

Hungry for Success: A healthy packed lunch



This document has been produced by staff working in
Local Authorities and NHS Boards across Scotland, including:

Fife Council

Midlothian Council

NHS Forth Valley

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde

NHS Highland

NHS Tayside

North Lanarkshire Council

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1. Aim

This resource was produced to support teachers and parents in the provision of healthier packed lunches. It is based on the Eatwell model and supports implementation of Hungry for Success¹ and the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007². It encourages a whole school approach to eating well, with emphasis on a balanced and varied diet.

¹ Scottish Executive (2002) Hungry for Success: A Whole Approach to School Meals in Scotland

² Scottish Government (2007) Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007



2. Background

The history of the packed lunch

In Scotland for many years a packed lunch has also been referred to as a 'piece'. The 'piece', a packed lunch or snack, usually bread with a filling, goes back many generations. Workers carried their lunch to work with them, miners for example wrapping their 'piece' in newspaper.

In the early 1900s specially produced containers were made by tobacco companies, which when empty were used as lunch boxes. The lid often bore an illustration advertising the tobacco company. At that time, using a lunch pail was a sign you were far enough down the pay scale that you didn't have time or money for a decent hot meal at lunchtime. By the 1930s, children's toy manufacturers began to produce containers solely for the purpose of carrying lunch. These tin pails and boxes often had colourful illustrations and designs.

From the 1980s plastic became the material of choice, as it was more durable than metal or vinyl. Today, wide arrays of lunchboxes are available featuring popular cartoon characters. Some boxes are now insulated and others are created using anti-microbial materials. Compared with some years ago, having the 'correct' box is now a very important part of the lunchtime experience.

Changes in lunchbox contents

Over the years the content of lunchboxes has changed from the original 'piece' and children's lunchbox contents vary enormously. Today some lunchboxes contain healthy options whilst others are filled with convenient, less healthy options. A survey by the Food Standards Agency in 2004 found that nine out of ten children took food to school which contains too much salt, sugar and saturated fat³. The survey revealed that some lunchboxes provided half the daily recommended amount of salt for children. Levels of saturated fats and sugars were also in excess of recommendations, some children having twice the recommended intake for a lunchtime meal.

This data suggests that children are bringing foods and drinks from home which are not conducive to good health. The problem needs to be addressed by parents, teachers and children and this resource provides a whole school approach to tackling healthy packed lunches.

³ Community Nutrition Group & Food Standards Agency (2004) School Lunch Box Survey 2004



3. Information for teachers

(a) What does a healthy lunchbox look like?

This information will provide exciting ideas for making tasty, healthy packed lunches and is based on the guidance shown in the Eatwell model.



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This model shows the proportion and variety of foods which should come from each of the five food groups. Eating a diet in these types of proportions will help ensure that enough vitamins, minerals, protein and fibre are eaten without too much fat, especially saturates, and sugars. The five food groups are:

1. Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods
2. Fruit and vegetables
3. Milk and dairy foods
4. Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein
5. Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar



Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods

Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods are the main source of starchy carbohydrate providing energy in the diet. By choosing some whole grain products such as brown rice, wholemeal bread and wholegrain breakfast cereals, more dietary fibre and B group vitamins are included. A packed lunch should always contain a starchy carbohydrate food such as:

- Bread, rolls, baguettes, tortilla wraps, chapattis or bagels
- Pasta, rice or cous cous e.g. pasta salad
- Potatoes e.g. homemade potato salad with plain yoghurt and minimum mayonnaise

Fruit and vegetables

A third of the diet should be made up of fruit and vegetables and it is recommended that a minimum of five portions a day are eaten. Fruit and vegetables contain differing amounts of fibre, vitamins, minerals and plant chemicals which all promote good health. A packed lunch should aim to provide at least one portion of fruit and one portion of vegetables. This could include:

- Add salad to sandwiches
- Chop carrots, peppers and cucumber into sticks as a snack
- Vegetable soup in an unbreakable thermos
- A tub or small can of fruit salad, some grapes or a piece of seasonal fruit e.g. a clementine or peach
- Bananas, apples, pears and oranges
- Dried fruit such as apricots, sultanas, raisins and figs
- A small carton of pure, unsweetened fruit juice

