



Nutrition Standards for Hot School Meals

These Standards were developed with the assistance of **safefood** and the Health Service Executive in cooperation with members of “Hot School Meal Programme” in the Department of Social Protection.

Introduction

These *Nutrition Standards for Hot School Meals* are being published under the auspices of Healthy Ireland, the national framework which aims to improve the health and wellbeing of the population of Ireland. They have been developed for the Department of Social Protection by the Department of Health, **safefood** and the Health Service Executive.

The Hot School Meals operates in schools and aims to provide regular, nutritious food to children who are unable, by reason of lack of good quality food, to take full advantage of the education provided for them. It is an important component of policies to encourage school attendance and extra educational achievement by children, particularly those from the most disadvantaged background.

Children should be educated and supported to embrace the 'Healthy Food for Life' guidelines from a young age in order to grow and develop into healthy adults and to be a healthy weight. Research has shown that proper nutrition can improve children's ability to concentrate, improve disruptive behaviour and encourage children to attend school. The Hot School Meal Standards will provide guidance to ensure that children and young people are offered a healthy, nutritious and balanced lunch.

Food intake during the day is usually divided across: breakfast, lunch, evening meal and food consumed between meals (snacks). As a wider range of foods is usually consumed at lunch – about a third of total daily energy intake is recommended.

Portion sizes should be age-appropriate and a guide for primary schools would be to serve at least half an adult portion at the beginning of primary school, moving towards a full adult portion size toward sixth class. The Standards below are based on existing Nutrition Standards for School Meals (2017).



These Standards recommend that using the Food Pyramid as a guide, **every Hot School Meal** should contain:

2 servings of vegetables, salad or fruit

1 serving of wholemeal cereals and breads, potatoes, pasta and rice

1 serving of meat, poultry, fish, egg, beans and nuts

Examples of food to be provided in a Hot School Meal are:

- a serving of meat (50-75 g), poultry (50-75 g), fish (100 g), eggs (2), beans/peas/lentils (120 g) or cheese (25 g) for vegetarian options.
- a serving of cooked vegetables (80 g).
- a serving of fruit: apple, pear, orange or banana (approx. 80 g – smaller child size servings for younger children).
- a serving of potatoes (2 medium or 4 small; 100-120 g), pasta, rice or noodles - all cooked (1 cup or approx. 90 g).

Not needed for good health.

Foods and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt



Fats, spreads and oils



Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans and nuts



Milk, yogurt and cheese



Wholemeal cereals and breads, potatoes, pasta and rice



Vegetables, salad and fruit



Needed for good health. Enjoy a variety every day.


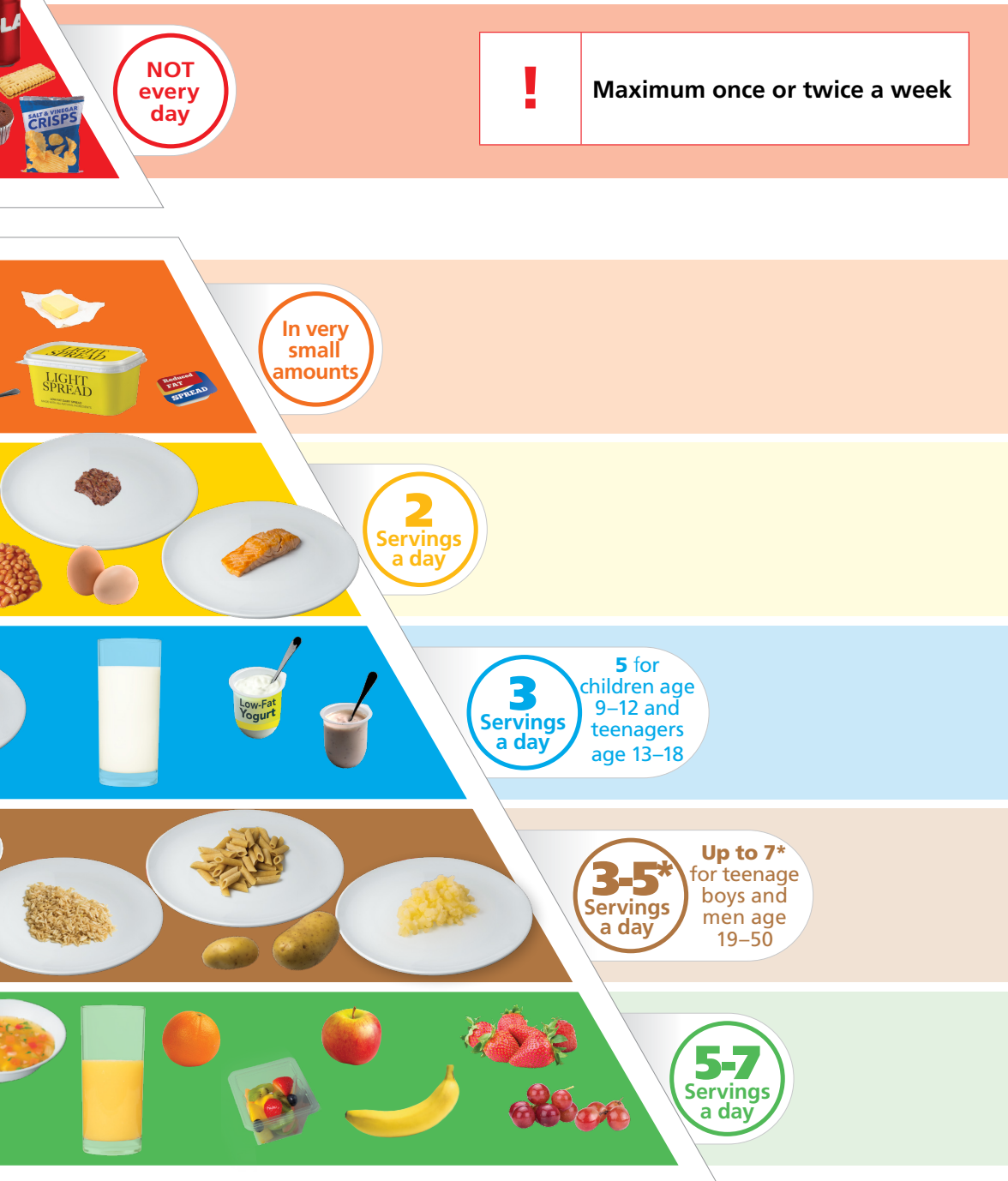
*Daily Servings Guide – wholemeal cereals and breads, potatoes, pasta and rice

