



HEALTHY KIDS

Packed lunch guidance for parents and carers

Helsby Hillside Primary School
September 2026



**FOOD
ACTIVE**

Introduction

Schools are an influential setting and can contribute significantly to improving the health and well-being of pupils.

Eating behaviours and habits are formed in early life and good nutrition in childhood can help to prevent a variety of health problems, both in the short term and later in life. There is increasing concern that many children are consuming too much fat, sugar and salt and too little fibre, fruit and vegetables.

Meals served in school all meet the Government's School Food Standards, and catering providers work hard to ensure that there is a balanced offer which remains healthy, tasty and appealing to the child.

As parents and carers, you have an important role in helping your child to choose and enjoy healthy food and drink. It is important to set a good example by eating well yourself and by providing your child with a nutritious and balanced diet - this does not need to be difficult, complicated or expensive. Helping your child to eat well in their early years can have lifelong benefits; helping them to continue to choose and enjoy healthier foods as they grow, supporting them to keep a healthy weight, and ensuring they have the best nutrition in order to learn and play well.

Around half of school children in the UK currently take a packed lunch to school. Packed lunches can contribute to almost a third of a child's weekly food intake, therefore we want to encourage healthy packed lunches for those children who bring food into school. This guidance has been designed to help you to provide a healthy and nutritious packed lunch for your child, it includes hints and tips to help you to make sure that what you provide in your child's lunchbox meets the School Food Standards.

Why do we need this guidance?

Schools and catering providers work hard to ensure that school meals meet the school food standards, ensuring a balance of foods which are both tasty and appealing.

We all know how important a balanced diet is, but packed lunches can seem a bit tricky to get right and it can be difficult to know if you are providing the most appropriate options for your child. Whilst there are examples of some very nutritious and varied packed lunches, unfortunately they can be very unhealthy too. Recent audits of lunchboxes have shown that they mainly contain highly processed foods with high levels of fat, sugar and salt, and very few fruit and vegetables

The short-term effects of unhealthy packed lunches and food intake can include poor growth, tooth decay, obesity, anaemia, constipation, poor concentration, and behavioural problems which may have an impact on a child's learning. The longer-term effects of a poor diet in childhood can be an increased risk of stroke, cancer, heart disease and diabetes in adulthood.

What are the benefits of a healthy packed lunch?

There are many benefits of sending your child to school with a healthy and nutritious lunch, including:

- ✓ They will have better levels of concentration and energy throughout the day
- ✓ It will help your child to consume a healthier diet and encourage life-long good eating habits, support them to have better dental health and to remain a healthy weight
- ✓ A healthy packed lunch can be an opportunity to contribute to your child's 5-a-day
- ✓ You can monitor exactly what your child is eating, and be assured their food intake is balanced
- ✓ It can reduce waste at home – leftovers can be used to make a healthy lunch, which also reduces your food waste
- ✓ If you pay for school meals, then a packed lunch can save you money
- ✓ If all the children come to school with a healthy, varied lunchbox it can help to encourage others to try new foods (great if your child is a little picky)

What should be included in a healthy packed lunch?

Packed lunches do not have to be boring or bland.

With a little thought and imagination, they can be healthy, tasty and fun too. Try to base the contents around the five main food groups detailed in the Eatwell Guide displayed below. There is also a checklist near the end of this guidance and turn the page for some examples of good choices to include.



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Make sure your packed lunch contains:

- 1) A portion of bread, rice, potatoes or pasta
- 2) Plenty of fruit and vegetables
- 3) A portion or dairy or a calcium rich alternative
- 4) Some protein in the form of beans, pulses, fish, egg, meat
- 5) A healthy drink

- 1) **Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta:** These starchy foods are a healthy source of energy. Good choices include rolls, bread, wraps, pitta pocket, pasta or rice salad. Wholemeal varieties of bread, pasta and rice are good options as they contain more fibre than white varieties.
- 2) **Plenty of fruit and vegetables:** Fruit and vegetables provide vitamins, minerals and fibre. Eating these foods keep children healthy and reduces the risk of disease in later life. Lunches should include at least one portion of fruit and one portion of vegetables/salad. Don't forget pulses and beans also count as a portion of vegetables. Some examples include an apple, satsuma, handful of cherry tomatoes or carrot sticks, mini-can of fruit chunks in natural juice, a small box of raisins.
- 3) **Dairy and alternatives:** These foods provide calcium for healthy bones and teeth. Include one portion at lunch, for example a drink of semi-skimmed or skimmed milk or unsweetened (fortified) soya milk, an individual cheese portion or pot of plain or low sugar yoghurt, or dairy free alternative.
- 4) **Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat:** These foods provide protein for growth. Packed lunches should include one portion of these foods each day. There are lots of protein options so it is a good idea to try to vary them throughout the week. Options include boiled egg, ham, chicken, soya, Quorn, tuna, mackerel, salmon, hummus, chickpeas, lentils or beans.
- 5) **Drinks:** The best option to put in a packed lunch is always plain water or milk (semi-skimmed, skimmed or unsweetened (fortified) alternative). Avoid fruit based and sugary drinks.

