

Are you packing a healthy lunch?



Getting the balance right

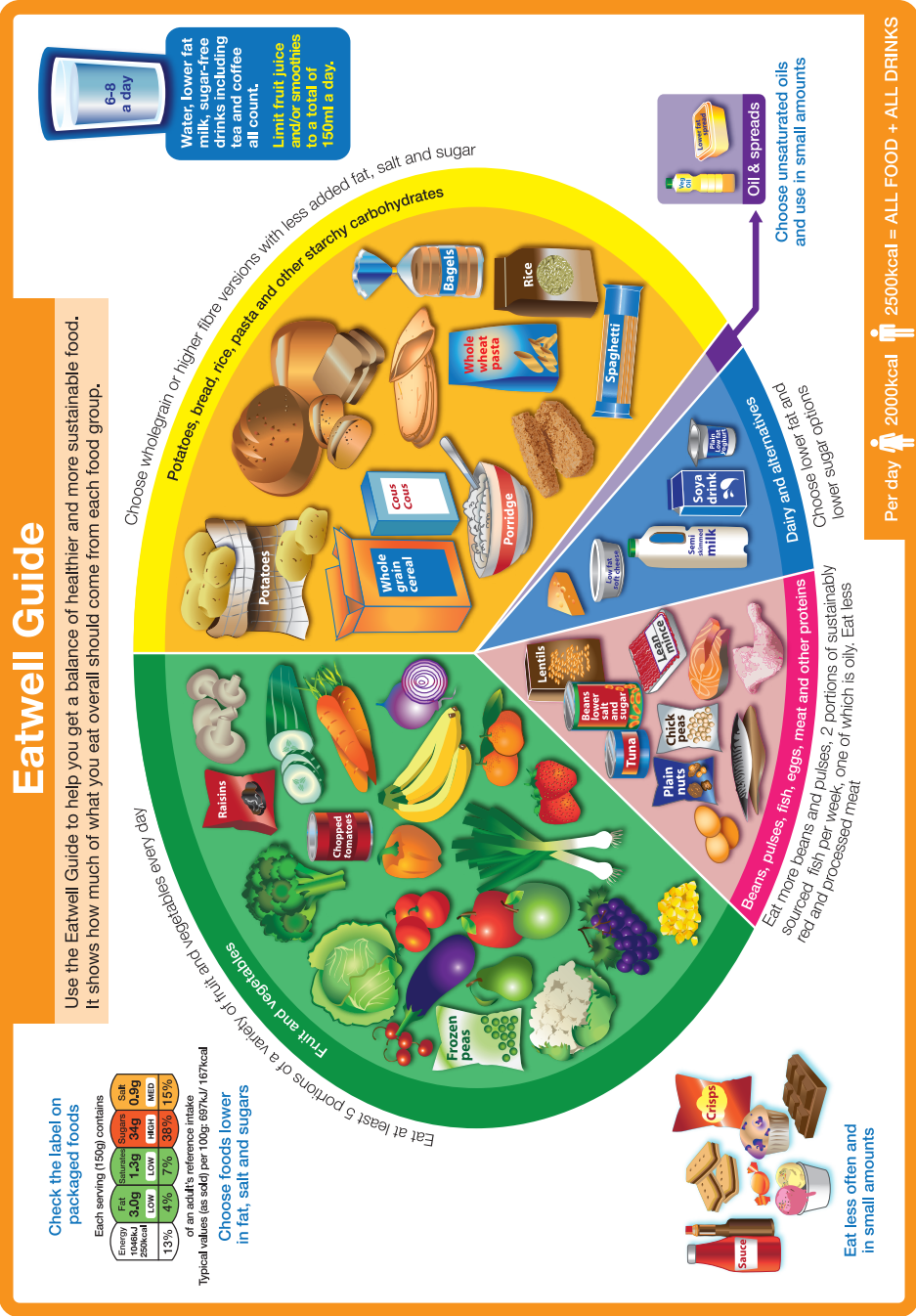
Positive eating habits established early in life can last a lifetime. Sending children to school with a nutritious lunchbox can make a valuable contribution to your children’s diet and can help your child get all the nutrients they need to keep them healthy and strong.

Recent surveys looking at children’s lunchboxes found that they were too high in fat (especially saturated fat), salt and sugar, and just under half of lunchboxes contained no fruit. This leaflet provides practical tips for you and your child on how to prepare a healthier lunchbox.

The Eatwell Guide opposite shows the different types of food we eat and the amounts we should aim for to achieve a healthy balanced diet. A healthy lunchbox includes at least one serving from each food group.

