**Parent Information**

Health and education staff at NHS Highland and Highland Council, have been working together to develop a comprehensive set of programmes to promote healthy food choices and physical activity for children. These programmes cover pre-school, primary, mid-primary and high school. All of these programmes help to achieve key “***Milestones***” required by the “***Curriculum for Excellence***”. These include “***Food & Health***”, “***Physical Activity”*** and ***“Health & Wellbeing***”.

Throughout, pupils will learn that eating well and being physically active can be enjoyable. We know that food and physical activity choices affect our long term health but that doesn’t feel relevant to many children. That is why the focus of these programmes is on how much better you feel, minutes, hours and days after eating well and being active. While food and physical activity are at the centre, these programmes are as much about emotional wellbeing as they are about physical health. From pre-school settings to high school, inclusion and self-acceptance are key principles.

**Pre–School Education**

The programme for early learning and childcare settings is called “***Smart Start***”. It has been carefully developed to equip early learning and childcare practitioners with the tools and confidence to enjoy delivering a crucial aspect of all children’s learning and development. It covers core components of every child’s development: healthy eating, physical activity and the self-awareness to begin making the best choices. All early learning and childcare settings have received the materials and training to support delivery.

**Primary School Education**

The primary school programme is called “***High 5***”. It is an eight session health & wellbeing programme for Highland primary school children. It has been carefully developed by teachers and health improvement specialists, to develop healthy attitudes to food and physical activity. It is delivered by the class teacher who will have received specialist training in the programme.

As well as learning about nutrition (regular meals, eating a varied diet etc) and the benefits of being more active, pupils also learn how to become “***critical consumers***”. For example, they become more aware of how the marketing of less healthy foods influences the choices we make. They also learn how to interpret food labels and how to compare the meals they eat with healthy eating guidelines. Older pupils get a chance to discuss the unhelpful promotion of “*ideal*” body shapes in the media and how this makes them feel about themselves.

This programme also encourages teachers, pupils and the school cook to work together. For example, sometimes the cook will talk to the pupils about school meals or provide tasting samples.

**Secondary Education**

We are developing a range of resources for High school teachers to use as part of the **“*Broad General Education*”** for S1 to S3 pupils. Most High schools have Home economics departments where pupils learn everything from practical cookery, to nutrition, food safety and a range of consumer issues. High school will increasingly be looking for topics that can involve several departments and food & health is an ideal opportunity. For example, English is well placed to look at advertising and marketing; PE at nutrition and sport; and PSHE at body image. Resources have been developed looking at all of these.

**Why are a healthy diet and physical activity so important for children?**

Healthy eating guidelines and “dietary goals” for Scotland encourage us to eat more fruit, vegetables and fish, and fewer high sugar foods and drinks. Most children consume more added sugar than is healthy. Most children eat fewer than the recommended 2 portions of fish a week or 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day. This is also true for adults. As a result, many people do not get enough of the 39 nutrients the brain and body need. This can have an impact on children’s mood, ability to learn, and their general wellbeing. To find out more about healthy eating guidelines, please visit the [NHS Choices website](http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Goodfood/Pages/Goodfoodhome.aspx).

Similarly, most people are not as active as the guidelines recommend. Children should be physically active for at least 1 hour a day. This is good for physical fitness. It can also help improve their readiness to learn in the classroom.

**What you can do to support these programmes**

Thousands of children in Highland have already taken part in these programmes and we are confident that pupils are benefiting greatly from them. However, attitudes to food, physical activity and body image also come from home. So please take a look at the following tips. You are probably doing quite a few of them already!

* Enjoy your food – eating well should be a pleasure not a chore
* Eat regularly – skipping meals does no one any good
* Get active – not to “burn calories” but because it is fun and healthy
* Try something new – this applies to food choices and physical activity
* Eat together when you can – it’s a chance to chat without the distraction of screens
* Promote self-acceptance and body confidence – children come in all shapes and sizes
* Consider using healthier foods as treats – it makes children value these foods more
* Buy fewer highly processed foods – eat more fresh and seasonal food instead
* Involve your child in food preparation – they are more likely to accept it that way
* Choose school meals – these are nutritionally balanced and good value (free for P1-3)
* Be wary of advertising and marketing – good products rarely make healthy foods.

We’d love to hear your ideas for promoting healthy choices at home. Upload your ideas via the ‘[Tell Us Your Story](http://www.highfive.scot.nhs.uk/tell-us-your-story/)‘ section of the website.

**Getting involved at school or nursery**

If you are a confident food grower or cook, you might want to offer your services and help demonstrate some of your skills to children who attend your child’s school or nursery.

**How advertising, availability and affordability affect our food choices**

Making healthy choices is not always as easy as it should be. Where you live and how much money you have to spend can make quite a difference to the choices you make as a family. Many highly processed foods are heavily marketed at children, and temptingly cheap. We shouldn’t feel guilty for buying these foods from time to time. However, it is important to base most of our diet on fresh, wholesome food – mostly the kind that tends not to be heavily advertised!

**School meals**

All younger pupils and some older pupils are entitled to free school meals. Even if you have to pay for them, they still represent good value for money. If you do opt for a packed lunch, it’s still possible to make a healthy choice. For details on school meals or for ideas on how to prepare healthy packed lunch ideas, please visit the [Beyond Highfive](http://www.highfive.scot.nhs.uk/toolkit/running-a-highfive-programme/beyond-highfive/) section of this website.

**Getting active**

Most children and adults are not as physically active as they could be. Remember that much of the time children are physically active during play, or from walking or cycling to school. Anything that is enjoyable, gets the lungs breathing deeply, the heart beating faster and the muscles working is valuable. Some forms of physical activity cost more than others, and some might be more appealing in summer than on a dark winter’s night. Getting a Family Highlife Highland card can be good value for money if you have a leisure centre nearby. You can pay monthly and there is no 12 month contract. Also, if you are in receipt of certain benefits, you might be entitled to the discounted rate of 50p per person per activity. Visit the [Highlife Highland website](https://www.highlifehighland.com/join-high-life/) for more information.