Choosing healthier extras

It is fine to add an extra treat in to the lunchbox on occasion – perhaps once or twice per week - but try to make sure it is a healthier option.

Additional 'treat' items should contain lower amounts of sugar, fat and salt. Some good options include:

- ✓ A slice of malt loaf or banana bread, a teacake or low sugar flapjack/ cereal bar, rice pudding pot or fruit pot (items containing dried fruit should be eaten as part of a meal).
- ✓ Pretzels, plain popcorn, seeds, rice or corn cakes with cream cheese, crackers and cheese, vegetable or bread sticks with a dip.



Food and drink which are best avoided in a healthy lunch box?

You may wish to avoid including foods and drinks that are high in fat and / or sugar in your child's lunchbox.

It is important not to fill up on too many foods that are high in fat and / or sugar at the expense of other more nutritious foods. Limiting high fat and sugar foods will help protect young people from becoming overweight as well as helping to prevent tooth decay, heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. Also watch out for anything too salty as too much salt in the diet can cause health issues in later life. Try to avoid the following:



Confectionery such as chocolate bars and sweets

Fizzy drinks as these are mostly very unhealthy.



Savoury snacks which are high in fat and salt such as crisps or processed meat snacks.

Chocolate coated biscuits or wafers.



Cakes, bakes or slices.

Meat and pastry products such as sausage rolls or pies.



Nut or nut products are not allowed on the premises. We are a nut free school because of the danger to other children with allergies.

Top tips on making a healthy packed lunch in a flash!



Short on time? Follow these tips...

- Make the packed lunch the night before – saving yourself any added stress to the morning routine!
- Spend some time at the weekend preparing meals, you can even freeze individual portions and get them out the night before to defrost.
- Plan the lunches across the week – this will help to ensure there is variety and nutritious foods included.
- Get the kids involved! Not only could an extra hand be useful when preparing lunch, but having your child help to make the lunch may encourage them to eat.
- Make a larger quantity and give all members of the family the same lunch, this may even help to save some money if parents or carers often buy their lunch.
- When adding something new to your child's packed lunch, it is a good idea to make sure there are also other items that you know they will enjoy. This avoids your child going hungry if they don't like it – but just make sure you don't overcompensate with a large quantity of the familiar food as they may just fill up on this rather than trying something new!



- None of us like food waste, or to think our child is going hungry at school. Get your child involved in planning the packed lunch menu for the week.
- Use leftovers for lunch! If you're making pasta for dinner, cook a little extra and keep aside for lunchboxes. Either reheat and store in a thermos flask, or if suitable serve cold (pasta is delicious cold). Just make sure you use up the leftovers within two days.

Packed lunch ideas & inspiration

Below are some tasty ideas of what you could include in your child's packed lunch:

V = vegetarian / Ve = vegan

A sandwich, bagel, wrap, chapatti or pitta

There are hundreds of sandwich fillings you can choose from, and variety is definitely a good idea. Try to use wholemeal versions if you can – if your child prefers white bread etc., why not try using 50/50 versions instead, or one slice each of white and wholemeal. Try to make sure to add some vegetables to your sandwich fillings, some ideas include:

- Grated lower-fat cheese mixed with grated apple, sliced spring onion and a tablespoon of low-fat mayonnaise (v).
- Salmon pâté with salad leaves, chopped tomato and cucumber (to make the pâté: mix a can of tinned salmon with two tablespoons of low-fat yoghurt and two teaspoons of lemon juice)
- Falafel, grated carrot, lettuce leaves, reduced fat hummus or tzatziki (ve with hummus, v with tzatziki)
- Left over spiced chicken, red onion, spinach and a tablespoon of yoghurt or low-fat mayonnaise.
- Mixed vegetable omelette (v) served in a roll.



Pasta salad

There are many ingredients you can mix together to make a pasta salad. Try to use wholemeal pasta if you can. If your child does not like wholemeal, try mixing half white pasta with half wholemeal pasta and see if they notice the difference. These recipes would also work well with cooked and cooled rice, boiled and sliced potatoes, couscous or quinoa. Some options include:



- Canned tuna, sweetcorn and grated carrot – add a tablespoon of low-fat mayonnaise or low-fat plain yoghurt if you like it a bit creamy.
- Roasted vegetables (peppers, red onion, aubergines and/or courgette all work well) and grated cheese (v).
 - Chopped ham, grated cheese, diced peppers and spring onion.
- Diced and cooked green veg such as green beans, courgettes and peas, halved cherry tomatoes, cooked chicken or prawns and pesto mixed with a little low-fat mayonnaise.



