

# Healthy food and drink choices in schools

**GREEN**  
Fill the  
menu



**AMBER**  
Select  
carefully



**RED**  
Off the  
menu



Australian Better Health Initiative: A joint Australian, State and Territory initiative. Acknowledgement NSW Health

## Tips for including in school newsletters

### Breakfast

- ✓ Eat breakfast every day. Missing meals, especially breakfast, can reduce brain efficiency and concentration.
- ✓ Before school, build a breakfast around fruit, low sugar cereals or porridge, wholegrain breads/bagels/English muffins, smoothies, yoghurt and baked beans.
- ✓ Enjoy a drink of water or milk to replenish fluids first thing in the morning.
- ✓ Breakfast tip: add fruit to breakfast cereal or yoghurt.
- ✓ Breakfast tip: top toast with sliced bananas.

### Encouraging children to eat fruit and vegetables

- ✓ The best way to encourage children to eat fruit and vegetables is for parents to have them everyday themselves. It may take time but children learn best by watching their parents and family. So keep trying!
- ✓ Remember to enjoy meals together with your children whenever possible. If children see you eating and enjoying a wide variety of fruit and vegetables, they are more likely to join in.
- ✓ Serve fruit, salad and vegetables every day for good health, vitality and improved immunity.
- ✓ Keep offering vegetables and fruit in a variety of ways as children learn to eat what is familiar to them. Children's tastes do change with age.
- ✓ Keep offering fruit and vegetables even when children avoid eating them.
- ✓ Take your child fruit and vegetable shopping and let them see, smell and choose the fruit and vegetables with you.
- ✓ You are better off choosing a piece of fruit over a fruit drink as drinks may contain energy but little fibre.
- ✓ Go for 2 fruit and 5 vegetables, especially if they are raw, steamed or baked.

- ✓ Grow some vegetables or herbs in the garden or in a pot. Let your child water and nurture the plants.
- ✓ Look for a variety of colours at every serving including yellow, orange, green, purple and red.
- ✓ Make vegetables and fruit look great on the plate. Serve different coloured fruit and vegetables.
- ✓ Sometimes children may prefer raw vegetables rather than cooked.
- ✓ Keep a bowl of fresh fruit handy, and vegetables such as peas, cherry tomatoes, baby carrots and mushrooms in the fridge to grab for a quick snack.
- ✓ Keep the fruit bowl 'topped up' or have fruit salad in the fridge.
- ✓ Keep some cut vegetable sticks in containers in the fridge to encourage snacking on carrot and celery sticks.
- ✓ How much is enough? One serve of vegetables is 75 grams or
  - 1/2 cup cooked vegetables or cooked legumes or
  - 1 medium potato or
  - 1 cup salad vegetables.
- ✓ How much is enough? One serve of fruit is 150 grams of fresh fruit or
  - 1 medium piece eg apple or
  - 2 small pieces eg apricots or
  - 1 cup canned or chopped fruit.
- ✓ Freeze bananas, grapes, strawberries and oranges for an icy snack.
- ✓ Puree fruit and pour into iceblock moulds to add to drinks.
- ✓ Grate apple or pear into pancake mix, or add fresh or dried fruit to muffin or cake mixtures.

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- ✓ Always be on the lookout for ways to include more vegetables – try grating vegetables into pasta sauces, homemade hamburger patties and soups.
- ✓ Always wash fruit and vegetables before you eat or prepare them.
- ✓ Foods such as dried fruits and fruit bars may be seen as healthy snack alternatives. However they may contain high concentrations of natural sugar and tend to cling to the teeth more readily. This can contribute to tooth decay just like confectionery so, to reduce this risk, limit these foods to meal times.

### Fruit and vegetables as sources of nutrition

- ✓ Fruit and vegetables are good sources of vitamin A. Vitamin A is found in large amounts in dark green, yellow and orange fruit and vegetables eg carrots, pumpkin, spinach and rockmelon. Vitamin A keeps skin and eyes healthy and also defends the body against infection.
- ✓ Fruit and vegetables are good sources of vitamin C. Vitamin C is found mainly in fruits and vegetables such as tomatoes, capsicum, broccoli, cabbage, citrus fruit, rockmelon and kiwi fruit. Vitamin C helps your body to absorb iron from food.
- ✓ Fruit and vegetables are good sources of folate. Folate is found in green vegetables, dried peas, beans and lentils. Folate has been found to prevent the birth defect spina bifida.
- ✓ Fruit and vegetables are a good source of fibre. High fibre foods are filling so they help satisfy appetite for longer.

