

Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Healthier lunchboxes



Ideas for Primary Schools

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Audience: Headteachers, healthy school co-ordinators and teachers of schools in Wales.

Overview: This document is designed to help schools promote healthy lunchboxes.

Further information

can be obtained from

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Related documents

- Food & Fitness- Promoting Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for Children and Young People in Wales. 5 Year Implementation Plan (2006)
- Appetite for Life (2006)
- Developing a Whole School Food and Fitness Policy (2007)

Introduction

Childhood obesity is a concern for everyone. Poor diet is a major contributing factor and the Welsh Assembly Government is taking a proactive role in addressing many of the issues which are linked to this.

The 5-year Food and Fitness Implementation Plan¹ outlines a range of actions to improve nutrition and levels of physical activity amongst children and young people.

Appetite for Life² emphasises the importance of a whole school approach to food and nutrition. Schools have a major role to play in educating our children to eat a more healthy diet by giving them the skills and knowledge to make healthy choices. The school meals service will be promoting positive nutrition messages and in order for packed lunches to be consistent with this, we need to provide information and support to pupils and parents.

You will already have received leaflets for the parents of pupils in your school with some ideas for healthier lunchboxes³.

This booklet suggests a variety of approaches that could be taken in your school to raise awareness of the types of food which children should bring to school to eat at lunchtime. It is important that this work is carried out in conjunction with the development of a school food and fitness policy⁴ which will address all aspects of education including diet, physical activity and personal, social and emotional health. Further support and advice can be obtained from your local healthy schools co-ordinator.

Healthy lunchbox activities for schools

Lunchboxes are an important aspect of the food and drink provision in your school. If a child chooses to have a packed lunch instead of a school lunch, we would like that option to be as healthy as possible. To encourage your pupils to be more aware of the importance of a healthy packed lunch a number of the following suggested activities could be undertaken. As part of a whole school approach you could include:

A whole school focus on healthy eating through the curriculum

See case studies on pages 12–13 for ideas.

Class assemblies/ Healthy lunchbox assembly

As part of their work, pupils could focus on healthy eating. This work could culminate in a class assembly when pupils have the opportunity to share their work with the whole school. Also, if parents are invited to the assembly, this is an ideal opportunity to extend these important messages to the home setting.

Visitors to school

Children always enjoy listening to someone new. Your healthy schools co-ordinator will be able to suggest a number of people who could come into school to work with your pupils. This could be with each class or by speaking to the children during a whole school assembly.



Theme day / Health week

If you are organising a specific day/week with a health focus as part of your healthy school work, then this is an ideal opportunity to focus on healthy food choices. It is an opportunity to encourage pupils to try new foods and involve parents in the preparation and planning.

Sociable lunchtimes

Early Years/Key Stage 1 pupils could plan and enjoy a healthy 'Teddy Bears Picnic' by bringing their teddy to school to 'share' their lunch. A focus on healthy choices from the 4 main food groups prior to the activity would be needed. Other themes could be developed e.g. 'a healthy lunch for a giant', or a parent and child picnic.

'Design a lunchbox' day or morning for parents and children

Healthy options could be laid out then parents and children could try new items together, creating a healthy lunchbox. Be realistic about the foods being sampled bearing in mind price and availability.

- Pupils could look at their lunchboxes using a 'Balance of Good Health' floormat or poster to check if the contents are healthy choices

Development of a personalised school lunchbox leaflet

This is an opportunity for your pupils to research the importance of a healthy balanced diet. Following the research a leaflet could be designed which gives pupils and parents ideas for daily menus for their lunchboxes. Your healthy schools co-ordinator can help with this and advise pupils on the best way to put their ideas into practice. (see page 11 for further advice on developing your own leaflet).

Links with parents

It is vital to keep parents informed of any work the school would like to do and why this is being done. Try to involve parents in any discussions and work which is planned.

This could be done in a variety of ways. Here are some suggestions:

- Sending home current information, from reputable sources, about nutrition/healthy eating home e.g. by including this in a newsletter.
- Encouraging parents to be actively involved in the work you may be planning.
- Inviting parents in to school to assemblies/workshops which focus on healthy eating.
- Arranging displays/speakers to come in to school on parents evenings to discuss issues around healthy eating/ healthy lunchboxes.
- Help parents to put together a realistic lunchbox by sending home a lunchbox leaflet, ideas or menu planners.
- Link with your PTA to discover what help and support parents feel they need.



Involving your School Council

School Councils are now at the centre of many of the developments taking place within schools. The subject of healthier lunchboxes is an excellent opportunity for them to take a key role in taking forward the nutrition agenda.

Here are a number of ways in which your School Council could take an active role.