Foods and drinks high in fat, salt or sugar are not needed in the lunchbox. These foods should be eaten less often and only in small amounts (not every day). Remember to cut down all fats and choose lower fat spreads, cheese and leaner meats in your sandwiches. The table below shows the main contributors.

	Fat	Salt	Sugar
Butter/spreads	✓		
Crisps	✓	✓	
Cheese	✓		
Biscuits	✓		✓
Chocolate bars	✓		✓
Processed meats, eg ham		✓	
Fizzy drinks			✓
Ready to drink juice drinks			✓



Tired of packing the same old lunch? Try these ideas to add variety

- Use different varieties of bread, such as pitta bread, bagels, rolls, wheaten bread or wraps. Try a variety of white, wholemeal and granary.
- Cook extra pasta or couscous in the evening and include it as an alternative to bread.
- Theme your lunchbox on a different country, eg Italy – add a homemade pizza slice, Mexico – fill a tortilla wrap.
- Home-made soup (in a thermos flask) is great for cold days, while raw vegetables and salads are light and refreshing for warmer weather. Both are packed with essential vitamins and minerals.
- Get your child excited about packed lunches. Let them help choose the contents. Pick a colourful water bottle and lunchbox or let them decorate one with stickers.

Children often need to see and taste new foods many times before they accept them, so try out new ideas at teatime or the weekend before including them in a lunchbox.



What to pack in a healthy lunchbox

Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates



Starchy foods will help your child feel satisfied, as well as being a good source of energy and B vitamins. Choose wholegrain, wholemeal or granary options where possible as these are higher in fibre. Why not try some of these suggestions?

- 2 slices of bread
- 2 small bread rolls
- 1 tortilla wrap
- 1 or 2 mini pitta breads
- 1 bagel
- ½ a soda or wheaten farl
- 2–3 tablespoons of cooked rice, pasta or couscous
- a slice of homemade pizza - choose one with a vegetable or fruit topping, such as pineapple, sweetcorn or peppers

Did you know?

If your child doesn't like wholegrain bread, try breads made with half white and half wholemeal flour to boost their fibre intake.



Fruit and vegetables



Help your child get their five a day by putting two portions of fruit and vegetables in their lunchbox (ideally one fruit and one vegetable). A portion could be:

- 1 medium sized piece of fruit, eg apple, orange, banana, pear
- 2 small fruits, eg kiwi fruits, satsumas, plums
- 1 cup of grapes, cherries or berries
- 1 large slice of pineapple or melon
- 1 heaped tablespoon of dried fruit, eg raisins, or 3 dried apricots (this should be part of lunch rather than a snack because of its high natural sugar content)
- 1 cereal bowl of salad, eg lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber and celery
- 3 heaped tablespoons of fresh or frozen veg, eg chopped, sliced or grated carrots, peppers, or sweetcorn
- 150ml of pure unsweetened fruit juice or fruit smoothie
- 3 heaped tablespoons of fruit salad (fresh or tinned in fruit juice) or stewed fruit.

For younger children (4–6 years), reduce these portion sizes by about half, then increase the amount as they grow. Older primary school children should be eating full portions. To reduce the risk of choking in young children under the age of five years, smaller fruits and vegetables like grapes and cherry tomatoes should be halved by cutting lengthways.

Visit www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/5-a-day/5-a-day-what-counts for more information.

Did you know?

You can only count fruit or vegetable juices as one of your fruit and veg portions. Remember fruit juice and/or smoothies should be limited to **no more than 150ml per day in total**.

Remove

this middle section from the staples and display as a reminder for lunchbox ideas!



LunchBOX

PLanner

Lunchbox 1

Bagel with tuna,
sweetcorn and
low-fat mayo

Water

Fresh fruit
chopped into
yogurt



Lunchbox 2

Soda bread pizza with
tomato and cheese

Vegetable sticks with
hummus

Fruit smoothie (max 150ml)

Lunchbox 6

Ham salad pitta
bread

Banana

Yogurt

Water



Lunchbox 7

Chicken, lettuce,
tomato, onion and low-fat
mayo wrap

Water

Pot of low sugar custard
and grapes

Lunchbox 3

Roast beef, lettuce,
tomato roll

Fruit salad

Yogurt

Water



Lunchbox 4

Rice salad with salmon and
vegetables

Milk

Handful
of raisins

Kiwi fruit



Lunchbox 5

Crackers and small tub of hummous

Yogurt

A pear

Cherry tomatoes

Small carton of pure fruit juice
(150ml carton)

