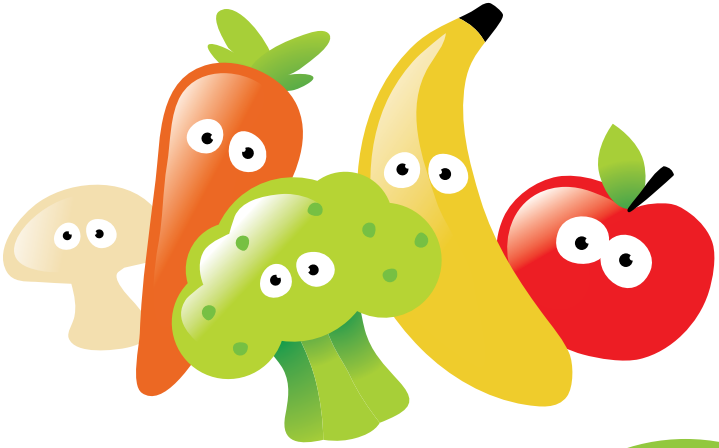
little book of goodness

CHILDREN'S FOOD TRUST
Eat Better Do Better

www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk



The right choice

As a dad with young children, I know there are lots of things to worry about when your little one starts school for the first time. Will they like their teacher? Will they make friends? Will they ever grow into that uniform?!

But the one thing you can be reassured about is school lunch.

School menus are now measured against tough national standards – so by choosing school meals for your child, you know they're being offered healthy, tasty dishes to fuel them for the afternoon. Investment in food, kitchens, dining rooms and training has helped cooks and lunchtime supervisors to make sure that every child has a great lunchtime at school.

This Little Book of Goodness answers the questions we're often asked by families all over the country. I'm confident that when you hear why millions of parents are choosing school lunches for their children, you'll want the same for yours, too. After all, when children eat better, they do better.

Rob Rees MBE
Chair of the Children's Food Trust

Good stuff for kids

Our children now benefit from some of the healthiest school lunches in the world. But even though they are now the healthiest ever, they are still tasty and include old favourites such as roast dinners, spaghetti bolognese and the occasional plate of fish and chips.

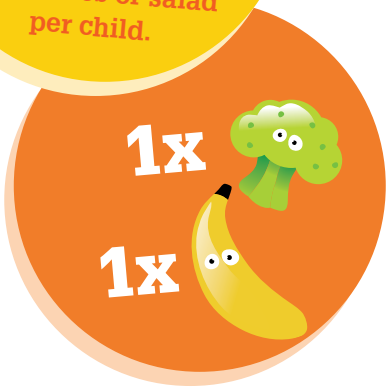
School meals are significantly more likely than packed lunches to contain salad and vegetables.

Source: Primary School Food Survey (2009), Children's Food Trust.

National standards mean that school lunches provide at least one portion of fruit and one portion of vegetables every day for each child. The standards ensure food is lower in fat, sugar and salt by restricting deep-fried foods and not allowing chocolate, sweets, salty snacks and sugary drinks. School lunches are now healthy, well balanced and nutritious. They pack in the essential vitamins and minerals your child needs to help them grow, develop, fight infection and have the energy to lead a happy and healthy life.

Fruit 'n' veg

School lunches provide at least one portion of fruit and one portion of vegetables or salad per child.



"We freshly prepare our school meals. We pride ourselves on ser ving healthy and delicious food, plus children have a choice of at least one portion of fruit and vegetables a day. We have lear ned new techniques to help us with our cooking and have been on training courses to ensure our meals are of the highest quality."

Carol Worrall, School Cook, Cuerden Church School.

Getting it just right

It's only natural to be concerned about whether your child is eating the right things, getting enough food and if they will actually eat anything at all.

That's why lunchtimes are well supervised. School cooks know new or different foods may not have been seen or tried before by children and will let children have tasters and encourage them to experiment.

Find out what your children are being served in school - ask your child's school to give you a menu.

Every school is different at lunchtime, that's why we encourage you to talk to your child's school about the lunches they offer. You can also find out if they provide family dining, classroom dining, or sittings by year group. Schools want to hear what you think about the food and the dining area, so why not see if you can try a taster meal yourself?

Top Tip

Fussy eaters!

Children often go through fussy or picky eating stages – but this usually passes. Try putting something new on their plate, and praise them if they try it.

Of those pupils eating a packed lunch, over half contained sweets or chocolate, and almost half contained salty snacks such as crisps.

Source: Primary School Food Survey (2009), Children's Food Trust.

"Thomas is a fussy eater, so there is always a concern that he won't eat a proper meal. By signing up to school lunches we know there's more chance of him eating healthily over the course of the day."

Suzanne, mum of Thomas, aged 6, Darwen, Lancashire.