Milk and dairy foods

The milk and dairy food group includes milk, cheese, yoghurts and fromage frais. It does not include butter, other spreads, cream or eggs. Fortified soya milk also falls into this category. These foods are an important source of calcium, protein, and vitamins B12, A and D. Packed lunches should aim to provide one portion from this group. This could include:

- A carton of yoghurt or fromage frais, preferably plain or fruit varieties
- A small carton of semi-skimmed milk
- A portion (30g) of cheese. Reduced fat cheese is preferable e.g. Edam, mozzarella, cottage or reduced fat cheddar



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

These foods provide protein as well as important minerals such as iron and zinc. Fish, especially oil-rich fish such as mackerel, sardines, pilchards, salmon and herring, provides omega-3 oils. Packed lunches should contain one item from this group unless cheese is chosen as an alternative. Consider:

- Sliced cold meat e.g. ham, turkey or chicken
- Canned fish, mashed with lemon juice or plain yoghurt
- Hard-boiled eggs
- Vegetarian alternatives such as hummus, and lentil or quorn based products

Foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar

Foods high in fat, and foods and drinks high in sugar add variety and interest to the diet but, because they are easy to over-consume, their consumption should be limited. They provide energy from the fat and sugar but little else in terms of nutritional value. The foods and drinks from this group, most likely to appear in lunchboxes include crisps, biscuits, cakes, chocolate confectionery, sugar confectionery and carbonated sweetened drinks. Where possible, try not to include these foods and drinks in a packed lunchbox, as some are no longer permitted in schools (see Appendix 1). This is due to Government legislation aiming to improve the diet and health of children across Scotland.



(b) Teacher/supervisor input at lunchtime

Hungry for Success: A whole school approach to school meals in Scotland emphasises the importance of enhancing the social aspect of lunchtime. As part of this, schools are encouraged to allow children with packed lunches to sit with friends who choose to have a school meal. Often, this is problematic in terms of space available in the dining room. However, a pupil-generated rota system, which permits pupils to join classmates taking a school meal at lunchtime, could alleviate this problem.

Adequate supervision of packed lunches helps to ensure that pupils eat a sufficient amount of food before going out to play. Adult input can also be useful in encouraging pupils to eat the savoury starchy meal component, e.g. sandwiches, first whilst they are still hungry, before eating yoghurts, fruit, etc. Any crisps, cakes, biscuits or other foods high in fat and sugar are best kept until last as these are not essential to well-being and can spoil appetite for more nutritious foods. Litter from lunch should go into the bin or back into the lunchbox.

It is important that pupils are not stigmatised, either for not having healthy items or for including healthy items in their lunchbox. A reward system for eating a well-balanced lunch has been tried in some schools. Parents or carers may need encouragement to include healthier items.

(c) Eating to appetite

A child's appetite will vary through their time at school and increases at times of rapid growth, especially during adolescence. Teachers/supervisors play an important role in advising parents what their child eats whilst at school. This needs to be handled sensitively, especially if the child is overweight. By observing at lunchtime, teachers/supervisors may be able to spot the child who has too much to eat, or those who could do with more.

However, other factors should also be considered, not least of which are the activity level and weight of the child. For example, a child who leaves food may have too much to eat, may be a slow eater, may have eaten large snacks at break-time or simply be a child who prefers playing to eating. A child who seems to have a large appetite may be having a growth spurt or be very active, and teachers may want to discuss adding more starchy foods, such as sandwiches, for additional energy rather than adding extra biscuits or cakes.