- ‘Healthier lunchboxes’ to be included on a School Council agenda. Class representatives to gain opinions/responses from each class.
- At the following meeting the School Council could identify concerns raised by pupils and gather ideas to include in a clear plan of action.
- Invite your local healthy schools co-ordinator or local dietitian to the next School Council meeting to discuss ideas and take advice. It is important to have guidance from experts in this field.
- Once a clear action plan has been developed, it is important for the School Council to inform parents about what they hope to do and why they are doing it. This can be done through the School Council newsletter.
- Development of a ‘Lunchbox Charter’ based on the balance of good health with lunchboxes containing foods from each food group. (see case study on page 12).

Ideas for the School Council to consider

- The School Council could use a whole school assembly to speak to everyone about their ideas and plans.
- Councillors to encourage all pupils to research healthy diets and talk to their parents about this.
- School Council newsletter to be sent to parents .
- Baseline survey of food eaten at lunchtimes to be undertaken to include both school lunches and packed lunches.
- Involve all staff. Teachers to show pupils what they have brought to school each day. A 'beat the teacher's lunchbox' approach can be really successful.
- Use the school website to inform parents and others about what the School Council is hoping to achieve.
- Invite lunchtime supervisors to a School Council meeting. It is vital to involve the lunchtime supervisors in your action plan as they will play a key role in encouraging pupils to eat a healthy lunch and link with reward schemes.
- Develop a school lunchbox leaflet. This could contain examples of healthy menus for lunchboxes. It could be done on a class or whole school basis following lessons on healthy eating using the 'balance of good health'.



Storage of lunchboxes

How and where lunchboxes are stored in school is a very important issue. Lunchboxes should be stored away from sources of heat e.g. radiators, and direct sunlight. Cool, well-ventilated areas are preferable.

The school building, pupil numbers and size of school are just a few factors which will determine the way in which lunchboxes are stored.

Encouraging parents to use insulated lunchboxes and to include 'ice' packs or similar would be beneficial. Similarly they should be advised that if lunchboxes are prepared a day in advance, then they should be refrigerated overnight.

The Food Standards Agency⁵ provides advice and guidance on packed lunches and food storage and advises that if foods are prepared on the day of consumption, there are relatively few foods where lack of refrigeration until lunchtime could lead to the growth of harmful organisms⁶.

Food hygiene issues for parents to consider are contained in the Welsh Assembly Government publication Teach germs a lesson!⁷. It is important to share these messages and promote good hygiene in order to ensure food is safe to eat.

Evaluation

Has your work been successful? Have lunchboxes improved?

These are important questions to ask. The pupils, parents and staff will have enjoyed the variety of activities that have taken place and now it is important to judge their effectiveness. You could try some of the following ideas.

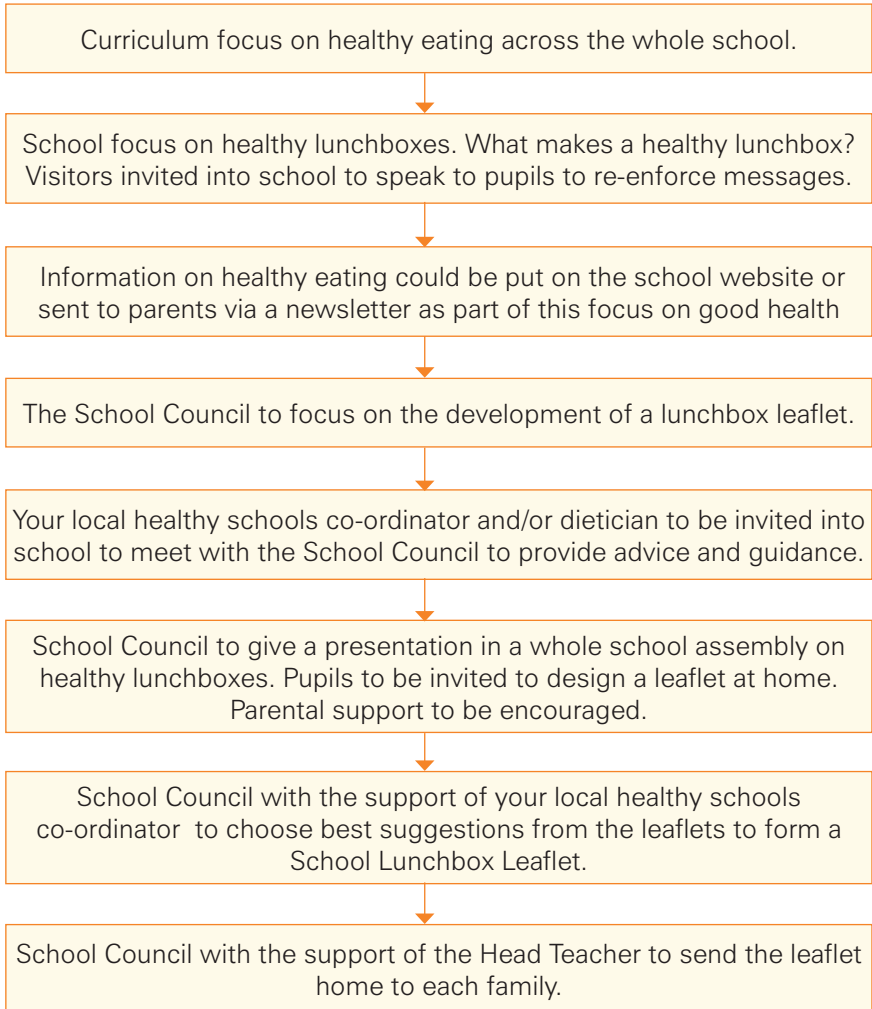
- Review the contents of lunchboxes. This is particularly effective if you have carried out a baseline survey.
- Review the activities to judge whether they were successful. Could they be altered/improved if carried out again.
- Talk to pupils, parents and staff to find out what worked well and what further support they would like.
- Collect evidence from the activities to share with colleagues and friends.