### Dairy

- ✓ The Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend the use of reduced fat milk for children older than two years as part of a varied diet and skim milk may be used as a drink for children from the age of five years.
- ✓ Make reduced fat milks, yoghurts and cheeses your choice or consider non-dairy alternatives such as calcium fortified soy milk. Salmon with bones, almonds, baked beans and broccoli are also good sources of calcium.
- ✓ Did you know cola drinks interfere with the absorption of calcium?

### Planning meals

- ✓ Healthy families plan, prepare and eat meals together where possible.
- ✓ Plan all meals and the shopping list before you shop. Check you have included lots of fruit and vegetables.
- ✓ Once in the shop, be flexible enough to take advantage of specials. Swap to fruit and vegetables in season if they are cheaper.
- ✓ Shop regularly so fruit and vegetables are fresh, look good, taste good and keep their nutritional value.

### Shopping

- ✓ Get children involved in shopping and preparing meals.
- ✓ Spend most of the shopping budget on 'eat most' foods. These foods contain vitamins, minerals and fibre – and are the food nutritionists recommend you should eat the most of. They include fruit, vegetables and legumes, and cereals and grain foods (for example, breads, flour, pasta and rice). Eat these foods every day in large amounts.
- ✓ Spend moderately on 'eat moderately' foods. These foods contain protein, vitamins and minerals (such as iron and calcium). They include lean red meat, fish, chicken, eggs, cheese, milk and nuts. We need some of these foods every day in moderate amounts.
- ✓ Spend least on 'eat least' foods. These foods are high in fat, sugar and salt, and do not provide many essential nutrients. They include chocolate, crisps, sweet biscuits, cordials, soft drinks, coffee, fatty meats (sausages, bacon) and full fat pies. Only eat these foods sometimes and in small amounts.
- ✓ If your child is already used to sweet drinks such as soft drinks or cordial, start now to limit them and break the habit by not buying them.
- ✓ Keep staples like bread, cheese, yoghurt and tinned fruit handy for quick snacks.
- ✓ When fresh fruit and vegetables are in limited supply, check the price of frozen or canned varieties. These may be a substitute at a better price.
- ✓ When shopping, choose brands of frozen or canned fruits and vegetables with 'reduced' or 'no added' fat, salt and sugar.
- ✓ Choose wholegrain options whenever possible.

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### Mealtimes

- ✓ Try to eat as a family as often as possible.
- ✓ Try to eat at set meal times.
- ✓ Try to avoid eating in front of the television or computer.
- ✓ Remember to praise your child for eating healthily.
- ✓ Children may refuse new foods if mealtimes are stressful so try and focus on the positives about the meal and avoid arguments.
- ✓ Don't fight with your children over food.
- ✓ Don't force children to finish everything on their plate.
- ✓ Encourage children to listen to their stomachs: eat until you have had enough, not until you are full. Your stomach will let you know the difference.
- ✓ Encourage children to eat slowly and to stop when they are full.
- ✓ Offer small serves on the plate. Children can always come back for more if they are hungry.
- ✓ It's not unusual for busy children to eat very little at the evening meal. Make sure after school snacks are nutritious and varied.
- ✓ Offer words of encouragement but don't force your child to eat. Try not to fuss if your child refuses to eat a particular food. Just keep offering that food at other times.
- ✓ Plan meals around vegetables, rice and pasta first and then fish, chicken or meat for flavour.
- ✓ Extend meat dishes with cheaper vegetables such as carrots, potatoes and cabbage.

### Eating out

- ✓ Takeaway foods can make life much easier when you are on holidays, stretched for time or haven't been able to do the grocery shopping. Some takeaways are high in fat and salt. When choosing takeaways, use it as an opportunity to educate your children about why you have made a healthier choice.
- ✓ Some food outlets offer 'upgrades' to larger serves. Think before you order and decide if you really need a larger meal and the extra kilojoules, fat and sugar that come with it.
- ✓ Avoid ordering the same foods at lunch from the canteen or only eating your favourite foods.