Homemade mini pizzas

Spread some tomato purée and fresh or dried herbs onto a pitta bread, then top with vegetables such as onion, sweetcorn, peppers, courgettes, spinach or rocket, some cooked chicken (or ham) and some grated cheese or slices of mozzarella. Grill until the cheese is melted. Cool and place in the lunchbox in the fridge for the next day. The kids may enjoy helping to make these.

Easy frittatas

Frittatas are a great lunchbox item that can be enjoyed by all members of the family. You can add any vegetables, beans, pulses, meat and cheese that you like, and it is a great way to use up any leftovers. They are great cooked in a muffin tray to make individual portions (which can be frozen). Some favourites include:

- Ham, cheese, mushroom and onion
- Mediterranean veg (peppers, courgette, onion, aubergine) with a sprinkle of cheese (v)
- Potato, pesto, green beans and tuna



Easy Mexican quesadillas

These are a great way to use up leftover veg. Spread a wrap with tomato puree or pesto (nut free), add diced veg (peppers, tomatoes, sweetcorn and spring onions all work well) and grated cheese, top with another wrap and toast in a hot pan, turning once the first side is toasted. Let the quesadilla cool before placing it in the fridge in the lunchbox (v)

D.I.Y Cheeseboard

Let your child have a pic and mix cheeseboard for lunch. Pack a portion of their favourite cheese (30g), 4-5 crackers (wholegrain if possible) along with a selection of fruit and vegetables – grapes, sliced tomato and cucumber all work well (v). Add a couple of slices of ham too, if you like.



Portion sizes

Consider carefully the portion sizes that you include in your child’s packed lunch.

They should have the amount that they can finish comfortably, with little or no waste. Portion sizes everywhere seem to be getting bigger – think about chocolate, crisps, pizzas - so to make sure children do not end up with the same amount of food as an adult we need to think about what portion is right for them.

Children are encouraged to eat all of their school meal as the portion sizes are carefully regulated but you need to discuss with your child what you would like them to finish from their packed lunch. Children will be encouraged to eat the majority of their savoury items first. A small piece of cheese eaten after the sweet items or a drink of water has been shown to help prevent dental decay. Below is a guide to help you estimate correct portion sizes.

Item	Portion size for your child
Vegetables	The amount your child can fit in their hand
Fruit (fresh and tinned)	The amount your child can fit in their hand
Fruit (dried)	1 dessert spoon
Starchy food	Two slices of bread from a medium sized loaf, one medium pitta pocket, one wrap or one child fist size of cooked rice or pasta. Two of three egg sized potatoes
Protein (meat, fish, eggs, beans)	Approximately the size of your child’s palm, and the thickness of their little finger
Dairy (or alternative)	A 125g serving of yoghurt, fromage frais, rice pudding or a small matchbox size piece of cheese
Optional treat/snack	Approximately half the size of your child’s palm

Top tips on making healthy packed lunches exciting and appetising

When we think about school packed lunches many of us imagine a boring sandwich, a packet of crisps and a piece of fruit, but they can be much more fun, appealing, and nutritious than this.

- Invest in a small thermos flask and fill it in the morning with piping hot soup, stew or even leftover tomato pasta or risotto. You could add some toppings such as cheese or seeds in separate container for the child to add themselves. Do not forget to pack a fork or spoon if they are unable to borrow one from the school canteen.
- Use a range of bread items over the course of a week – mix up bread, rolls, pittas, wraps, chapattis, bagels and sandwich thins.
- 'Mix and match' sandwiches – if you have a few mouths to feed you could make a few different flavours, divide into two or three and put one of each flavour in each lunchbox.
- Get a few cookie cutters and cut sandwiches into different shapes (freeze the crusts to make breadcrumbs to add to recipes).
- Include lots of different colours in the form of fresh fruit and vegetables. Vegetables can be added to sandwiches, rice salad, pasta or served as crudité's.



- Kids love skewers and just putting cheese and pineapple on a stick can make the food much more appealing. Why not try a rainbow fruit skewer – this can be a good way to introduce new fruit.
- Choose a fun, colourful lunchbox which they will look forward to opening at lunch time.
- Write your child a little note which they can look forward to reading when they open their lunch box.

Healthy snack ideas for after school or school trips

If you provide a packed lunch, you may also provide a snack for after school – for the journey home or for after-school club.