Lunchbox 8

Egg and onion sandwich

Carrot sticks

Fruit pot
Milk



Lunchbox 9

Vegetable soup and
wheaten bread

Peeled boiled egg

Apple

Milk

Lunchbox 10

pasta with cherry
tomatoes, mozzarella
and vegetables

Grapes

Yogurt

Fruit smoothie



For more ideas, check out:

www.safefood.net/Healthy-Eating/Children/School-lunchboxes

www.youtube.com/watch?v=JN8YfPjGnGs

www.pha.site/healthy-eating



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Dairy and alternatives



Make sure your child is getting enough calcium by putting one of these in their lunchbox:

- a container/mini-carton of milk (200ml)
- a pot of reduced sugar custard or rice pudding
- a pot of low-fat yogurt*
- a matchbox-sized piece of cheese such as cheddar, edam or gouda varieties
- 2 triangles of spreadable cheese

Children over two years of age can have lower fat dairy products if they are eating well. Plain milk is the best option as flavoured milks have added sugar, but if using flavoured milk, compare brands by checking the nutrition labels, and only offer these at mealtimes. If using a milk alternative like soya, oat or nut milk, these should be fortified with calcium and unsweetened.

*Many yogurts contain high amounts of added sugar. Unsweetened options like natural or greek style yogurts are best. Or choose lower sugar options by comparing nutrition labels.

Did you know?

Lower fat milk, cheese and yogurt still has the same amount of calcium as full fat versions, which supports growing bones and teeth.





Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins



Protein is important to help your child grow, so include one of the following options in your child's lunchbox:

- 2 slices of cooked meat
- 2 slices of chicken or turkey breast
- 1–2 eggs (hard-boiled, sliced or mashed)
- half a small can of tuna, salmon, mackerel or sardines
- 2 tablespoons of chickpea spread, eg hummus – try it as a dip with carrots/celery

Try to include a portion of fish at least once a week. Remember to remove any bones and choose tinned fish in spring water rather than in brine or oil.

Did you know?

Processed meats like ham, bacon and sausages are high in salt. Use these less often and instead choose options from the list on the left.

Nuts and other food allergies

Nuts and nut products are suitable for most people; however, a child who has a nut allergy can be affected even if there are nuts in someone else's lunchbox. Many schools have a 'no nuts' policy but there may also be children in the school with allergies to other foods. Your school will be able to provide advice on what foods should be avoided.



You can find out more about food allergies at www.safefood.net/food-safety/allergy-and-intolerance/food-allergies

Healthier treats

Many schools have healthy eating policies that encourage children and parents not to bring sweets, chocolate, crisps and fizzy drinks for break or lunch. Below is a list of options that can be provided in your children's lunchbox occasionally as a treat.



- Fruit loaf
- Mini fruit muffin
- A plain bun or slice of plain cake
- A small slice of banana bread
- Sugar-free jelly pots

Remember

These treats contain sugar, so these should only be eaten at mealtimes when they are less damaging to teeth.

Thirst quenchers

It is important that children drink enough during the day, so that they don't become dehydrated and tired. Drinks should always be included for break time and lunch. Water and milk are the most suitable drinks for children. If providing pure fruit juice or smoothie, remember to limit these to 150mls per day in total. Ordinary and diet varieties of squashes/diluting juice, colas, lemonades and fizzy drinks are not recommended. If used, they should be kept to main meals. Squashes should be well diluted.

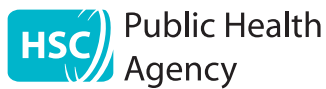
Did you know?

If you put fruit juice in your child's lunchbox, give them a straw, as drinking through a straw can help prevent dental erosion.

Top tips

Help keep lunches cool and safe by following these tips.

- Sandwiches containing meat or other foods that need to be refrigerated should be kept as cold as possible until lunch.
- Use an insulated box or bag to help keep lunches cool. Put in a small ice pack or alternatively include a frozen fruit juice carton, pure unsweetened fruit juice or bottle of water (fill one third full, freeze and then top up with water).
- To keep the cold air in, minimise the number of times your child needs to open the lunchbox. Pack things that don't need to be kept cold separately.
- It's important lunches are not kept in a warm place, such as near radiators or in direct sunlight – ask your child's teacher if there's a suitable place for lunches to be stored.
- Pop in a piece of kitchen roll for wiping sticky fingers or mopping up spills.
- Always remember to wash your hands before preparing food and remind your child to wash theirs before eating.



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