- ✓ There are heaps of healthier takeaway options to choose from. Try sushi, pita wraps, baked potatoes, souvlaki, kebabs, vegetable or seafood pizzas, tabouli, falafels, steamed rice with vegetables, baked chicken, grilled fish and steamed dim sims.
- ✓ Healthier desserts include fruit salad and fruit smoothies.

### School lunches

- ✓ A healthy lunch should include fruit, vegetables, wholegrains, meat or alternatives, dairy products and water.
- ✓ Ask your children what they would like (within reason!) in their school lunch.
- ✓ Keep lunch boxes interesting. Offer a variety of lunch foods including sandwiches, rolls, wraps and cold salads.
- ✓ Try not to include biscuits, cakes, chocolates, energy bars, chips and confectionery.
- ✓ Peer pressure and food marketing urging children to try all sorts of foods can be very strong. Let your children try these foods occasionally.
- ✓ Keep food cold in the lunch box with a frozen icebrick and insulated bag.

### Physical activity

- ✓ Children need to be doing at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day to keep healthy. Remember that more is better!
- ✓ Healthy families are physically active after school and work every day.
- ✓ Enjoy 'mucking around' instead of watching television.
- ✓ Healthy families limit screen entertainment to less than one hour a day.
- ✓ Activity, whether as sport or play, is crucial for a child to successfully control their weight.
- ✓ Children love to be active. Making physical activity a part of their daily routine is not only fun but also healthy.
- ✓ Encouraging children to be active when they are young establishes a routine that could stay with them throughout their life.
- ✓ Be a role model – be active when you're with children.



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- ✓ Include physical activity in family outings.
- ✓ Encourage and support walking and cycling to school.
- ✓ Think of active alternatives when you hear “I’m bored”.
- ✓ Be prepared – have a box at home and in the car with balls, a Frisbee or kite and you will always be ready for action.
- ✓ Give gifts or toys that promote physical activity such as bats, balls, skipping ropes, skates and bikes.
- ✓ Go rollerblading or iceskating instead of to a movie.
- ✓ Physical activity can promote healthy growth and development.
- ✓ Physical activity can build strong bones and muscles.
- ✓ Physical activity can improve balance and develop skills.
- ✓ Physical activity can maintain and develop flexibility.
- ✓ Physical activity can help achieve and maintain a healthy weight.
- ✓ Physical activity can improve cardiovascular fitness.
- ✓ Physical activity can help relaxation.
- ✓ Physical activity can improve posture.
- ✓ Physical activity can provide opportunities to make friends.
- ✓ Physical activity can improve self esteem.
- ✓ Walk to the shops or park.
- ✓ Impact exercise such as walking, running and skipping stimulates the body to lay down bone.
- ✓ Girls in particular need to continue impact exercise through their life.