Active	Child (5–12)	Teenager (13–18)	Adult (19–50)	Adult (51+)	Inactive	Teenager (13–18)	Adult (19–50)	Adult (51+)
	3–4	4	4–5	3–4		3	3–4	3
	3–5	5–7	5–7	4–5		4–5	4–6	4


There is no guideline for inactive children as it is essential that all children are active.

For adults, teenagers and children aged five and over

The Food Pyramid



Drink at least 8 cups of fluid a day – water is best



Get Active!
To maintain a healthy weight adults need at least 30 minutes a day of moderate activity on 5 days a week (or 150 minutes a week); children need to be active at a moderate to vigorous level for at least 60 minutes every day.

Meat, poultry, fish, egg and peas or beans



Standard

- Every meal should contain **1 serving** from this group.
- Processed meat and processed chicken products, fried foods, foods cooked in batter or breadcrumbs or foods containing pastry, should only be provided once a week maximum, if at all (for example bacon, ham, sausages, chicken nuggets and similar products).
- Fish to be available at least once a week.

Notes

- Meals containing red meat must be offered at least 2 and a maximum of 3 times a week.
- Chicken, turkey and fish are good low-fat options.
- Beans and eggs are good sources of protein and are low in fat.
- Lean red meat is a good source of iron. Lean cuts of meat are best. Remove all visible fat before cooking and cook without added fats or oils.
- Some pupils may have a severe allergic reaction to nuts, and whole nuts. Individual schools should decide to serve nuts or not.

1 serving is

- 50-75 g cooked lean beef, lamb, pork, mince or poultry.
- 100 g cooked fish.
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup beans, peas, lentils (120 g).
- 2 eggs.
- Cooked soya or tofu (100 g).

Potatoes, pasta and rice



Standard

- Every meal should contain **1 serving** from this group.
- Pasta and rice must be offered at least once a week each.
- Don't add salt to water when cooking rice, pasta or other starchy foods.
- Boil or steam potatoes. Do not add oil or butter.

Notes

- Don't add salt to water when cooking pasta, rice, or other starchy foods.
- Boil or steam potatoes. Do not add oil or butter or deep fry.

1 serving is

- 1 cup (approx. 90 g) of cooked pasta or rice or noodles.
- 2 medium or 4 small potatoes, yams and plantain (100-120 g).



Vegetables, salad and fruit

Standard

- Every meal should contain **2 servings** from this group. This can be 2 servings of vegetables or 1 serving of vegetables and 1 serving of fruit or salad.
- Offer a variety of vegetables and fruit.

Notes

- Steam or boil vegetables in a small amount of water.
- Pies, casseroles, stews and other composite main course dishes must contain a minimum of half a serving of vegetables per portion (40 g).
- Spaghetti tinned in tomato sauce does not count as a vegetable.
- Do not add salt to vegetables when cooking.
- Do not serve vegetables in high fat sauces.
- Offer a variety of fresh, frozen, tinned and dried vegetables and fruits.
- Tinned fruit in its own juice is a healthy option.
- Tinned vegetables and pulses in water or well drained are lower salt/sugar options.
- It is recommended that children eat 5-7 servings of vegetables, salad and fruit a day (5 child size portions a day for younger children and 7 a day for post primary school children).
- Cutting up fruit and vegetables into smaller pieces can make it easier to eat for younger children.
- Whole fruits such as apples, bananas and oranges are a better choice than fruit juice as they are higher in fibre.



