



**Guidelines for Developing a  
HEALTHY EATING POLICY  
in Post-Primary Schools**

# FOREWORD

By the Minister for Health and Children and the Minister for Education and Science

In second-level schools, children are at an age when they begin to make informed choices and decisions about their lives. One of these vital areas is food and nutrition. Students need to be aware of the importance of healthy eating practices in order to optimise their growth, health and potential.

In 2003-2004, the Health Promotion Unit of the Department of Health and Children published *Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-Schools*, and *Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Primary Schools*. The guidelines contained in this book develop and build on the advice and information contained in those earlier publications, and continue the vital theme of promoting healthy eating choices and habits in post-primary schools.

Young people, to achieve their full potential in many areas, need to eat healthily and to establish good nutritional practices at a time of rapid physical growth and development. These good habits, together with regular physical activity, will help them to live long, healthy and productive lives.

In seeking to promote a healthy-eating policy, schools should address this vital area in the whole-school context and in teaching and learning. This will enable the school to produce an action plan to create a supportive whole-school environment in which consistent messages are provided through the curriculum.

We are pleased that our Departments – Health and Children, and Education and Science – have worked together to initiate this publication which will be a new and important resource for schools in the promotion of healthy eating for all their students.



**Mary Harney, TD**

Minister for Health and Children



**Batt O'Keeffe, TD**

Minister for Education and Science



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John Lahiff, SPHE Support Service, Post-Primary (Chairperson)  
Olive McGovern, Department of Health & Children  
Susan Higgins, Community Dietitian Manager, representing Community Dietitians, HSE, Population Health  
Ursula O'Dwyer, National Nutrition Policy Adviser, Health Promotion Policy Unit, Department of Health & Children  
Grainne Conachy, Post-Primary Inspector, Department of Education & Science  
Anne McAteer, Health Promotion Service, HSE West  
Eleanor Petrie, President, National Parents Council (Post-Primary)  
Bernie Judge, Teachers Union of Ireland  
Fergal Somerville, Office of the Minister for Children  
Deirdre Dunworth, formerly Office of the Minister for Children  
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Sylvia Cox, Department of Health & Children (Secretary to working group)

The nutrition information was drafted by:  
Louise Reynolds, Consultant Dietitian  
Kathleen Jordan, Community Dietitian, HSE

Project Officer was Anne Marie Callery

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# SECTION 1

# SECTION 1

## SECTION 1.1: INTRODUCTION

Food and drink are an essential part of our daily lives. They play a fundamental role in the development of the human being. Making the right choices to support our nutrition requirements satisfies our physiological needs, and also contributes to our mental and emotional development. What we eat and drink is directly related to our state of health.

Adolescence is a time for developing the skills to make informed choices and decisions throughout life. What we eat and drink is one such choice. Young people need to be aware of the importance of good nutrition for health in order to optimise their growth, health and developmental potential through their teenage years and beyond.

Schools can contribute by developing a Healthy Eating Policy that reflects and represents the whole-school community. The aim of such a policy should be to improve the eating choices and habits of young people.

These Guidelines seek to support post-primary schools that wish to develop a Healthy Eating Policy and promote healthy eating through a supportive school community. The document outlines a step-by-step approach to achieve this. It also provides consistent, accurate information about healthy eating for young people. Since resources and facilities vary from school to school, working groups are encouraged to use the Guidelines as a framework to develop a policy which meets their own needs within the context of the resources and facilities they have available.

In 2003/4, the Health Promotion Unit of the Department of Health and Children published *Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-Schools* and *Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Primary Schools*. The current Guidelines have been produced to ensure that the impetus generated in pre-schools and primary schools will continue through to post-primary schools.

- **Section 1: 1.1-1.3** of this document provides a guide to the process of developing a policy. The procedure outlined largely reflects the process encouraged as part of the School Development Planning Initiative.
- **Section 2: 2.1-2.2** offers additional support materials to help schools in the initial stages of developing a Healthy Eating Policy. It also presents case studies from a number of schools where policy development is already under way.
- **Section 3: 3.1-3.3** provides useful nutrition information as well as lists of resources and key contacts that schools may find necessary and useful in both the policy development and implementation phases.



## SECTION 1.2: RATIONALE FOR DEVELOPING A HEALTHY EATING POLICY

For young people to achieve their full potential, it is essential that they eat healthily. As well, healthy eating provides the building blocks for lifelong health and well-being. Adolescence is a time of physical growth and development – the most rapid since infancy. It requires adequate intake of energy and nutrients. Eating a nourishing breakfast and a healthy school lunch allows children to take full advantage of the education provided for them.

The *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children* (HBSC, 2006) report has shown that many adolescents have poor eating habits. Skipping breakfast and/or lunch is a habit reported by up to 17% of students, while many do not eat good food or drink enough fluid. All this can lessen their concentration levels and make learning more difficult. Research has also shown that the foods eaten at lunchtime can affect behaviour in the classroom during the afternoon: consuming food and drink that are high in fats and sugars, especially fizzy drinks, may cause over-activity, resulting in difficult classroom management.

*Obesity – The Policy Challenges: The Report of the National Task Force on Obesity (2005)* highlighted the worrying increase in childhood obesity across Europe. Figures suggest that the number of overweight children in Ireland has trebled over the past decade and may be rising at a rate of 10,000 per year. Foods associated with this increase in obesity include energy-dense, micronutrient-poor foods such as packaged sweet and savoury snacks and sugar-sweetened soft drinks. The report makes recommendations for the education sector. Two key recommendations provide a strong basis for action by schools:

*Nutrition and physical activity levels of school children should be seen as part of the duty of care of each school, for example in relation to catering for school meals, policy on vending machines, and provision of fresh drinking water.*

*All post-primary schools should be encouraged to engage with their student councils and parents associations in promoting the concept of 'healthy eating and active living'.*

Young people spend a large part of the day in school where they eat at least one of their main meals. The home plays the major role in determining healthy eating habits. However, the school, in partnership with parents, can make an important contribution.

It is recommended that a whole-school approach be taken in developing a Healthy Eating Policy. This creates a strong sense of ownership among students, staff and parents and a commitment to sustain the improvements.

In developing a Healthy Eating Policy, the school should address two key action areas: a) the whole-school context and (b) teaching and learning. This ensures that an action plan to develop a supportive whole-school environment is created and that consistent messages are provided through the curriculum. Step four of the policy development process (see below) provides details on how this can be achieved.

A Healthy Eating Policy developed in consultation with the whole-school community as part of the school planning process will help to integrate healthy eating into school life.

## SECTION 1.3: STEPS FOR DEVELOPING A HEALTHY EATING POLICY

- **Step 1: Establish a working group**
- **Step 2: Review current advice and information on healthy eating, and community initiatives**
- **Step 3: Review current school practices**
- **Step 4: Prepare a draft policy document**
- **Step 5: Circulate, amend and finalise draft document**
- **Step 6: Ratify and implement the policy**
- **Step 7: Review, monitor and evaluate**

### STEP 1: ESTABLISH A WORKING GROUP

Set up a working group that represents the whole-school community. It should include at least two staff members, one of whom will coordinate the group, two parents and two students. It may also include key community members – for example, a community dietitian and a local business representative. If the canteen or tuck shop is run by an outside shop or franchise, it should also be represented.

#### The role of this working group is to:

- liaise with senior management and board of management
- be a voice for their respective peers
- review current healthy eating practices
- draft an informed policy and circulate it for comment
- assist in implementing the policy
- monitor, review and evaluate the policy

So that the working group fulfils its function, it is important that its members be selected carefully. The following suggestions are offered for consideration.

#### Student representatives

A strong student voice will greatly influence the acceptance of the policy by all students. Ideally, students should be nominated by their peers and willing to act as a voice for students. The student representatives may be from the student council or be class representatives.

#### Staff representatives

Staff representatives should include teaching and ancillary staff. The co-ordinator of the working group should be a teacher who has some responsibility for school planning issues. Another teacher may support the co-ordinator. Ideally this individual should have expertise in the area of healthy eating.



Ancillary staff can play an important role in the working group. Canteen staff and lunchtime supervisors can contribute valuable opinions and have insight into the current food and drink provision.

### **Parent representatives**

Parents and eating practices at home have a major influence on the eating habits of young people. It is important that parents take part in developing the school policy. As a parent usually does the shopping for food at home, they need to support the young people by providing healthy food choices in line with the Healthy Eating Policy.

The parents council should be invited to nominate two parents to the working group. The council may be aware of parents who have a special interest in healthy eating and are willing to support the work.

### **Community representatives**

The local community may provide particular expertise that is not available in the school. A community dietitian could advise on healthy choices. A local business representative, such as the manager of a local shop or garage shop where students regularly buy lunch, may help to support the implementation of the policy within the broader community.

## **STEP 2: REVIEW CURRENT ADVICE AND INFORMATION ON HEALTHY EATING, AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES**

Current information on healthy eating will reflect what is happening nationally and locally and help to provide a context for the policy. Within the community, there may also be particular nutrition initiatives that will support and inform school policy. Resources and information on initiatives may be obtained through your local Health Service Executive. (Contact details are included at the end of this document.)

## **STEP 3: REVIEW CURRENT SCHOOL PRACTICES**

A review of current school practices will inform the draft policy and provide an opportunity for whole-school involvement at an early stage of the work.

An Audit Tool is available in section four to assist in the gathering of this information. The Audit Tool includes three questionnaires to elicit information and views from students, parents and staff.