(d) Keeping food safe in school

It is essential that good basic hygiene be reinforced in the classroom. To reduce the risk of food poisoning:

1. Ensure there is a suitable place to keep lunchboxes. This should be away from radiators or windows where the temperature may rise. Some schools provide refrigerated storage
2. Always encourage hand washing before lunch is eaten
3. Strongly discourage pupils from swapping and eating other children's food.
It can make another child extremely unwell if they have a food allergy.
4. Ensure tables are wiped between lunch sittings since lunchboxes may have been on the ground

(e) Curriculum links

A whole-school approach to food in schools is required for effective promotion and encouragement of healthy eating. Nutrition and food activity can be taught across several areas of the curriculum and ideally are linked up with good practice in canteens, tuckshops and vending machines. Links with home, including the provision of healthier packed lunches, form part of a whole-school approach to the health promoting school, which creates a supportive, health-enhancing environment for pupils, staff and the wider community.



Curriculum link ideas for primary school teachers

Some pupil tasks are outlined below within a range of subject areas.

Languages

- Create a piece of functional writing explaining how to make a healthy lunch, a sandwich, or a mixed/fruit salad.
- Create a piece of personal or imaginative writing including a healthy lunchbox.
- Write and perform a short play about the importance of healthy eating in school.

Mathematics

- Undertake a survey of the content of packed lunches brought from home. Collate the information into a report, displaying information in the form of bar graphs, pie charts, etc.

Technologies

- Find out what children in other countries take to school in a packed lunchbox. Present the information in a variety of formats, i.e. information leaflet, spreadsheet, poster.
- Extension activity: Use nutritional analysis software to support work and provide ideas for healthier lunches.
- Design, make and evaluate a new, healthier recipe to be included in a packed lunchbox.
- Extension activity: How should this new dish be stored to make sure the food remains at its best until lunchtime?

Health and Wellbeing

- Find out the links between health and diet, focusing on lunchboxes. (Pupils may be involved in a workshop with a school nurse, dietitian, nutritionist or health promoting schools officer).
- Investigate which foods are a good source of energy for physical activity, exercise and sport.
- Record your food intake for a day using a food diary. Also write down how you felt at the time. Do you think what you ate, or didn't eat, affected your performance in class?



Social Studies

- Find out where a range of different foods originate, and the processes they go through before they reach your lunchbox or plate.
- Investigate what children ate during the school day during different periods in history e.g. World War 2.

Sciences

- Undertake an experiment to find out the effect of temperatures on food.
 - a. Why do certain foods need to be kept hot/cold?
 - b. How could you use this knowledge in relation to storing your lunch?

Curriculum link ideas for secondary school teachers

Technologies

- Design and make a dish, suitable for packed lunchboxes, which provides a healthy balance of ingredients, which is to be marketed to your friends. You have to work within a set budget for your ingredients and your marketing materials.

Health and Wellbeing

- Investigate the outcomes of consuming a poor diet over a lifetime.
 - a. What (statistical) evidence supports your claim?
 - b. What changes could be made early on to prevent the onset of diet related disease?
- Consuming a varied, well-balanced diet and being physically active are unquestionably interlinked.
 - a. Complete a food diary and an activity diary to estimate the amount of energy you consume and the amount you use up.
 - b. Analyse one day from your food diary to determine the total calorie intake for that day.

Sciences

- Study different types of moulds and the process by which these grow on food.
 - a. How does this knowledge influence how food is stored at home and how lunchboxes are stored at school?



Whole-school projects

Eco schools

The Eco schools initiative is an international programme designed to encourage whole-school action to environmental issues. In Scotland, Eco schools cover a range of environmental topics, including, health and well being, and litter.

Litter

Pupils should be encouraged to develop a school litter policy targeting reduction and prevention of litter. This is particularly important in terms of packed lunchboxes and what happens to empty packaging. The policy should encompass appropriate disposal of lunchbox waste including compostable waste such as fruit and vegetable peels and cores.

Health

Pupils could examine the links between health and the environment, drawing up a whole-school health action plan. The task could include an audit of health and well being, specifically relating to healthy eating during the school day.

Enterprise

Determined to Succeed is a Scottish Executive strategy, aiming to develop enterprise in education. This initiative supports increased self-esteem, confidence and ambition in young people, encouraging the use of skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership and decision making. Determined to Succeed encourages enterprise in relation to food in school and healthy eating. Many schools run enterprise projects as part of their whole school curriculum.

An enterprise project can easily incorporate aspects of food and nutrition. A pupil task is outlined below.