1 serving is

- 1 cup vegetables (80 g).
- 1 bowl of salad (80 g).
- 1 bowl of homemade vegetable soup (220 ml).
- 1 medium piece of fruit (apple, banana, orange, pear).
- 1 bowl of fresh fruit salad in own juice (80 g).
- 1 bowl of fruit tinned in own juice (80 g).
- 2 small pieces of fruit (kiwi, plums, mandarin).
- 10 - 12 berries or grapes.
- 1 small carton or glass of unsweetened fruit juice (approx. 150 ml). Limit fruit juice to once a day.

Other required standards

Fats, spreads and oils



Standard

- Use as little as possible and only mono or polyunsaturated oils.
- Limit mayonnaise and salad dressings and use only lower fat, light options.

Notes

- Fried and other high fat food products, such as chips, roast potatoes, fried potatoes, products fried in the manufacturing process, garlic bread, fried fish or meal choices containing pastry, should only be served a maximum of once a week.
- Processed meat or chicken products (such as burgers, sausages, chicken nuggets etc.) should only be served a maximum of once a week.
- Processed meat and chicken products are manufactured products that have been processed and are ready for cooking or reheating.
- On the day when processed meat or chicken are served schools should aim to provide an alternative healthy option.
- Limiting fried and other high fat options helps to limit the overall fat content of lunches.



Salt

Standard

- Table salt must not be available to add to food.
- Use low-salt options of gravy mixes or stock cubes.

Notes

- Children need only 3-5 g of salt a day – this is about 1 g in total in lunch foods.
- Replace salt with other flavourings such as garlic, lemon juice, herbs and spices.

Other considerations



Drinks

Standard

- Fresh drinking water, i.e. tap water, should be available every day.
- Children and young people in school should have easy access to free, fresh drinking water at all times. Funding must NOT be spent on sugar-sweetened drinks or juices.
- Milk and water are the best options for drinks as they are tooth friendly. If the school offers other meals or snacks as part of the School Meals Scheme, fruit juice (unsweetened) should not be served more than once per day.

Notes

- Plain water.
- Milk.
- 1 small carton or glass of unsweetened fruit juice (approx. 150 mls). Limit fruit juice to once a day.

Other considerations

Foods and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt

Confectionery, such as crisps, chocolate, cakes and biscuits, must **NOT** be served.

Providing food for vegetarians

The food provided for those who are vegetarian should be varied. Cheese must not be served as the only vegetarian option more than twice a week. Other options such as fish, eggs, beans and low-fat hummus can be used as ingredients in soups or salads.

Field trips and special occasions

It is recognised that there are instances where the food provided varies due to the location or the nature of the occasion such as field trips. Food provided on these days still needs to comply with the Standards if it is to be funded in the context of the Scheme. Schools and organisations are encouraged to consider non-food treats to mark these occasions.

Cooking methods

Using cooking methods other than frying is addressed in the Standards.

Convenience Foods

Fried and other high fat food products, such as chips, roast potatoes, other fried potatoes, products fried in the manufacturing process, garlic bread, fried fish or meal choices containing pastry, should be served a maximum of one day per week.

Pizza can meet the Standards set out above if:

- **It has a wholemeal base**
- **The portion size is equivalent to two thin slices of wholemeal bread**
- **A serving of fruit or vegetable as a topping or a side salad is provided**
- **Is topped with a low-fat cheese**
- **It complies with the Standard for meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein as set out.**

The provision of food for those with allergies

The food provided for those with allergies must comply with the Standards. Guidance on allergies is available from <http://www.safefood.net/Allergens/Home.aspx>

Support materials available

- 1.** Nutrition Standards for School Meals (2017).
<https://assets.gov.ie/15978/6ade4b9f4810445e8c6516b3a33d330b.pdf>
- 2.** Healthy Food for Life (Food Pyramid and Healthy Eating Guidelines resource pack 2016- including Fact sheets and meal plans)
Visit: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/da7f19-eat-well/#healthy-eating-guidelines>
<https://assets.gov.ie/7567/d52712b9e9fa4f30a471bcae0337dbca.pdf>
- 3.** Healthy Food for Life – Revised Healthy Eating Guidelines and Food Pyramid Rationale (2016)
- 4.** Healthy Eating , food safety and food legislation – A guide supporting the Healthy Ireland Food Pyramid, Food Safety Authority of Ireland (2018).
https://www.fsai.ie/science_and_health/healthy_eating.html
- 5.** Scientific Recommendations for Healthy Eating Guidelines in Ireland Food Safety Authority of Ireland, (2011).
<file:///C:/Users/odwyeru/Documents/FSAI%20nutrition/Healthy%20Eating%20Guidelines%202011%20FINAL.pdf>



An Roinn Coimisce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