## STEP 4: PREPARE A DRAFT POLICY DOCUMENT

The following should be considered as a template for a Healthy Eating Policy:

- Policy title: Healthy Eating Policy
- Policy statement: to set the context for the policy, include an introductory paragraph outlining when, where and to whom the policy is applicable. When devising this introduction, take into consideration the school's ethos, mission statement and code of behaviour.
- Rationale: explain why the school considers it important to develop a Healthy Eating Policy.
- Aims and objectives: exactly what does the policy seek to achieve? The objectives may be divided into short-term and long-term.
- Action plan: this should outline clearly the actions that will be taken to support healthy eating. The action plan should be devised in consultation with senior management. The review process carried out as part of step three will help to inform the action plan. Identifying roles and responsibilities and estimating the timeframe for each action will help ensure that the plan is implemented successfully. The financial implications of all actions need to be considered.

The action areas can be divided into two parts: a) whole-school context and (b) teaching and learning.

### a) Whole-school context

Schools can provide a physical and social environment that encourages healthy eating. It can ensure that lessons learnt in the classroom are transferred into school life and that healthy-eating messages are consistent throughout the school.

In addressing the whole-school context, canteens, dining facilities, tuck shops and the school policy on vending machines are obvious areas of potential change.

Consideration should also be given on how to do the following:

**Promote and market healthy eating:** this helps to create whole-school awareness of the impending policy. Hosting a Healthy Eating Day or Healthy Eating Week offers an ideal opportunity to provide a variety of healthy-eating activities for students, staff and parents. Healthy Eating Week activities could include:

- inviting guest speakers into the classroom
- offering healthy options in the canteen and tuck shop at reduced prices
- running a juice or smoothie bar
- providing healthy-eating cookery demonstrations or competitions
- holding art/slogan competitions

The activities deemed to be the most beneficial could be repeated at appropriate times throughout the school year and integrated into school life. Involving a group of students and offering them specific roles in promoting and marketing healthy eating helps to influence the wider student body.



**Support and advise parents:** to encourage parents to play a role, it is important to offer them support. This may take many forms. For some parents, being kept informed via newsletter or flyer will be adequate. Other parents may welcome advice on healthy eating and the nutrition needs of a young person. This may be done through sending information home or by organising a parents night promoting healthy eating.

**Involve the wider community:** this helps to provide support and expertise to the school and may help to generate heightened interest in healthy eating locally.

Possible ways of involving the wider community are:

- developing initiatives in partnership with local food businesses – for example, garage shops, shops and fast-food outlets
- involving the community dietitian and health-promotion personnel in informing the school policy
- inviting national food groups such as An Bord Bia to the school to offer their expertise
- participating in national youth projects – for example, Young Social Innovators or school business projects

The local media can also play a part by highlighting the school's good work.

## **b) Teaching and learning**

The classroom should be used to inform the whole-school practice and help instigate change.

Health education is not only about delivering information but also about developing the skills and confidence required to make healthy choices.

### **Subject areas**

The subject of healthy eating is addressed to varying degrees in many subject areas that offer a unique opportunity for teachers to influence young people in this regard. Social, Personal & Health Education (SPHE), Home Economics, Biology, Science, and Physical Education (PE) are examples of subjects on the curriculum for post-primary schools that address aspects of diet, nutrition, physical activity and health.

### **Cross-curricular projects**

These provide valuable learning opportunities. Examples of cross-curricular links include: English (Media Studies), Business Studies (healthy-food accounts in tuck shops) and Art (visual-communication projects in graphic design). Pastoral-care and form-tutor time may also offer teaching and learning opportunities.

To maximise the potential of teaching and learning opportunities, it is best to plan the curriculum framework in a coordinated way that supports the Healthy Eating Policy. Planning should address specific learning outcomes in terms of content covered, teaching methods and time allocation, to maximise the influence of these classes and reaffirm consistent key messages.

## **STEP 5: CIRCULATE, AMEND AND FINALISE DRAFT DOCUMENT**

The draft policy should be circulated to maximise feedback and create ownership among staff, parents, students and board of management. The working group is central to this distribution process. Posting the draft policy on school notice-boards and discussions during class time or at meetings may help to generate interest.

## **STEP 6: RATIFY AND IMPLEMENT THE POLICY**

Once the draft policy has been completed, it is ratified by the board of management. The ratified policy should be distributed and publicised among the whole-school community. In the implementation phase, all actions outlined in the action plan should begin.

## **STEP 7: REVIEW, MONITOR AND EVALUATE**

If a Healthy Eating Policy is to be effective, it should be reviewed regularly within a timeframe stated in the policy. In practice, this review could be carried out in consultation with the whole-school community and coordinated by the working group.

The review should consider any legislative changes, new policy and strategy documents, changes in school facilities and feedback from parents, students and staff.

The policy should be revised as necessary within the framework of school planning.

*Section 2: 2.2 of this document provides case studies of the experiences of a number of schools in developing policy. These may be of interest and use.*



# SECTION 2

# SECTION 2

## SECTION 2.1: AUDIT TOOL AND SAMPLE LETTERS

### Audit Tool: student, parent and staff questionnaires

This Audit Tool seeks to inform the working group of the strengths and opportunities of the school in relation to food and drink provision.

It aims to:

- identify the food and drink currently on offer in the school
- review the eating environment in the school
- help to identify the priority areas to be worked on in developing the Healthy Eating Policy
- give the whole-school community an opportunity to contribute to and inform the Healthy Eating Policy

The Audit Tool includes three questionnaires:

- a) Student questionnaire
- b) Parent questionnaire
- c) Staff questionnaire

The questions may or may not be relevant to individual schools. The questionnaires can be amended to suit each school's needs.

It is worth considering how you can maximise the response rate to the questionnaires in your school.

#### A) Student questionnaire

Student-council and class representatives play an important role in promoting the successful completion of this questionnaire. With the permission of the class teacher and principal, a student representative can inform the class group of the background to the questionnaire, encourage students to fill it out honestly and remind them that this is an opportunity to inform and shape school policy.

Completing all student questionnaires at the same time will enable efficient and speedy collection and minimise the disruption to class time.

#### B) Parent questionnaire

The parent questionnaire can be an ideal opportunity to invite parental opinion on healthy-eating issues and encourage involvement by parents. It may be distributed in many ways: for example, taken home by students, or through the parents council, or it may be useful to



send it along with other school/parent correspondence (such as exam results, amendments to the school calendar, etc). It is important to state a return date. The collection process may be organised in collaboration with the parents council.

### **C) Staff questionnaire**

The co-ordinator of the working group, in consultation with other staff members, is the ideal person to complete this questionnaire. It deals with policy issues, staff issues and the provision of food and drink.

When the questionnaire process is complete, the working group should discuss the findings. The information gathered will contribute to informing the draft policy and help to prioritise the actions that need to be taken.

# STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE – A

**1. Do you usually (please tick the relevant box)**

- bring lunch from home?
- buy lunch from school canteen?
- buy lunch from local shop or garage?
- go home for lunch?
- buy lunch from a vending machine
- Other?

**2. Is the dining area in your school clean and comfortable?**

Yes  No

If 'no' – what could be done to improve the area?

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**3. Is there adequate space for seating and tables?** Yes  No

If 'no' – what could be done to improve things?

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**4. Are students consulted about the choice of food and drink available?**

Yes  No

If 'yes' – how is this done?

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**5. Are healthy food and drinks options available?** Yes  No



6. Does the quality and variety of food and drink remain consistent throughout the day?

Yes  No

7. Is the food and drink priced fairly and affordable for all students?

Yes  No

If 'no' – please comment?

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8. Do students learn in the classroom about healthy eating?

Yes  No

If 'yes' – in which subject areas?

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9. Does the school discuss Healthy Eating Policy and practices with students?

Yes  No

If 'yes' – how is this done?

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10. Have you noticed anything in the school that could undermine healthy-eating messages/policy (for example, advertising of unhealthy food or drink)?

Yes  No

If 'yes' – please give details.

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11. What could be done to promote and market healthy eating in the school?

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# PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE – B

1. Are you aware of the food and drink facilities available in the school?

Yes  No

If 'no' – would you like to have this information?

Yes  No

2. Are you aware of the variety of food and drink available in the school?

Yes  No

If 'no' – would you like to have this information?

Yes  No

3. Are you aware of your child's drinking/eating habits while at school?

Yes  No

4. Would you be interested in supporting a Healthy Eating Policy in the school?

Yes  No

5. As a parent, would you like information on healthy eating?

Yes  No

If 'yes' – how should this information be provided?

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Any other comments you would like to make?

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# STAFF QUESTIONNAIRE – C

1. Is there a Healthy Eating Policy in place in the school?

Yes  No

If 'yes' – when was it developed?

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Who was involved in developing the policy?

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How often is it reviewed?

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2. Are healthy eating practices in place in the school?

Yes  No

If 'yes' – what are these practices?

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3. Does the school discuss Healthy Eating Policy and practices with parents?

Yes  No

If 'yes' – how is this done?

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4. Does the school discuss Healthy Eating Policy and practices with students?

Yes  No

If 'yes' – how is this done?

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5. Are food and nutrition issues considered as part of the School Development Plan?

Yes  No

If 'yes' – how is this done?

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**6. Is health and safety considered in storing and providing food and drink?**

Yes  No

**7. Are any foods and drinks prohibited at school?**

Yes  No

If 'yes' – which foods and drinks are banned, and why?