1. Develop a new, healthier product for inclusion in a packed lunch box.
2. Market this product to peers, parents, teachers and the wider community.
3. Set up a pre-lunch shop to sell their product to fellow pupils.
4. Market this new product to local businesses, taking into account other markets, e.g. organic produce, Fairtrade goods, etc.



(f) Working with parents

It is important that consistent messages are provided throughout the school day, as well as at home. This means consulting many people about what is suitable to be included in a packed lunchbox. This can be facilitated by a Pupil Council, School Nutrition Action Group (SNAG), or Health Promotion Committee.

How to engage parents

- Display healthier lunchbox ideas at parents' evenings or send literature home with ideas.
- Create a buzz around a theme day: a fruity Friday, Caribbean day, etc.
- Give parents lots of help with top tips in school newsletters, on the school website, prospectus or brochure.
- Ask parents and pupils what they would like to see in lunchboxes and what support they may need to achieve this.

Top tips

- Encourage pupils to come up with ideas. This is more effective than a leaflet drop.
- Invite parents to an assembly to hear children talking about healthy eating and the work they have been doing in relation to this.

(g) Example packed lunch policy

Schools may wish to develop a packed lunch policy for the whole-school community. An example of what information could be included in such a policy is detailed in Appendix 2.



Case Study

An example of using a whole-school approach to improve the content of packed lunches in school

Classroom workshop

A Scottish primary school invited the community dietitian to speak to Primary 6 and 7 about healthy packed lunches. After a quick verbal recap on healthy eating, the class were split into pairs and given information on packed lunches and a worksheet to complete. They were asked to design a healthy but interesting packed lunch including plenty of carbohydrates, fruit and vegetables, some protein and a drink. They were also asked to include an 'extra' which could have been from a choice of yoghurt, lower fat crisps, fruit bread or other homebaking, etc. They were encouraged to use the 'Eating for Health' model as a guide to a balanced packed lunch.

Parents health evening

The teacher and dietitian chose the best three examples, looking for variety, balance and creativity. The three pairs were asked to attend an upcoming health evening to make up their packed lunches and display them along with leaflets for parents. The pupils manned the stand and spoke to parents about how their packed lunches were balanced and healthy. Pupils also made extra sandwiches and pasta salad to give out as tasters. Having the pupils involved appealed to the parents and the pupils enjoyed the experience of passing on information to adults.

Allied activities at health evenings

Display examples of foods to include in a healthy packed lunch. For example:

- a wide range of breads, rolls, wraps, bagels, baguettes, pasta/rice salads
- many different fruits and vegetables - fruit salad, dried fruit, cherry tomatoes, cucumber and carrot sticks, etc
- dairy products - small cartons of milk, yoghurt and fromage frais
- sandwich fillings such as tuna, egg, sardines, salmon and lean meat
- bottles of plain water or cartons of pure, unsweetened fruit juice

Also show items that are 'not so healthy' e.g. cans of fizzy juice, chocolate bars, large packets of crisps, biscuits, sweets, processed lunchbox items, etc. Discuss with parents and children what they put in to a packed lunch, pointing out why some items would be discouraged.



4. Information for parents

(a) What does a healthy lunchbox include?

Use the 'Have you included?' checklist below to make sure that your child has a good balance of food and drinks to cover all the essential nutrients and energy he or she needs at lunchtime.

Children often get bored of eating the same foods so keep the lunch interesting by not having the same thing everyday. A lunch that is bright, colourful and interesting is appealing to eat. Include brightly coloured fruits and vegetables and a range of textures and shapes of foods.

Always include a drink. Children can become dehydrated quickly and this can affect their concentration levels as well as their health.

Have you included?

The basics - a good portion of starchy foods to boost energy levels. Try different types of breads and rolls e.g. pitta, wraps, granary bread, bagels, baguettes, or crackers. Alternatively, use rice or pasta to make a simple salad.

Plenty of fruit and vegetables - try to include at least two portions. Cut carrots, peppers, celery or cucumber sticks, add cherry tomatoes or pop in a salad. Dried fruit such as raisins and dried apricots are great too. Add an extra piece of fruit as a 'play piece' for morning break. Don't forget a piece of kitchen roll for messy fruits.