A snack can help you child to keep their energy up and keep them going until their next meal. If you provide a snack for after school or as part of a packed lunch for a school trip it is a good idea to adhere to the packed lunch guidance. Try to avoid high sugar and/or fat snacks as further to these not being very nutritious for your child, they may not keep them full for very long either and actually cause an energy slump – this can happen after eating sugary or highly processed foods. Some healthy options include:

- ✓ A slice of banana bread, a low sugar flapjack/ cereal bar, rice pudding pot or fruit pot
- ✓ Pretzels, plain popcorn, seeds, rice or corn cakes with cream cheese, crackers and cheese, vegetable or bread sticks with a dip.
- ✓ It is a good idea to combine fruit or starchy foods with some protein, this will make your child feel fuller and keep them going until the next mealtime. For example, a few breadsticks with some carrot sticks and hummus, or fruit with a yoghurt.

How to store a healthy packed lunch

How lunch boxes are stored, and whether they are kept cool, can be an important factor in the type of foods included.



You may choose not to include sandwich fillings such as egg and cheese worried that they will become 'smelly' and therefore off-putting to your child at lunch time. However these options can be included with the correct preparation and storage.

Using an insulated lunchbox or including ice packs in lunch boxes is the best way of storing food until lunchtime. Or why not fill a water bottle $\frac{3}{4}$ full and freeze? Stored next to the lunchbox this will help to keep the food cool and also provide a refreshing drink as the ice melts throughout the day.

Reducing waste

The best thing you can do to reduce your plastic waste is to purchase in bulk, this can also go a long way to reducing food waste and saving money

Some top tips on how to ensure waste free packed lunches include:

- ✓ Have a range of small re-usable containers or recycled tubs
- ✓ Cook in bulk (fruit muffins, low-sugar flapjacks, frittata etc.) and freeze individually.
Remove one in the morning and place in lunchbox and it will be thawed by lunchtime
- ✓ Make your own popcorn and keep in small re-usable containers
- ✓ Put dried apples, sultanas, bananas and seeds in re-usable containers
- ✓ Put a handful of dried cereal such as Cheerios in re-usable containers
- ✓ Cut your own cheese slices and place in crackers in re-usable containers
- ✓ Make a smoothie with fresh fruit and vegetables at home and place it in a small reusable thermos bottle
- ✓ Say NO to single serving fruit in plastic and buy whole fruit
- ✓ Swop cereal bars in plastic to homemade cereal bars in re-use wraps or small containers
- ✓ Swop small cartons and single use plastic bottles for re-usable drink containers
- ✓ Say NO to plastic knives and forks. Use reusable ones available from school
- ✓ Look at using evening leftovers for packed lunches such as pasta and salads

Waste and disposal

The school will, within reason, send any uneaten packed lunch food items back home.

The rationale for this is that parents can also monitor what their child has consumed during the day and then raise any concerns over their child's food intake with the school.

Sample healthy lunch menu

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Pitta pizza with ham, cheese and sliced mushrooms	Salmon, pea and sweetcorn pasta salad	Houmous and grated carrot wrap	Tomato soup and half a cheese sandwich	Mixed vegetable frittata
Carrot and cucumber sticks	An apple	Chopped fruit salad	Tinned pears (in juice), drained	A banana
Slice of malt loaf	Small pot of rice pudding	Plain yoghurt with sliced fruit	Plain popcorn	Cheese and crackers
Skimmed milk	Water	Water	Skimmed milk	Water

Healthy packed lunch checklist

Below is a handy checklist to help you to make sure that your child’s packed lunch is balanced

You can even get your child involved by checking off the items in the lunchbox against the list – it is a good way to teach them about different types of food.

		YES/NO	What is it?
A starchy food?	Bread, rice, pasta, potatoes (wholemeal or wholegrain are great options)		
At least one portion of vegetables?	Carrot, cucumber or pepper sticks; cherry tomatoes, peas, sweetcorn, green beans, salad (these are just examples – there are many more options which you can include)		
At least one portion of fruit?	Any whole fresh fruit (chop grapes in half for younger children); tinned or frozen fruit; small portion of dried fruit		
A source of protein?	Meat, fish, eggs, beans, lentils, tofu, Quorn, hummus		
A dairy or alternative?	Cheese, yoghurt, milk		
A suitable drink?	Water or milk (skimmed, semi-skimmed or fortified unsweetened alternative)		
Optional: a healthier extra lunchbox item	A slice of malt loaf or banana bread, a teacake or low sugar flapjack/ cereal bar, rice pudding pot or fruit pot Pretzels, plain popcorn, seeds, rice or corn cakes with cream cheese, crackers and cheese, vegetable or bread sticks with a dip.		