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**8. Are there any specific initiatives aimed at promoting healthy eating in the school?**

Yes  No

If 'yes' – what do these entail?

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**9. Is there a healthy-eating component in the taught curriculum?**

Yes  No

If 'yes' – in what subject/subjects is it included?

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**10. Are there any established links with outside agencies to help promote healthy eating?**

Yes  No

If 'yes' – which agencies?

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**11. Is there a designated dining area for staff to eat their lunch?**

Yes  No



**12. If 'yes' – is this area clean and comfortable?**

Yes  No

If 'no' – what could be done to improve things?

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**13. Are there adequate facilities for staff to store their food and drink during the school day?**

Yes  No

If 'no' – what could be done to improve things?

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**14. Are catering staff involved in discussions about changes to food and drink on offer in the school?**

Yes  No

**15. Do staff actively support healthy eating in the school?**

Yes  No

If 'yes' – what is the nature of that support?

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**16. Are there any specific initiatives in the school that could undermine healthy-eating messages/policy (e.g. advertising of unhealthy food and drink)?**

Yes  No

If 'yes' – please elaborate.

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**17. Does your school have the following facilities?**

- |                            |                              |                             |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Breakfast club          | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Vending machines        | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Tuck shop               | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Canteen                 | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Drinking-water fountain | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. After-school club       | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

**18. Which food and drinks are available in the following facilities?**

Food & drink	Breakfast club	Tuck shop	Canteen	Vending machine	After-school club
Bread					
Cereals					
Fruit					
Sandwiches					
Cereal bars					
Sweets					
Biscuits					
Crisps					
Popcorn					
Confectionery					
Water					
Hot beverages					
Fruit juices					
Smoothies					
Fizzy drinks					
Hot dinners					
Vegetables					
Chips					
Salads					
Soup					
Others					
(please specify)					



**19. When do students have access to vending machines?**

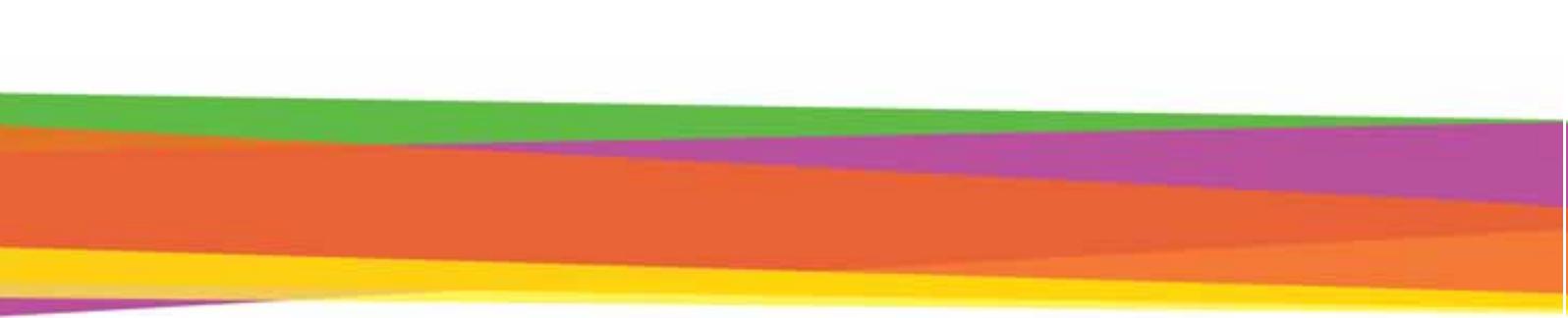
All day

Breaktimes only

**20. Are students allowed to leave the school grounds during lunchtime?**

Yes

No



# SAMPLE LETTER FOR PARENTS

[Date]

Dear Parents,

As you may be aware, we are currently developing a Healthy Eating Policy for our school.

For this policy to be successful, it is essential that a whole-school approach to healthy eating is taken – with students, parents and staff working together to provide consistent messages on healthy eating.

We are setting up a working group to promote and support healthy eating. Its role will be to develop a draft policy in consultation with staff, parents and students.

As we value your input and opinions, we would be grateful if you could complete and return the enclosed questionnaire to \_\_\_\_\_ by\_\_\_\_\_.

The results of the questionnaire will help to inform the policy.

If you have any queries about this development or would like to get involved in some way, please contact \_\_\_\_\_

Yours sincerely,

[Name]

[Principal]



## SECTION 2.2: EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE – CASE STUDIES

THE schools identified in the following case studies were nominated through the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Support Service. Each school was subsequently visited and the following reports compiled in consultation with all concerned.

These case studies seek to reflect good practice in four schools. Each school had different facilities and resources and got involved in promoting healthy eating for different reasons. However, they do have some things in common. Each school used a whole-school approach and is committed to improving the nutritional quality of the food and drink offered to young people.

### Case Study 1: A whole-school approach to wholesome food

Jesus and Mary Secondary School is a rural co-educational school with 360 students, located in the seaside town of Enniscrone, Co. Sligo.

In March 2004, following the completion of a Health Needs Analysis, the school decided to develop work on healthy eating. This needs analysis was carried out as part of the Healthy Schools Scheme, in which the school became involved. The school's healthy-eating project was supported by the Health Promotion Department, Health Service Executive West and the SPHE Support Service. Healthy eating was highlighted as the priority area of concern.

A co-ordinator was appointed and a working group established. The group consisted of five members of the student council, two representatives from the parents council and two members of staff. One member of staff was the deputy principal and the other took up the role of co-ordinator.

Healthy-eating co-ordinator Martina Ryan says: *“All our meetings were held within school time. This greatly facilitated the attendance of staff and students and we were very fortunate that these times also suited the parents.”*

The main focus of the group was to generate interest in healthy eating and to actively encourage healthy eating within the school.

The school does not have canteen facilities. Leaving Certificate students and those who live locally are the only students with permission to leave the school premises at lunchtime. Many students brought lunch in from home or bought food in the school tuck shop.

A cross-curricular approach was taken to promote the educational component of the Healthy Eating Policy. All the SPHE classes had at least three lessons on healthy eating, while nutrition education was addressed in Biology, Home Economics, Physical Education and English. Most of the classes were delivered over the same couple of weeks to help reinforce healthy-eating messages and generate a whole-school awareness of healthy eating.

During this time, a Healthy Eating Day was organised. A variety of competitions was held – including art and slogan competitions and a crossword competition in different languages – which added an element of fun to the week. Local businesses supported the day by sponsoring prizes.



The tuck shop, managed by Transition Year students, previously offered mainly chocolate, crisps and fizzy drinks. It was decided to introduce a variety of healthy options. These included fruit, fruit juices, water, crackers, cheese and fruit-and-fibre bars. Fizzy drinks were removed from the shelves. Sales of chocolate and crisps fell; this was attributed to healthy choices now being available and students' heightened awareness of the need to eat healthily. Senior students, through the working group, reported that drinking bottled water was fast becoming the 'in thing', mainly because senior students set the example and were imitated by junior students.

Four Transition Year students set up The Sandwich Shop. A local sandwich company became involved and freshly made sandwiches and rolls were delivered to the school daily, all with healthy fillings. This proved to be a big success. Daily sandwich orders increased steadily.

Recently, a hot-beverages dispenser has been installed. Profits go to supporting the education of students in Lagos, West Africa.

The parents were actively involved throughout the process. The parents council invited celebrity chef Neven Maguire to host an evening on healthy eating and provide cookery demonstrations. The evening was very well attended and generated interest in healthy eating.

At the beginning of the school year, all new students and parents are informed of the school's policy on healthy eating.

*"The whole-school involvement is what has made this work so worthwhile,"* says Sr. Mary Kelly, Principal. *"Everyone was aware of the work and had opportunities to get involved."*

## Case Study 2: Concern about food choices prompts school into action

Borrisokane Community College, on the outskirts of the town of Borrisokane, Co. Tipperary, has 470 students, mainly from a rural catchment area.

During 1999 and 2000, thanks to extensive fundraising by parents and a committed and enthusiastic staff, a new dining hall and canteen facility was built for students. These facilities were equipped to a high standard, meeting all the health-board regulations at the time. The canteen was managed privately. While the school didn't have to worry about the day-to-day running of the canteen, concern began to grow about the choice of foods on offer – chips were a firm favourite every day. This, coupled with the number of fizzy drinks being bought at vending machines, prompted the school into action. With the strong support of the Principal, Matthew Carr, a committee was set up; it comprised two parents, two students, two teachers (both Home Economics teachers), a community dietitian from the HSE and the canteen manager.

As the vast majority of students travel to school by bus and remain within the school grounds during lunchtime, there was an ideal opportunity to influence positively what students were eating and drinking during the school day.



Coordinator Nora Hill says: *“We really wanted to create an awareness of healthy eating among the students and encourage them to make wise choices when it came to food and drink.”*

The first task of the committee was to generate an interest in and understanding of healthy eating. A Healthy Eating Week was organised. An Bord Bia was invited to the school to address all students and provide food demonstrations for students and parents. Vending machines selling fizzy drinks, crisps and sweets were removed from the school and a cooled-water fountain was installed in the dining hall. Healthy-eating lessons were delivered through SPHE and Home Economics.

Under the guidance of the community dietitian, a survey of students’ eating habits was carried out. To help shape the way forward, it encouraged students to give their opinions. It was completed by all junior students. The findings showed a low consumption of fruit and vegetables and almost no consumption of fish. The top shelf of the Food Pyramid was being visited regularly.