A tasty filling for sandwiches - Why not try the following: cold meats such as ham, turkey or chicken, canned fish like salmon or tuna, hummus, eggs, cheese or cheese spread. Remember to add colourful salad items such as red peppers, cucumber, tomatoes and lettuce.

A source of dairy foods - add a pot of yoghurt or fromage frais, a carton of semi-skimmed milk or some cheese. Children like individually wrapped portions of cheese or cut a matchbox size chunk of their favourite into cubes or sticks. Reduced fat varieties are preferable e.g. Edam, mozzarella, cottage or reduced fat cheddar.

Pop in a drink - good choices are plain water (still or sparkling), semi-skimmed milk or pure fruit juice. Plain milk and plain water are the only safe drinks for teeth. Pure fruit juice is a good choice for mealtimes. Schools should provide free, fresh drinking water for pupils and most schools also sell semi-skimmed milk at lunchtime.



Other ideas

- vegetable soup in an unbreakable flask is great for the winter.
- left over roast chicken is great with a simple pasta salad and cherry tomatoes.
- use vegetables and fruits in season to keep costs down.
- add more grated carrot and a few raisins to bought coleslaw.

Added extra - Adding a treat to the lunchbox? Try a fruit scone, piece of banana loaf, or a packet of reduced fat crisps. Some treats are no longer permitted in schools. It would support your school if lunchbox treats complied with current Government legislation (see Appendix 1).



Packed Lunch Ideas



- 1
- Tuna pasta salad with sweetcorn
- Apple
- Fruit muffin
- Bottle of plain water



- 4
- Mini pitta pockets with cheese & coleslaw
- Piece of malt loaf
- Small bunch grapes
- Pure unsweetened apple juice (no more than 200ml)

- 2
- Roast beef & salad sandwich
- Cherry tomatoes
- Small box raisins
- Fromage frais
- Satsuma
- Pure unsweetened fruit juice (no more than 200ml)

- 5
- Crusty brown roll with chicken & salad
- Low-fat trifle
- Banana
- Semi-skimmed milk (200ml)

- 3
- Tuna & sweetcorn wholemeal sandwich
- Fruit yoghurt
- Tub of fruit chunks
- Lower fat crisps
- Bottle of plain water

- 6
- Plain bagel with egg mayonnaise & cress
- Tub of mixed salad
- Small packet of dried apricots
- Banana
- Semi-skimmed milk (200ml)



(c) Keeping lunches safe and cool

It is really important to prepare and store foods hygienically. Here are some ideas to help you make sure your child's lunch is safe to eat.

1. Wash fruit and vegetables.
2. Put food in a clean plastic box or bag. Wash the box thoroughly inside and out every day.
3. Refrigerate packed lunches made the night before school.
4. Keep chopped fruit or vegetables fresh in a small plastic box with a lid.
5. Keep sandwiches fresh by wrapping in cling film, tin foil or plastic bag.
6. To help keep the food cool at school add a little freezer pack or a frozen bottle of water/carton of fruit juice (which will be ready for drinking at lunchtime).



5. Where to find more information

Food Standards Agency Scotland

<http://www.food.gov.uk/scotland>

Food Standards Agency - Eat Well

<http://www.eatwell.gov.uk>

Healthy Living

<http://www.healthyliving.gov.uk>

British Nutrition Foundation

<http://www.nutrition.org.uk>

British Nutrition Foundation - Food a Fact of Life

<http://www.foodafactoflife.org.uk>

NHS Health Scotland

<http://www.healthscotland.com>

The Scottish Health Promoting Schools Unit

<http://www.healthpromotingschools.co.uk>

Learning Teaching Scotland - Parents Zone

<http://www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk>

Hungry for Success

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/2003/02/16273/17566>

The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk>

British Dietetic Association - Teen Weight Wise

<http://www.teenweightwise.com>



6. Appendices

Appendix 1: Standards for snacks and drinks in schools⁴

Permitted

- Fruit and vegetables.
- Cereal-based snacks e.g. bread sticks, crackers, and breakfast cereal.
- Yoghurts (plain or fruit are preferable).
- Crisps and savoury snacks that are lower in fat and salt e.g. light crisps.
- Healthier varieties of homebaking e.g. pancakes, scones, fruit loaf, and banana bread.
- Plain water (still or sparkling).
- Milk and flavoured milk (semi-skimmed is preferable). Flavoured milk and yoghurt drinks should be lower in sugar.
- Pure, unsweetened fruit juices or water and pure fruit juice combinations.

