3) 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. For more information see standard 8.

Appendices

Appendix 1: 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 other food and drinks in schools. Please use it when you introduce or amend a menu. Complete a checklist for every week in a menu cycle.

Nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools checklist

PS = primary school standard

SS = special school standard

PPS = post-primary school standard

Our school ensures that:		Standard applies:	Compliant?	
			Yes	No
We do not sell confectionery.		At all times	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We provide cakes and biscuits only at lunch time and as part of a meal.		At all times	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We do not provide savoury snacks other than nuts and seeds (without added salt or sugar).		At all times	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We make available a variety of fruit and vegetables (which may include fresh, dried, frozen, tinned and juiced products).		At all times	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children have access to free, fresh and preferably chilled water.		At all times	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The only drinks available are plain water (still or sparkling), milk, unsweetened fruit or veg juices, yogurt and milk drinks (with less than 5% added sugar), or drinks made from combinations of these (eg smoothies containing at least 50% milk, yogurt or fruit juice), low calorie hot chocolate (less than 20kcal per 100ml), tea and coffee.		At all times	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We restrict fried and other high fat foods.		Max: twice per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We restrict 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"/>
There are days when no meat or chicken products, fried foods, or foods cooked in batter, breadcrumbs or pastry are available.		Min: two days per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We restrict 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"/>

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