Borrisokane Community College was the first school in Ireland to participate in the sea-food and health information and education campaign for young people of Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM, the Irish Fisheries Board): ‘Fish at the heart of a healthy diet’. Following the BIM information day, consumption of fish increased and fish is now part of the weekly menu.

With all this information about healthy eating in mind, the main issue of the lunchtime menu was discussed in earnest. *“Having the canteen manager on board and interested in making changes was imperative to success,”* said Principal Matthew Carr. *“Our main challenge was to offer healthy hot meals at affordable prices and offer food that the students would enjoy.”*

- A menu was agreed that offers variety and is reviewed regularly. It includes chicken, vegetables, shepherd’s pie, lasagne, fish and chicken curry, while chips are offered one day each week.
- The canteen opens each morning and offers students hot drinks and cereals.
- The school avails of the School Meals Programme (operated by the Department of Social and Family Affairs) which allows some students to get their main meal free of charge.
- Sandwiches, rolls and soup are available at break times.

A Healthy Eating Policy was drawn up and included in the School Development Plan, securing commitment to implementing it.

*“This work is ongoing and keeping it alive will always be a challenge, but having someone in charge of monitoring its effectiveness and having it embedded in the school plan certainly helps,”* says coordinator Nora Hill.

Borrisokane Community College has also recently become involved with the local Sports Partnership, providing lunchtime physical activities for students who otherwise would not take part in sport. This complements the established work on healthy eating.

### Case Study 3: New Healthy Options offered with free fruit

Presentation Brothers College, The Mardyke, Cork City is an all-boys school, with a student population of 667. In 2004, a parent on the board of management introduced the school to the concept of the Health Promoting School. The school embraced this concept and became involved in the Health Promoting Schools Programme, supported by the Health Promotion Service, HSE South.

With a focus on healthy eating, a Nutrition Committee was set up with two students nominated from the student council, two parents nominated from the parents council, the canteen manager, the principal and two teachers (a PE teacher and a Biology teacher) interested in the nutrition needs of students. Claire Lynch, the Biology teacher, was appointed health coordinator and was granted a 'special duties' post for this work.

Initially the Nutrition Committee met with two community dietitians who provided expertise and advice that was to steer the work. The committee met every six weeks to discuss initiatives and planning, prepare implementation strategies and record progress.

Many students coming to Presentation College were familiar with the Health Promoting Schools Programme from their years at primary school where healthy lunches are the norm. Some parents were concerned about the transition to post-primary school, where fizzy drinks, chips and burgers were on offer. The primary objective of the Nutrition Committee, with the full support of parents and staff, was to provide a healthier canteen and develop a Nutrition Policy.

A parent survey was conducted and the responses catalogued. Parents' opinions and requests influenced the way forward. Fizzy drinks were banned from the school, and burgers and chips were taken off the canteen menu. Breakfast cereals were introduced in the mornings and a 'hot options' menu made available in cold weather. Each month, a trial for a new Healthy Options product was promoted and advertised in the school. The new Healthy Options item came with free fruit.

Presentation College has a longstanding tradition of sport. To promote healthy eating among the boys, a 'performance lunch' was introduced, linking a healthy lunch with sports performance. The lunch promoted was a filled sandwich/roll, milk or water and fruit. During training sessions and class, rugby personnel and the PE teacher promote and support healthy eating.

The annual sports day hosts a Performance Food Stall at which information leaflets on sports nutrition are distributed. Students and staff are invited to sample seeds, nuts, fresh exotic fruit and fruit smoothies.

Once the Healthy Eating Programme was established, students were surveyed to ascertain baseline information on their eating habits during school hours. The data was used to inform a comparative study of the effectiveness of the programme. The results indicated that, after one year of the campaign, 49% of students were eating at least one piece of fruit during school hours and 23% were eating two pieces. Consumption of milk and water had increased tremendously; water is now the drink of choice for most students. To meet this demand, three new water fountains were installed.



The school developed its own Nutrition Policy, based on the results of the first year of the Healthy Eating Programme. The Nutrition Policy and Food Pyramid were formally incorporated into the school journal and launched during a Health Promotion Week held in the school early in 2007.

The Health Promotion Week was a major undertaking and involved the whole-school community. A specific health theme was the focus for each day; for example, mental health, sexual health, physical fitness, back care and healthy eating. The policy was launched by a local sports personality and endorsed by many other celebrity speakers. Workshops and talks were held during the week.

The demand for fresh juice and smoothies was so great that stock was running out each day. Rory McCarthy, a fourth-year student, says: *“During the week I tried fruits that I never tried before and started making smoothies at home.”* Staff also benefited from this week. Heart health screening was provided, offering blood-pressure and cholesterol measurements, while bowls of fruit were available in the staff room.

*“Having one class per week with fourth-year students to support this work definitely made a big difference for me. We wouldn’t have managed to do so much if it had not been for this extra help. Having students involved gives them a sense of ownership and responsibility, it helps to keep them interested in healthy eating,”* says health coordinator Claire Lynch.

Michael Hennessy, Principal of Presentation College, comments: *“The world in which we live presents young people with many opportunities and challenges that affect their health and well-being. As a society, it is important to support young people in a holistic manner to develop high self-esteem and a sense of security.”*

*“The Education Act 1998 places a responsibility on schools to ‘promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them’. We are lucky in Pres that parents, students and staff all saw the importance of the project and gave it their full support.”*

The healthy-eating campaign in Presentation College is ongoing. It is planned to evaluate formally its progress in the near future.

#### Case Study 4: Healthy eating – teachers make a difference

Our Lady’s College, Greenhills, Drogheda, Co. Louth is a large, all-girls school catering for 890 students. The school is situated about one mile from the town centre and only 20 students go home at lunchtime. The rest of the students remain on the school premises.

Until 2004, students got food and drink from the tuck shop. Run for profit, it was stocked mainly with chocolate, chewy bars, crisps and fizzy drinks. While some healthy choices were offered – for example, yogurts and fruit – the uptake of these was poor and surplus stock was often discarded.

The healthy-eating initiatives in the school arose because teachers felt that, although students were being taught about the importance of healthy eating through the curriculum, the school environment did not support this in practice.

A group of six staff wanted to make a difference. *“Our efforts were not about dieting or counting calories, but about educating the palate and introducing balanced natural foods to our students,”* said a spokesperson. The staff recognised the need to extend the group to include other partners in education. Parents, students, the community dietitian and the regional development officer of the SPHE support service were brought on board. This group met regularly and explored ways to improve students’ eating habits.

The first step was to replace fizzy drinks in vending machines with water. To further raise awareness of health issues, the group organised an activity-based Focus on Health Week in May 2005. This involved the whole-school community and was a very successful project. Subsequently, the group decided that providing healthy hot meals and snacks was a priority. A proposal was put to the principal to replace existing facilities to comply with health and safety standards. The board of management agreed and a loan was secured.

Work to install a new kitchen took about five months to complete. A competition took place to name the new dining facility. This was important to give a sense of ownership to the students. The name chosen was *The Lunch Box*. This carried no connotations of diet or deprivation. Students painted a mural on the partition between the dining and kitchen areas, depicting healthy-food options.

Canteen staff were employed and trained. The new premises was visited by the HSE. A rota of senior students and staff was drawn up to help at breaktime and lunchtime. The logistics of feeding over 800 students was discussed in detail.

The menu was devised with the support of the community dietitian. It was decided that a wide variety of foods and drinks would be on offer, providing healthy-eating options. Food labels were examined to ensure that the best-quality products were on sale. The cost of food and drink was a big issue for the committee. They wanted to sell good food at affordable prices. The school applied for and secured funding under the School Meals Programme. All the funding from this scheme went directly toward subsidising the cost of the food.

*The Lunch Box* was officially opened in October 2006 and generated great interest in the local media. An extensive menu is available. Homemade soup, a variety of sandwiches, rolls, wraps and baked potatoes with different fillings are prepared each day. In addition, a hot meal, a pasta dish or a rice dish are on the menu. Water, fruit smoothies, yogurts and yogurt drinks are all available at subsidised prices. The sale of milk, plain and flavoured, has steadily increased over the last year, which has obvious benefits for adolescent girls.

Tea and toast are also available every morning between 8:10am and 9am at the Breakfast Club.

The reaction to these major changes has been extremely positive. *“Students are trying out new foods all the time, some of which they wouldn’t have tried were it not for The Lunch Box,”* the group reported. *“We are always looking for new foods and reviewing the sales of certain products.”*

*The Lunch Box* is managed by the school. This obviously increases the workload for those involved, but gives them full control over monitoring and reviewing its effectiveness.

*“We are not profit-driven, we are here to service the needs of the students and provide them with a supportive environment conducive to healthy eating and I am very proud of what we have achieved here,”* says Principal Pádraig O Broin.



# SECTION 3

## SECTION 3.1: KEY NUTRITIONAL MESSAGES

Adolescence, as a stage of development, presents particular nutritional issues and requirements. When addressing these nutritional issues with young people, it is important to convey concise and consistent key messages. Outlined below are 10 of the main nutritional issues pertinent to young people in Ireland today.

### 1. Eating habits

The Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC, 2006) survey has shown that poor eating habits are a feature of many children's lifestyles.