It is important to continue with this work and remind pupils regularly of the messages. Future monitoring will be important.



Developing a lunchbox leaflet for your school

Here are steps which you could follow towards developing your own lunchbox leaflet.



Case studies

Many schools across Wales have developed work on healthy lunchboxes as part of a whole school approach to healthy eating. Below are examples of just a few schools where enthusiasm and good practice have been successful.

Clytha Primary School, Newport

Head Teacher: Mrs A. Picton

Clytha Primary School has been involved in a local 'Lunchbox Project' led by the National Public Health Service (NPHS). Working together they have developed a Lunchbox Charter. This has been the result of several months of work during which time the lunchboxes were surveyed, pupils took part in a focus group where ideas were gathered, a healthy eating day was held and newsletters and advice were sent to parents.

This has been part of an on-going approach within the school to address healthy eating.

St Padarns R.C. Primary School, Ceredigion

Head Teacher: Mr A. James

The theme of 'healthy lunchboxes' has been a focus within the science curriculum for the whole school. Following this pupils were encouraged to enter a healthy lunchbox competition, working over a half term holiday to design a healthy lunchbox. As a result, many of the ideas that the pupils developed were used for a booklet produced by the school with examples of healthy lunchboxes. This booklet was given to all families and is also given to new parents when their child starts school. All staff encourage the pupils to eat healthily.



Tenby Junior School, Pembrokeshire

Head Teacher: Mrs J. Llewellyn

Healthy eating is high profile at Tenby Junior School and pupils are encouraged and rewarded when making healthy choices.

Information on healthy lunchboxes was given to staff from which a number of lessons were developed and delivered. Pupils were then given a blank healthy lunchbox sheet and had to plan a healthy lunch.

Yoghurt, fresh fruit, healthy sandwiches and crackers are encouraged at lunchtimes and certificates are given out weekly for pupils who have a healthy lunchbox. Links with parents are also fostered and parents are given a certificate thanking them for providing their child with a healthy lunchbox. The lessons on healthy lunchboxes are continuing on a regular basis.

Ysgol Borth-y-Gest, Gwynedd

Head Teacher: Mrs M. Millar

The subject of healthy lunchboxes was approached through a focus on 'healthy eating at lunchtimes'. This included work on the lunchtime menu. Science lessons were devoted to healthy eating across the whole school. The balance of good health was used to identify what could be included in lunchboxes and a positive approach to healthy living has been adopted throughout the school. The School Council has been involved in the development of healthy lunchboxes and it is now policy for only 1 sweet item to be included in the box and pasta and healthy sandwiches are encouraged together with fruit, vegetables & yoghurt. A dietitian has visited the school to talk to pupils and parents. Pupils have become very interested in healthy eating and regularly contribute items on this topic in 'News of the Week' time.

References

1. Food and Fitness - Promoting Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for Children and Young People in Wales. 5 Year Implementation Plan. Welsh Assembly Government, 2006
2. Appetite for Life. Welsh Assembly Government, 2006
3. Healthier Lunchboxes. Healthier Children. Welsh Assembly Government, 2007
4. Developing a Whole School Food and Fitness Policy, Welsh Assembly Government, 2007
5. www.eatwell.gov.uk
6. www.foodinschools.org
7. Teach germs a lesson! Infection Control Guidance for Primary and Secondary Schools. Welsh Assembly Government, 2006

