# Healthy breaks for schools

## A guide for pupils and parents

HSC Public Health Agency

school food

# What is included in healthy breaks for schools?

## Drinks

It is important that children drink enough during the day, so that they don't become dehydrated and tired. Water should be freely available throughout the school day and drinks should always be included for break time and lunch. Water and milk are the most suitable drinks for children.

Water: tap water or unflavoured, still, bottled water.

Milk: all whole, semi-skimmed or skimmed unflavoured milk.

Not suitable: fruit juices (including pure fruit juice), smoothies, sparkling water, squash or fizzy drinks, even those labelled 'no added sugar', 'diet' or 'zero'.

## Fruit and vegetables

Help your child get their five a day by including some fruit or vegetables as a snack for their morning break.

This includes all fresh fruit and vegetables and pots or tins of fruit in fruit juice, but not in syrup.

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 cereal bowl of salad, eg lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber and celery
- 3 heaped tablespoons of fresh veg, eg chopped or sliced carrots, peppers or sugar-snap peas
- 3 heaped tablespoons of fruit salad (fresh or tinned in fruit juice)

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.

Not suitable: fruit tinned in syrup, dried fruit (eg raisins, sultanas) and processed fruit bars (eg fruit winders, fruit flakes etc). These are high in sugar and can cause tooth decay, so are not suitable as between-meal snacks.

## Bread-based snacks

Children need more or less energy (calories) depending on their age and stage of development. Bread-based snacks can help to meet these extra energy needs and help your child feel more satisfied.

This includes white or wholemeal bread, rolls or baguettes, toast, plain bagels, wheaten, soda, potato or pitta bread, spread thinly with a little margarine, low-fat spread or butter; plain bread sticks, plain crackers or plain unsalted rice cakes; or a small sandwich with a sugar-free filling such as tomato, tuna, chicken, cheese etc.

Not suitable: Sugary spreads, including jam, honey, marmalade or chocolate spread as these are harmful to teeth. Peanut butter is high in fat and salt so is not recommended.

No cereal bars, or sweetened breads and pastries, eg pancakes, scones (plain and fruit), fruit bread, malt loaf, brioche, croissants and Danish pastries as these contain a lot of sugar and/or fat and salt.

The Department of Education and the Department of Health encourage all schools to provide healthier food and drinks throughout the day.

This healthy breaks for schools resource provides guidance on suitable snacks and drinks for children to have during their morning break, whether provided by the school or brought from home.

## Why is a healthy break important?

- Childhood is an important time to establish good eating and drinking habits for future health.
- School healthy eating schemes give pupils the knowledge and opportunity to make healthier choices.
- Teachers have suggested that a healthy snack at break time can help with pupils' concentration and behaviour in the classroom.
- It encourages suitable drinks and snacks to help prevent tooth decay.
- It helps to meet our target of five or more portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

If a child requires a special diet that will not allow the guidance to be met exactly, please discuss with your school.

## Want to find out more?

School Food: the essential guide
www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/school-food-essential-guide-and-irish-translation

Enjoy healthy eating
www.enjoyhealthyeating.info

5 a day – Live well – NHS choices
www.nhs.uk/livewell/5aday/pages/5adayhome.aspx

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Department of Education
www.education-ni.gov.uk

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