The survey highlighted:

- up to 17% of students were skipping breakfast and/or dinner
- 14% of children reported never having breakfast during weekdays
- poor fluid intake (which lessens concentration levels and makes learning more difficult)
- 19% ate fruit more than once a day
- 18% reported eating vegetables more than once a day

Eating of both fruit and vegetables was slightly up on the figures in the HBSC 2002 report.

Research has shown that the foods eaten at lunchtime can affect behaviour in the classroom during the afternoon (foods high in fats and sugars and especially fizzy drinks may cause over-activity and lead to difficult classroom management).

**Key nutrition messages are:**

- restrict faddy eating and dieting
- eat three main meals daily using the Food Pyramid as a guide (see section 3.2)
- eat breakfast daily
- get into the habit of eating healthy snacks in school and before homework/study

### 2. Overweight and obesity

The report of the National Task Force on Obesity (2005) highlighted the increase in childhood obesity across Europe. Figures suggest that the number of overweight children in Ireland may be rising at a rate of 10,000 per year.

Research suggests that over-eating foods in small quantities regularly, without really noticing, can lead to obesity. For example, 100 extra calories a day can add an extra 10 pounds of weight per year.

HBSC surveys have shown that teenage girls regularly diet. It is very important that people who diet should choose food from the bottom four shelves of the Food Pyramid. Foods from the top shelf should be restricted.



**Key nutrition messages are:**

- lead an active lifestyle: with a minimum of 60 minutes per day of moderate activity
- increase intake of fruit and vegetables
- reduce intake of sweet and savoury snacks
- restrict intake of sugar-sweetened soft drinks
- reduce portion size

### 3. Iron deficiency anaemia

Irish studies have shown that teenage girls are particularly vulnerable to poor iron intake. As many as 42% of Transition Year girls have iron deficiency, which may affect their school performance (Ryan 1997). Socio-economic disadvantage may increase the risk of iron deficiency.

**Key nutrition messages are:**

- eat red meat frequently (50-100gms of red meat, 3-4 days a week)
- include vitamin C-rich foods and juices with meals to increase iron absorption
- choose iron-fortified breakfast cereals
- following lower-calorie eating plans may reduce iron intake

### 4. Adequate calcium intake

Adolescence is a period of critical bone growth and increased calcium requirements. The Irish National Nutrition Survey (1990) found that teenage girls had a calcium intake equivalent to only 50% of the intake of boys of the same age. Both boys and girls need to include calcium-rich dairy foods in their diets to achieve the recommended 1,200mgs per day – that is, five servings. The Department of Health and Children recommends that schools avail of the EU School Milk Scheme and offer milk, flavoured milk or yogurt daily.

**Key nutrition messages are:**

- choose milk as a drink with meals or snacks
- take five servings per day of milk, cheese or yogurt
- do not cut out dairy foods if weight-watching – low-fat varieties are good calcium sources

Sunlight on the skin improves vitamin D levels and increases calcium absorption.

### 5. Folic acid

Folate is an important B vitamin for all age groups. In the last decade, it has been recognised that folic acid, taken before conception and during early pregnancy, is associated with a significant reduction in the incidence of neural tube defects in infancy. Many countries, including Ireland, recommend that women likely to become pregnant should take folic-acid supplementation before conception and during the first three months of pregnancy, and should eat foods rich in folate. The Irish government has agreed to fortify most breads with folate to help reduce the incidence of neural tube defects.



Teenage girls should be made especially aware of the importance of folate in the diet. If they risk becoming pregnant or are in the early stages of pregnancy, they should take daily a folate acid tablet (400 micrograms).

**Key nutrition messages are:**

- increase intake of folate-rich foods (leafy vegetables, fruit and berries, beans, whole-grain products and liver)
- choose folic-acid-fortified foods where appropriate (breakfast cereals, some milks, breads)

## 6. Vegetarians

As vegetarian diets are becoming more popular among adolescents, it is important that the diet be well balanced and does not damage nutrition intakes. Omitted foods must be replaced by suitable alternatives.

**Key nutrition messages are:**

- include other sources of protein and iron in the diet such as pulses, eggs and cheese
- the more restrictive the diet, the greater the need to avoid deficiencies
- vegetarian diets are not any healthier than omnivorous diets
- ensure adequate intake of calcium, vitamin A and vitamin D

A vegan diet contains no animal products. These diets need careful planning and vitamin supplementation. Adolescents on vegan diets should discuss their nutrition needs with a Community Dietitian.

## 7. Special food needs

Since Ireland is now a multi-cultural country, adolescents from various ethnic communities may have different food customs. These may cover foods eaten, how the foods are prepared, what combinations of foods are used and when particular foods are eaten. Periods of celebration and celebration foods may bring new learning opportunities to the school. There may also be periods of fasting.

## 8. Sports nutrition

Adolescents who take part in strenuous exercise and team sports should be aware of the dietary consequences of regular sporting activity. Healthy-eating messages can be well received by both boys and girls in the context of sports nutrition and sports performance.

**Key nutrition messages are:**

- eat regularly and do not skip meals
- include carbohydrate snack foods before and after training and sporting events
- choose complex high-fibre carbohydrate foods from the bottom of the Food Pyramid as the basis for all meals and snacks
- drink fluids before, during and after sports as dehydration lessens sports performance



## 9. Physical activity

The HBSC 2006 survey found that 53% of children exercise four or more times per week, while 10% exercise less than once a week. Irish studies have shown that regular exercise is more common among boys than girls. Activity rates for girls show a sharp drop at around 15 years of age.

It is recommended that teenagers engage in at least an hour of moderate physical activity every day. Some of this may take place in school; all post-primary schools provide a Physical Education programme, while many offer extra opportunities for physical activities as part of their extra-curricular programme.

### Key message is:

- All teenagers should engage in at least an hour of moderate physical activity every day.

## 10. 'Fear of fatness' among teenagers

Adolescence is frequently associated with dramatic physical changes in both boys and girls, such as weight gain, change in shape and bone structure, and skin conditions. These changes balance out during early adulthood. However, with the increased focus on physical appearance in society today, more and more young people have concerns about such changes and are anxious to fit in with perceived norms. For around 7,000 Irish adolescents, this may be a factor in the development of an eating disorder.

Irish data has highlighted the number of adolescents following weight-reducing diets; the number of teenage girls doing so is significantly higher than that of boys:

- 24% of girls aged 15 to 17 and 17% of girls aged 12 to 14 reported being on a weight-reducing diet
- a further 30% of girls reported needing to lose weight

Fewer males go on diets. However, other methods are sometimes used to change physical appearance, including excessive exercise and the use of muscle-enhancing products such as steroids and protein products. These methods are not recommended.

*When addressing all the above issues and conveying healthy-eating messages to young people, the Food Pyramid, explained in the next section, is an easy and useful tool to use.*

## SECTION 3.2: NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION

### The Food Pyramid

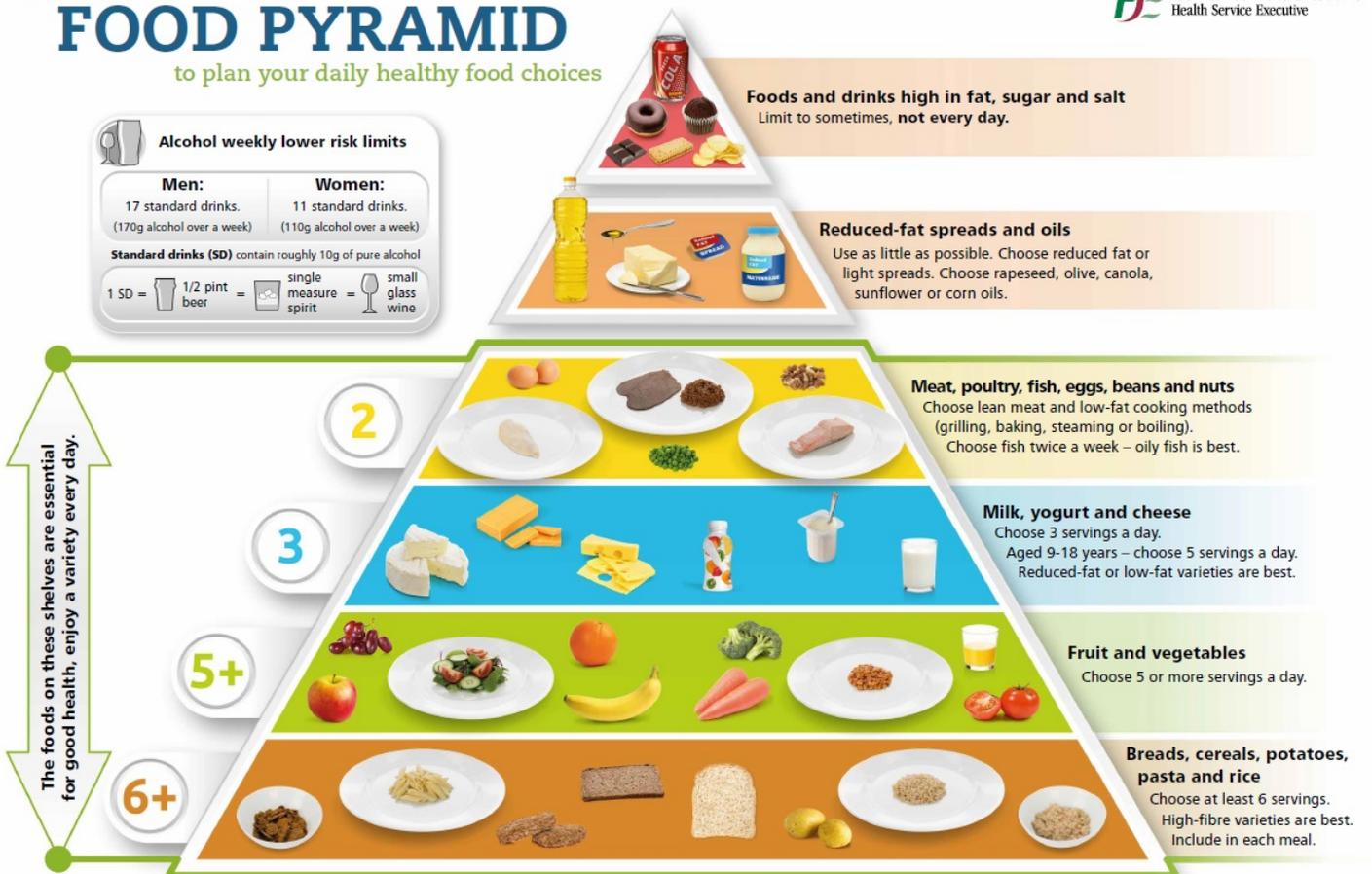
The Food Pyramid is used nationally to communicate visually the healthy-eating message of variety and balance in making food choices. It is familiar to most post-primary school students. It should be used as the basis for education on healthy eating. Choosing a variety of foods from each of the four main food shelves can help to ensure that young people make the correct food choices to stay healthy.