### Healthy teeth

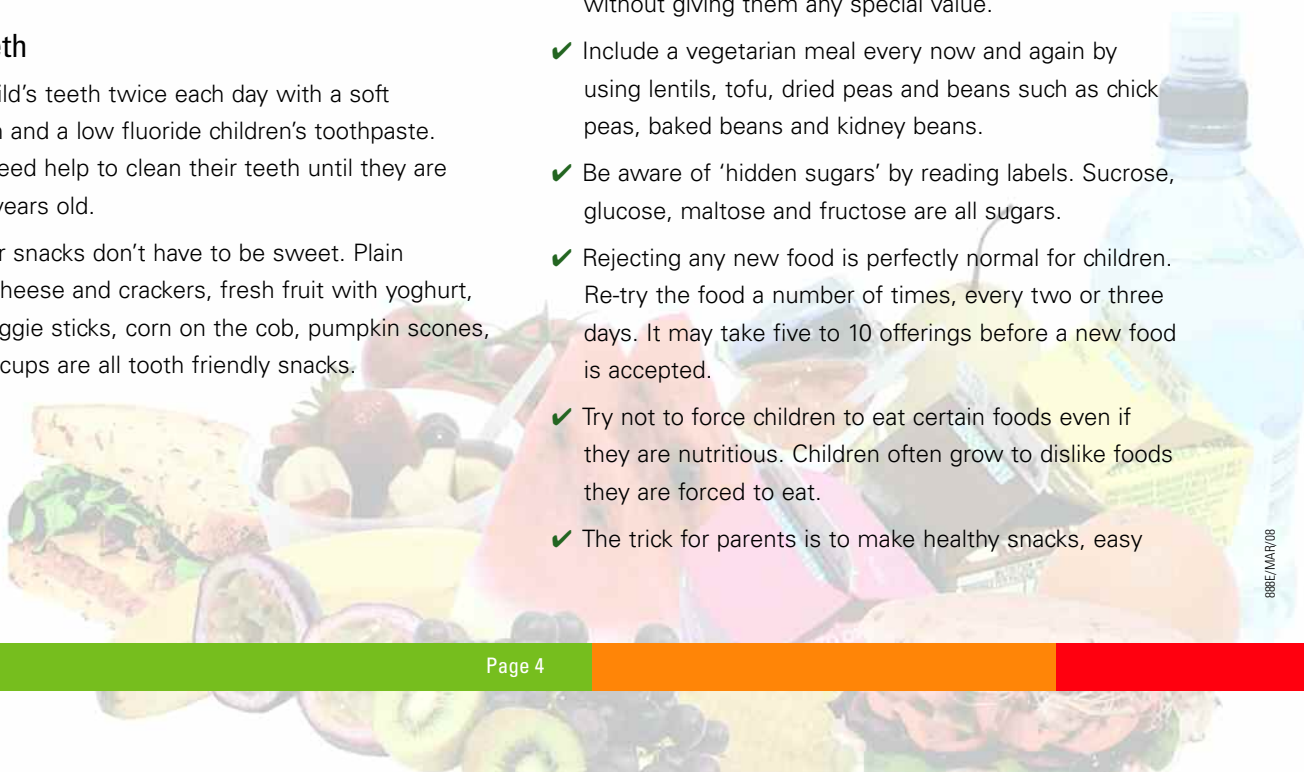
- ✓ Clean a child’s teeth twice each day with a soft toothbrush and a low fluoride children’s toothpaste. Children need help to clean their teeth until they are about six years old.
- ✓ Remember snacks don’t have to be sweet. Plain popcorn, cheese and crackers, fresh fruit with yoghurt, dip and veggie sticks, corn on the cob, pumpkin scones, fruit salad cups are all tooth friendly snacks.

### Thirst quenchers

- ✓ Water is the best thirst quencher. Carry a water bottle with you every day and refill it often. Remember to clean it well at the end of each day.
- ✓ Drinks high in sugar contain mainly empty kilojoules and can increase the risk of tooth decay.
- ✓ Being dehydrated will affect thinking. Drink plenty of fluids, such as water, after sport or exercise.

### General

- ✓ According to the World Health Organisation, seven of the top 10 risks of disease and death involve poor diet and lack of activity.
- ✓ There are no ‘good’ foods or ‘bad’ foods. The key point is that children get the right balance of foods. It is more helpful to refer to food as ‘everyday’ food like fruit, vegetables, milk and bread, and ‘sometimes’ foods such as cakes, biscuits and confectionery.
- ✓ Include a variety of healthy foods and snacks every day.
- ✓ Stock the fridge and pantry with healthy foods including some that can be grabbed on the run.
- ✓ Don’t use food to reward, bribe or show your love to children.
- ✓ Don’t offer sweet and salty treats as a reward or withdraw them for bad behaviour. If food is offered as a reward then this food will be preferred above others. This only enhances the attention and demand for treats.
- ✓ Offer small treats as a small part of healthy eating without giving them any special value.
- ✓ Include a vegetarian meal every now and again by using lentils, tofu, dried peas and beans such as chick peas, baked beans and kidney beans.
- ✓ Be aware of ‘hidden sugars’ by reading labels. Sucrose, glucose, maltose and fructose are all sugars.
- ✓ Rejecting any new food is perfectly normal for children. Re-try the food a number of times, every two or three days. It may take five to 10 offerings before a new food is accepted.
- ✓ Try not to force children to eat certain foods even if they are nutritious. Children often grow to dislike foods they are forced to eat.
- ✓ The trick for parents is to make healthy snacks, easy



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snacks. Have some fruit salad or last night's leftovers in the fridge. Muffins with grilled tomato and cheese can be made in an instant.

- ✓ Remember the most important way to get children to eat well is for parents to have sound eating habits. Over time your eating habits will be picked up by your children. Children learn a lot by imitation.

### Information sourced from:

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