No longer permitted

- Confectionery, including chewing gum, cereal bars, sweets, chocolate bars, or cakes and biscuits containing or covered in chocolate.
- Both sugary soft drinks and sugar-free soft drinks e.g. fizzy juice (full sugar or diet versions) and fruit flavoured drinks.

⁴ Scottish Government (2007) Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007



Appendix 2: Example packed lunch policy for schools

Aim of the policy:

Examples:

- To ensure a whole-school approach to healthy eating in school.
- To encourage pupils and parents to prepare and bring healthy and nutritious packed lunches to school.
- To improve the nutritional standard of packed lunches brought from home, in-line with school meals.

Why the policy has been developed & by whom:

Examples:

- To make a positive contribution to children's health.
- To meet the recommendations of Hungry for Success and Health Promoting Schools.
- To ensure pupils and parents receive consistent messages from the school in relation to healthy eating.
- To contribute positively to children's behaviour and learning in the classroom.

Include membership of the working group and who was consulted.

Who the policy applies to:

Examples:

- To all pupils, parents/carers, staff and visitors providing or bringing a packed lunch to school.
- Reference may be made to packed lunches for special occasions such as school trips or theme days.

What a packed lunch should contain:

Use guidance available within 'A Healthy Packed Lunch' and 'Hungry for Success: A whole school approach to school meals in Scotland'. Guidelines on healthy packed lunches should be made available to parents and carers.

Free, fresh drinking water should be readily available for all pupils, at all times.

Special diets and allergies:

Examples:

- Some children require a special diet for medical reasons or suffer from a food allergy. For this reason, children are discouraged from sharing or swapping food with fellow pupils.

Schools that are aware of any child/children with a nut allergy should make specific reference to this in the policy; there may already be a school-wide policy in relation to the avoidance of nuts.



Managing the storage and consumption of packed lunches:

Examples:

- Packed lunches should be stored at a safe temperature, away from radiators or direct sunlight.
- Parents and carers are encouraged to provide a small freezer pack or frozen bottle of water/carton of fruit juice with packed lunches, to keep packed lunches cool.
- All pupils and staff will wash their hands before handling or eating food in school.
- Tables where packed lunches are eaten will be kept clean.
- Waste food and packaging from packed lunches will be sent home in the packed lunch box or disposed of appropriately.
- Waste food will be sent home in the packed lunch box to allow parents to see what their child has eaten during the school day.
- Whenever possible, the school will ensure that pupils bringing packed lunches from home are able to sit and eat with friends who choose to have a school lunch.

Monitoring and review:

Examples:

- The content of packed lunches will be monitored by teaching staff, dining room supervisors, pupil helpers...
- Healthy lunches will be rewarded by... (stickers, class prize, etc)
- Pupils and parents who do not comply with this policy.... (action taken)

Links to other policies:

List all other relevant school policies and development plans that relate to health promotion, healthy eating, litter, Eco-schools, etc.

Dissemination of the policy:

Examples:

- The policy will be promoted to the whole school community, including pupils, parents/carers, teaching staff, catering staff, public health nurses, health development officers, active schools co-ordinators, etc.
- The policy will be sent to all new and existing parents and carers.
- The policy will appear in the school newsletter, handbook, and/or on the school website.
- The policy will be promoted at school assemblies and parents' evenings.



Hungry for Success: A healthy packed lunch has been produced by Nutritionists, Dietitians and other professionals working in schools across Scotland.

For further information on Hungry for Success or healthy packed lunches, please contact your Local Authority Education Department or Catering Service.

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