Use the

# FOOD PYRAMID

to plan your daily healthy food choices

**HE** Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive



The following energy proportions are recommended for each meal before and during the school day:

**Breakfast:** Aim to provide about 20-25% of total daily energy

**Lunch:** Aim to provide around 33% of total daily energy

**After-school snacks:** Aim to provide about 10-15% of total daily energy



## Lunch

When students bring a packed lunch to school or buy lunch at school or in the local shop, the Food Pyramid guidelines still apply.

The following quantities should be observed to help ensure the correct balance of energy and nutrients in the school lunchbox or school meal.

Food group	Lunch servings
Bread, cereal & potatoes	At least 2 servings
Fruit & vegetables	At least 1 serving
Milk, cheese & yogurt	At least 1 serving
Meat, fish & alternatives	1 serving
Fats, high-fat/sugar snacks, food & drinks	Sparingly

### Bread, cereal & potatoes shelf (at least 2 servings for lunch)

These foods are the starchy, 'filling' carbohydrate foods, which give the body energy for work and sport. They are naturally low in fat. Wholegrain or 'brown' varieties contain more vitamins, minerals and fibre and should be chosen frequently. Boys generally need more energy than girls and therefore need to eat more servings from this group. Very physically active adolescents may need up to six servings from this group at lunchtime.

The foods in this food group include:

- Bread (all types, plain or toasted) – sliced breads (brown, wholemeal, wholegrain/multigrain, white), homemade breads (brown, wholemeal, white or brown soda), currant breads, French bread/stick, soda farls, wraps, bagels
- Rolls (brown, white, wholemeal), burger buns
- Scones – wholemeal, brown, currant, white
- Crackers (preferably wholegrain/wholewheat)
- Pasta, noodles and rice may be included in salad
- Combination foods such as pizzas and quiche
- Baked potato/potato salad

One serving is:

- 1 slice of bread
- 1 medium roll
- 2 crackers
- 1 small scone
- 3 dessertspoons of cooked rice/pasta
- 1 medium potato

### **Fruit & vegetables shelf (at least 1 serving for lunch)**

These foods are packed with vitamins and minerals for vitality and good health, including healthy hair and skin. They are high in fibre, which helps promote a healthy digestive system, and are naturally low in fat.

The foods in this group include:

- Vegetables – cooked or raw
- Salad vegetables – such as lettuce, tomato, cucumber, sweetcorn, peppers, celery, grated carrot – and vegetable sticks, such as cucumber, carrots, celery, peppers (red, yellow, green)
- All fresh fruit such as apples, mandarins, satsumas, tangerines, peaches, pears, plums, bananas, oranges, kiwis, berries
- Tinned fruit – preferably in own juice
- Dried fruit – such as raisins, sultanas, apricots, figs, prunes, grapes and berries
- Fruit juice and fruit smoothies

One serving is:

- 1 large piece of fruit (1 apple, 1 orange, 1 banana)
- 2 small pieces of fruit (2 satsumas, 2 kiwis, 2 plums)
- 1 small (200ml) carton of unsweetened fruit juice
- 3 dessertspoons of fruit in own juice; one small individual tin of fruit
- 3 dessertspoons of vegetables (such as carrots)
- 1 small bowl of salad (lettuce, tomato, cucumber, celery sticks)

### **Milk, cheese and yogurt shelf (at least 1 serving for lunch)**

These foods are a rich source of calcium. Calcium is needed to build strong bones and help prevent osteoporosis (thinning of the bones) in later years. They are also a good source of protein for growth and contain vitamins A, B and D. If the school avails of the EU School Milk Scheme, this will provide one serving for students who drink milk.

The foods in this group include:

- Milk – all types
- Cheese – all types including cubes, sticks, strings, slices, triangles, spreads
- Yogurt – all types including yogurt drinks

One serving is:

- 1 glass/mini carton of milk
- 1 yogurt (125ml)
- 1 yogurt drink
- 25g cheddar-type cheese (size of matchbox)
- 2 cheese slices
- 2 small pots of fromage frais



### **Meat, fish and alternatives shelf (1 serving for lunch)**

These foods are high in protein and iron. Iron is particularly important for teenage girls. Iron absorption from foods can be improved by including a vitamin C-rich food with each meal (such as citrus fruit or juice, tomatoes, peppers or broccoli).

The foods in this food group include:

- Meat – lean beef, lamb, pork or ham
- Poultry – chicken, turkey
- Eggs
- Fish – tinned and fresh
- Cheese
- Beans, peas and lentils
- Nuts
- Peanut butter
- Textured vegetable protein (TVP) and tofu

One serving is:

- 50g meat (2 slices cooked meat)
- 50g chicken (2 slices chicken/turkey breast)
- 75g fish, such as tuna, salmon, mackerel, sardines
- 2 eggs – hard-boiled, sliced or mashed
- 50g cheese (2 matchbox-sized pieces)
- 9 dessertspoons of cooked peas or beans
- 6 dessertspoons of nuts

### **Sugary foods and savoury snacks shelf (sparingly: eat only occasionally)**

The foods at the top of the food pyramid are high in fat and/or sugar and do not contain many other nutrients. It is best to eat sweets, cakes, biscuits and crisps as occasional treats and in small amounts, rather than as everyday foods.

The need to reduce portion size is a message that can be effectively promoted to all young people, particularly in relation to snacking, eating out and soft-drink consumption. By making changes to portion size, in addition to changing the types of foods chosen, significant reductions of calories and dietary fat can be achieved.

The foods in this food group include:

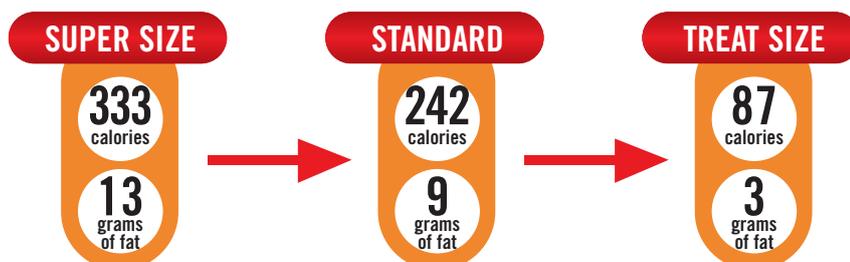
- Fats, oils and dressings, butter and margarine
- Table sugar and honey
- Sweets
- Cakes
- Biscuits
- Chocolate
- Sugar-sweetened fizzy drinks
- Savoury snacks, such as crisps

If you change the portion size of high-fat, high-sugar snacks, you can greatly reduce your intake of calories and fat.

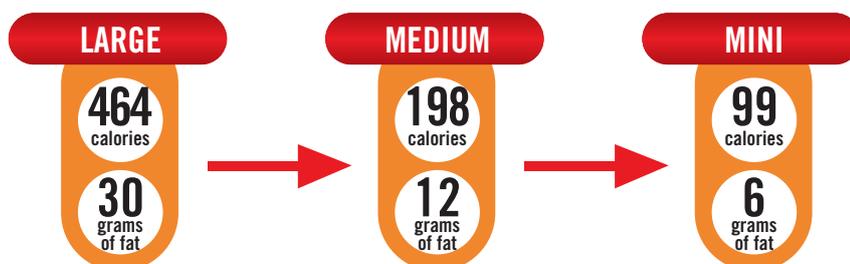


## TEMPTING TREAT?

### Chocolate Bar



### Sausage Roll



### Healthy drinks

Many students tend to survive on tea, coffee and other caffeine-containing soft drinks, especially during study periods or exam time. While some studies show that a small amount of caffeine (the equivalent of one cup of coffee) can make us more alert, taking excess caffeine can upset blood sugars, causing loss of concentration. Intake should thus be limited. Caffeine is also a diuretic, which causes us to lose fluids.

Keep well hydrated by drinking around 1.5 litres of non-caffeinated drinks every day:

- Water
- Milk
- Unsweetened fruit juices
- Smoothies
- Herbal teas
- Sugar-free squash

Drinking water, or still bottled water, should be readily available in all post-primary schools.