Fun and excitement

Children love eating together at lunchtime. It's all part of a normal day at school and a chance for them to socialise with their friends away from lessons. Plus, they are also more likely to try new foods if they see their friends eating them.

Schools are doing lots of great things with children to improve the school meal experience, from turning old-style canteens into family-style dining rooms, to decorating rooms with brightly coloured pictures.

The cooks, supervisors and assistants are passionate about food. They will often chat with the children about what's on the menu and how food links into their learning in the classroom. The whole experience is designed to be fun, safe, enjoyable and rewarding.

Overweight children are more likely to become overweight adults. School food can help shape the eating habits that lead to a healthy weight.

Source: The National Child Measurement Programme, England (2009/10).

"Dinner times have become an integral part of the school's culture and curriculum. It has created a new vibrancy in school, better behaviour and children who become really articulate when talking about food."

David Maddison, Headteacher, St Peter's Primary School.

More value, less hassle

Thanks to the standards for school lunches, your child is guaranteed a healthy nutritious lunch, which can be cheaper and a lot less hassle than giving them a packed lunch every day.

So, as well as knowing your child is eating well, it also saves you time. We know what it can be like trying to get children ready in the morning, never mind the added trouble of agreeing what goes into the lunch box!

"I love my school dinners. I eat with my friends. I used to be scared about trying new food. Butall the dinner ladies were very nice and made sure I ate my lunch up. I now like to try new things."

Niamh, aged 5, Walthamstow.

Some children are entitled to free lunches. Talk to your school or council about this. Did you know that free school lunches can save a family with three children over £1,000 a year?

An average packed lunch contains more fat, sugar and salt than an average school lunch.

Source: Primary School Food Survey (2009), Children's Food Trust.

Top Tips

Some parents find that their children won't try school lunches.

You can help by:

being positive about school lunches

cooking school meal recipes with your child at home

getting together with other parents and carers so all your child's friends try school lunches.

School dinner ✓

School lunches are on average lower in fat, sugar and salt than packed lunches.

School lunches provide one portion of fruit and a portion of vegetables.

This lunch meets all of the 14 nutrient-based standards for an average primary school lunch.

✗ Packed lunch

This packed lunch is high in fat, sugar and salt.

This lunch has no portion of vegetables or salad.

Making a nutritionally balanced packed lunch each day could take between 50 and 190 hours of preparation time during the school year.

This lunch meets only seven of the 14 government nutrient–based standard for an average primary packed lunch.

Healthy and happy

Eating healthy school lunches is the best choice for your child.

Healthier food at lunchtime, eaten in a pleasant environment, can help children to concentrate in the afternoon.*

It will also help them develop healthy eating habits, knowledge about food and cooking, good social skills and table manners. Healthy school meals help give children the best start in life.

That makes them, you, and us very happy!

"My husband and I like that Leon will eat a wide variety of food if he has school lunches. It's important for him to eat food away from home and learn to eat with other children."

Sandy Al Alani, mum of Leon, aged 5, Golders Green, London.

"I often see the difference in my class with the children who have eaten healthy school lunches. Their behaviour and concentration levels [compared to those who haven't] are generally much better."

Sara Croft, Reception Teacher, Bamber Bridge, Preston.

* Source: Children's Food Trust, School lunch and learning behaviour in primary schools: an intervention study.

Go for it

If you sign up your child for healthy school lunches you are guaranteed that they are getting a healthy, balanced meal.

It's really simple to do – just get in touch with your school.

Some schools will let you sign up on a daily, weekly, monthly or termly basis.

Everything you need to know about school lunches should be outlined in your induction day. If it isn't then ask!

If you're still undecided, why not talk to your child's school about trying a healthy lunch yourself?

One study has shown that children in primary schools were three times more likely to concentrate in the classroom following improvements to the food and dining room.*

Find out more about the school food standards at: www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk or email us at info@childrensfoodtrust.org.uk

***Source: Children's Food Trust, School lunch and learning behaviour in primary schools: an intervention study.**

CHILDREN'S FOOD TRUST

Eat Better Do Better

The Children's Food Trust
The Children's Food Trust aims to reduce childhood obesity and improve educational performance through improving the food our children eat both in and out of school and in early years settings. We work directly with thousands of schools, millions of parents and local authorities across the country. We campaign on key issues in school food. We run the UK's biggest network of cooking clubs and, under our previous name of the School Food Trust, we were directly responsible for developing and introducing the national food and nutrition guidelines in both schools and early years settings. We make a difference, and would be pleased to help you too.

Let's Get Cooking
Let's Get Cooking provides training, support and resources for setting up and running healthy cooking activities for people of all ages. Let's Get Cooking is a programme run by the Children's Food Trust.

www.letsgetcooking.org.uk

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Children's Food Trust registered charity number 1118995

Let's get cooking