## Vegetarian lunch

When planning a vegetarian lunch, use the Food Pyramid as a guide. As it is important to include one serving from the meat, fish and alternatives shelf, instead of meat or fish choose from the following alternatives:

- Beans, peas, lentils, eggs, cheese, hummus, nuts, tofu, seeds and textured vegetable protein (TVP)

## Lunch options

### Sandwiches

- Brown bread, multiseed bread, baps, rolls, pitta pockets or white bread
- Fillings:*
- ham, tuna, fish, chicken
  - beef, turkey, cheese
  - pate, peanut butter

### Other carbohydrate-rich foods including:

- slices of cold pizza
- slices of cold quiche
- crackers

### Fruit and Vegetables

- fresh fruit or tinned fruit in juice
- lettuce and tomatoes in sandwich
- carrot, celery and cucumber sticks
- fresh salads with small amount of dressing

### Milk, Cheese and Yogurt

- Cartons of milk, yogurt drinks, fruit yogurt
- fromage frais, natural yogurt, cheese cubes
- cheese slices, hot chocolate (made with milk)
- rice pudding (cold homemade or tinned rice)

### Desserts

- fresh fruit, fruit salad, fruit cake, fruit scones, small muffins
- hot-cross buns, tea bread/currant bread
- fats, sugars and oils
- small bags of crisps/bars of chocolate instead of 'supersize' ones
- popcorn instead of crisps
- small bag of dry roasted nuts
- small, thin bars of chocolate
- fruit juices or smoothies instead of soft drinks
- chocolate- or strawberry-flavoured milk (or plain milk) as an alternative drink



Having a good understanding of the Food Pyramid helps students to plan healthy packed lunches and to make healthy choices from the school canteen, local shop or garage forecourt.

**And remember, portion size matters!**

### **Breakfast and snacks**

In addition to the school lunch, breakfast and snacks eaten during the day will have an impact on the student's overall nutrition intake.

**Breakfast clubs and after-school clubs** are growing in popularity and in some post-primary schools are organised as a mini-enterprise by the Transition Year students.

### **HEALTHY EATING CHOICES**

#### **Breakfast cereals**

Porridge or instant hot cereals/cornflakes  
Wheat biscuits or bran-type cereals

#### **Fruit & vegetables**

Whole orange or apple  
Banana, pear or fruit salad  
Grilled tomatoes or grilled mushrooms  
Fruit juice

#### **Milk, cheese & yogurt**

Milk on breakfast cereal or glass of milk  
Yogurt, yogurt drink or fromage frais

#### **Breads**

Wholemeal, multigrain bread, white sliced  
Scones (plain, fruit or wholemeal)  
Bread rolls, toasted bread  
Crackers

#### **Meat & alternatives (optional)**

Baked beans  
Cheese slices



### Healthy snacks for after school

Adolescents may need to include snacks in their daily diet to meet their high energy needs. Three meals and three snacks per day will be a common eating pattern among this age group. Healthy snacks are listed below.

#### SNACK SUGGESTIONS

- Glass of milk, yogurt or fromage frais
- Soup and wholemeal bread roll
- Sandwich or roll with lean meat, chicken, tinned fish or salad
- Bowl of unsweetened breakfast cereal with milk
- Scone, bagel, currant bread or plain biscuits
- Milk pudding (rice or custard)
- Fruit (fresh, tinned or dried)
- Tea brack, fruit cake or banana bread
- Homemade fruit pie or crumble
- Sugar-free popcorn
- Beans on toast
- Cheese on toast or crackers
- Hot chocolate and plain biscuits

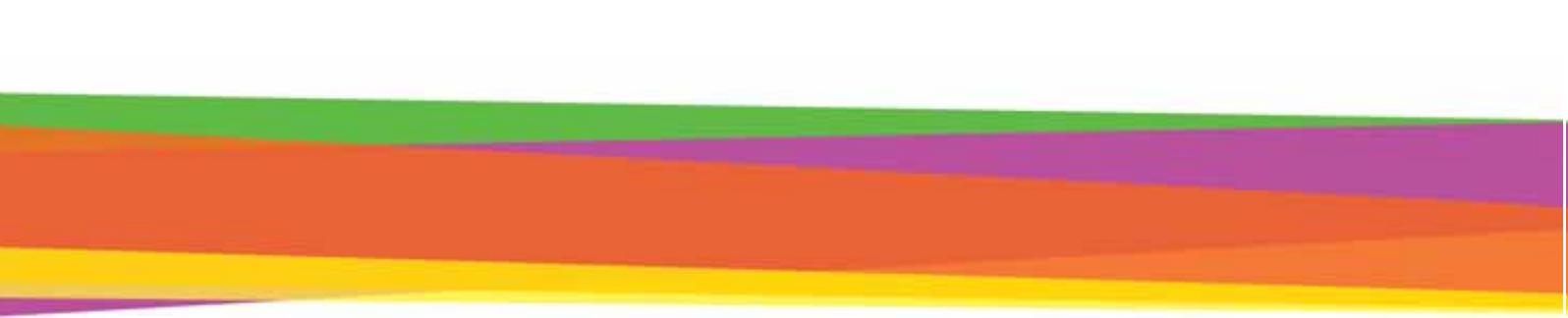
### Food outlets at school

#### School tuck shop and vending machine

The foods and drinks typically available in the school tuck shop and vending machines tend to be soft drinks and confectionery. These products tend to be high in fat and sugar and provide less nutrition. Healthy food choices should be offered instead.

#### Healthy food options for school tuck shop and vending machines

- Fruit juice (no added sugar)
- Fruit smoothie
- Portion of fresh fruit salad in a take-away container
- Fresh fruit
- Yogurts
- Popcorn
- Fruit and wholemeal scones with low-fat spread
- Grain cracker and cheese portion, preferably low-fat
- Portions of wholemeal or wholegrain bread with low-fat spread
- Sandwich selection to include wholegrain bread and wraps with low-fat dressings
- Wholegrain or bran-type cereal minipack and milk, preferably low-fat
- Dry roasted nuts (unsalted)
- Cartons of low-fat milk



A vending machine with rotating circular shelves (a shop-a-tron) is ideal for offering a range of healthy options. It allows foods such as fruit and yogurts to be made available without the risk of damage or spilling.

Before stocking the tuck shop or vending machine, conduct a school survey or consultation about preferences. Then promote the new products on offer to encourage healthy food choices.

### **School canteen**

If a school canteen is in operation, changes in catering practice can help to ensure healthy options. The preparation, cooking methods and presentation of food will not only influence the uptake of the food but also ensure that it is of high nutritional value. The following recommendations should be considered when examining current catering practice.

#### **Bread, cereal and potatoes**

- Many breakfast cereals are fortified with iron. Offer them with a vitamin C-rich food or drink to increase iron absorption (for example, fruit juice, fresh fruit).
- Offer a choice of breakfast cereals, including low-sugar and high-fibre varieties. Use cereals in baking for crumble toppings or in cooking for pie bases or gratin toppings.
- Thick slices of bread are good for healthy appetites.
- A sandwich bar with a range of filling options may be popular.
- High-fibre biscuits and crackers may be offered as a confectionery choice.
- Choose pizzas with a thicker base. Use more pasta and less sauce. Choose tomato-based sauces more frequently than cream-based sauces.
- Serve pasta in a variety of shapes and colours. Cold pasta in salads is also popular.
- Rice is good hot and cold; for variety, use white, coloured or wholegrain.
- Offer potatoes in a variety of ways: mashed, baked, boiled as well as chipped. If making chips, remember that thick-cut chips absorb less fat, while straight-cut chips absorb less fat than crinkle-cut. Offer no more than once per week.

#### **Fruit, vegetables and salad**

- Offer fresh fruit daily.
- Choose fruit in season as it's cheaper.
- Serve a variety of fruits and vegetables over a weekly menu plan.
- Incorporate fruit into baked dishes and vegetables into casseroles and stews.
- Cook vegetables with the minimum amount of water to reduce vitamin loss.
- Serve some vegetables raw in salads or with dips.
- Do not add bread soda to the cooking water when cooking green vegetables; they retain their colour at the expense of their vitamins.
- Steam vegetables when possible to retain more vitamins.
- Use tinned tomatoes and baked beans in meat dishes such as lasagne, shepherd's pie, casseroles.
- Offer bean-based dishes on the menu.
- Try to serve dark-green leafy vegetables at least twice a week as they contain iron.



- Salad bars are a popular way of encouraging students to eat vegetables.
- Serve salads in separate bowls and offer dressings on the side where possible.
- Vegetable-rich soups are a nutritious snack and suitable on cold winter days.
- Include fruit in desserts such as jellies and mousses.
- Choose tinned fruit in juice rather than in syrup.
- Try baked apples or stewed fruit as warm desserts.
- Add dried fruit to sponges and homemade biscuits for iron and fibre.

### **Milk, cheese and yogurt**

- Use milk in cooking for sauces, puddings and custard.
- If using low-fat milk in cooking, remember that it contains the same high level of calcium as whole milk.
- Milkshakes are a popular snack food.
- Offer cheese and biscuits.
- Yogurts are healthy toppings for desserts.
- Frozen yogurt is a delicious alternative to ice-cream.
- Smoothies are nutritious and convenient

### **Meat, fish and alternatives**

- Add beans and pulses to substitute for some meat in composite dishes (for example, chilli, Bolognese and lasagne).
- Trim excess fat from meat and buy the leanest cuts the budget will allow.
- Drain or skim the fat from casseroles and from mince.
- Offer a variety of fish regularly, especially oily fish such as salmon, sardines, mackerel.
- Use tinned fish in brine rather than oil.
- Do not add too much extra fat in cooking.
- Drain food well if it has been fried (for example, on wire trays).
- Good sources of easily absorbed iron include lean meat, tinned sardines, liver and homemade burgers with lean mince.
- If a dish contains nuts, make sure it is clearly labelled to inform anyone who may have a nut allergy.

### **Fats, oils and sugary foods**

- Use polyunsaturated and mono-unsaturated fats for cooking and use sparingly. These include corn oil, sunflower oil, olive oil, rapeseed/canola oil and soya oil.
- Do not serve both a pastry-based main course and a pastry-based dessert.
- Grill or bake foods rather than fry.
- Make pies with a top crust only.
- Use sauces and mayonnaise sparingly.
- Skim visible fat off sauces before serving.
- Offer milk, water and juices for drinks. Do not offer soft drinks.

Offering a wide variety of food and drink choices at affordable prices will contribute to the success of these recommendations.

### SECTION 3.3: USEFUL RESOURCES AND CONTACTS

**Bodywhys (Eating Disorders Association Ireland)** provides information on the different types of eating disorders and offers support to those affected by eating disorders. Helpline 1890200444. Tel: 012834963. [www.bodywhys.ie](http://www.bodywhys.ie)

**Bord Bia** promotes Irish food and drink and has nutritional information and recipes on its website. Tel: 01 668 5155. [www.bordbia.ie](http://www.bordbia.ie)

**Bord Iascaigh Mhara**, the state agency with responsibility for developing the sea fishing and aquaculture industries, has a schools resource pack which includes information on fish and nutrition (available on its website). Tel: 01 2144100. [www.bim.ie](http://www.bim.ie)

**The Coeliac Society** of Ireland provides information on coeliac disease and publishes a list of gluten-free manufactured foods. Tel: 01 8721471. [www.coeliac.ie](http://www.coeliac.ie)

**The National Dairy Council** provides leaflets, research articles and recipes, and a limited number of workshops for schools on bone health. Tel: 01 6169726. [www.ndc.ie](http://www.ndc.ie)

**The Dental Health Foundation Ireland** provides information on all aspects of oral health. Tel: 01 4780466. [www.dentalhealth.ie](http://www.dentalhealth.ie)

**The Diabetes Federation of Ireland** provides information on diabetes, including an online cookbook and video. Tel: 01 8363022. [www.diabetes.ie](http://www.diabetes.ie)

**The Food Safety Authority of Ireland** has responsibility for co-ordinating the enforcement of food-safety legislation. Tel: 01 8171300. [www.fsai.ie](http://www.fsai.ie)

**Healthy Food for All** promotes the access, availability and affordability of healthy food for low-income groups in Ireland. Its website describes food poverty projects and lists publications, some of which can be downloaded. [www.healthyfoodforall.com](http://www.healthyfoodforall.com)

**The Irish Cancer Society**, a national charity, provides an information service in addition to supporting cancer research. Tel: 01 231 0500. [www.irishcancer.ie](http://www.irishcancer.ie)

**The Irish Heart Foundation** produces leaflets on heart health and, in association with the Junior Cycle Physical Education Support Service (Dept. of Education & Science), produced Action for Life – a health-related activity resource for Junior Cycle PE. Tel: 01 668 5001. [www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)

**The Irish Nutrition & Dietetic Institute**, the national organisation for nutrition and dietetic professionals, has nutrition fact sheets available to download from its website. Tel: 01 280 4839. [www.indi.ie](http://www.indi.ie)

**The Irish Osteoporosis Society**, a national charity, provides information on all aspects of osteoporosis. Tel: 01 6774267. [www.irishosteoporosis.ie](http://www.irishosteoporosis.ie)



**The Irish Sports Council** is the statutory sports agency responsible for promoting, developing and coordinating sport in Ireland. Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) have been established throughout the country to increase participation in sport and to ensure that local resources are used to best effect. For further information and contact details see: [www.irishsportsCouncil.ie](http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie)

**Safefood (Food Safety Promotions Board)** provides information about food safety/hygiene and nutrition issues. Its website has details on educational resources such as understanding food labels. Tel: 021 230 4100. [www.safefoodonline.ie](http://www.safefoodonline.ie)

**The School Meals Programme** provides funding towards provision of food services for schools serving designated disadvantaged areas. Department of Social and Family Affairs, Cranmore, Sligo. Tel: 071 9138613

**The SPHE Support Service**, Post-Primary, provides information on the SPHE curriculum for post-primary schools. Its website includes sections for students, teachers and parents. Tel: 01 8057718. [www.sphe.ie](http://www.sphe.ie)

## PUBLICATIONS

*Obesity – The Policy Challenges: The Report of the National Taskforce on Obesity (2005):* Department of Health and Children, [www.dohc.ie/publications](http://www.dohc.ie/publications)

The National Health & Lifestyle Surveys: Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (2006) report, [http://www.dohc.ie/publications/hbsc\\_study\\_2006.html](http://www.dohc.ie/publications/hbsc_study_2006.html)

## HEALTH PROMOTION OFFICES

### HSE Dublin Mid-Leinster

Health Promotion Department, Third Floor, 52 Broomhill Road, Tallaght, Dublin 24. Tel: 01 4632800

Health Promotion Department, Block B, Civic Centre, Main Street, Bray, Co. Wicklow. Tel: 01 2014200

Health Promotion Service, Block 4, Central Business Park, Clominch, Portlaoise Road, Tullamore, Co. Offaly. Tel: 057 9357800

### HSE Dublin North-East

Health Promotion Service, Railway Street, Navan, Co. Meath. Tel: 046 9076400/1

Health Promotion Department, Floor 3, Park House, North Circular Road, Cabra, Dublin 7. Tel: 01 8823400

### **HSE West**

Health Promotion Department, Saimer Court, Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal. Tel: 071 9852000

Health Promotion Department, West City Centre, Seamus Quirke Road, Galway.  
Tel: 091 548321

Sláinte, 57 O'Connell Street, Limerick. Tel: 061 318633

### **HSE South**

Health Promotion Office, Eye, Ear & Throat Hospital, Western Road, Cork. Tel: 021 4921641

Health Promotion Department, Dean Street, Kilkenny. Tel: 056 7761400

## **COMMUNITY NUTRITION & DIETETIC SERVICES**

### **HSE Dublin Mid-Leinster**

Community Nutrition & Dietetic Service, Health Promotion Department, Third Floor, 52 Broomhill Road, Tallaght, Dublin 24. Tel: 01 4632800

Community Nutrition & Dietetic Service, Block B, Civic Centre, Main Street, Bray, Co. Wicklow. Tel: 01 2744261

Community Nutrition & Dietetic Service, Marlinstown Office Park, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, Tel: 044 9353220

### **HSE Dublin North-East**

Community Nutrition & Dietetic Service, Health Promotion Department, Floor 3, Park House, North Circular Road, Cabra, Dublin 7. Tel: 01 8823400

Community Nutrition & Dietetic Service, Health Promotion Department, Railway Street, Navan, Co. Meath. Tel: 046 9076400

### **HSE West**

Community Nutrition & Dietetic Service, Health Promotion Department, Saimer Court, Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal. Tel: 071 9852000

Community Nutrition & Dietetic Service, West City Centre, Séamus Quirke Road, Galway. Tel: 091 548335

Community Nutrition & Dietetic Service, Swinford Health Centre, Aras Attracta, Swinford, Co. Mayo. Tel: 094 9251900 Ext. 335

Community Nutrition & Dietetic Service, Sacred Heart Hospital, Roscommon. Tel: 0906 627851

Community Nutrition & Dietetic Service, Health Promotion Centre, Parkview House, Pery Street, Limerick. Tel: 061 483255



### HSE South

Community Nutrition & Dietetic Service, Health Promotion Office, Grosvenor Court, High Street, Killarney, Co. Kerry. Tel: 064 70763

Community Nutrition & Dietetic Service, Health Promotion Department, Dean Street, Kilkenny. Tel: 056 7761400

## CLASSROOM RESOURCES

SPHE Resource Materials: *Healthy Living* (First-Year), Teachers Manual & Workbook, *Healthy Times* (Second-Year), Teachers Manual & Workbook and *Healthy Choices* (Third Year), Teachers Manual & Workbook.

Department of Education and Science and the Irish Heart Foundation (2007): *Action for Life*, a health-related activity resource for Junior Cycle physical education. Dublin: Irish Heart Foundation.

Department of Health and Children: *Information Resource Pack for Junior Cycle Students*.

Safefood - the Food Safety Promotion Board offers *How they measure up*, which includes three lessons targeting second- and third-year students that introduce issues around food labelling.

The National Dairy Council *SPHE Nutrition and Health Mega Bites* resource deals with healthy eating (First-Year), a healthy skeleton (Second-Year) and body-weight issues (Third-Year). (See <http://www.ndc.ie>)

Bord Bia produces a free multimedia resource pack *Food Glorious Food* to support the study of meat for senior-cycle students. This can be downloaded from [www.foodgloriousfood.ie](http://www.foodgloriousfood.ie)

## LITERATURE AVAILABLE TO SCHOOLS

To keep up to date with currently available health-promotion literature, see [www.healthinfo.ie](http://www.healthinfo.ie)





