

Healthier Catering Guide for children's menus

Healthier eating is becoming more important to customers. The guide covers key areas where changes could be made to give children healthier options when they eat out. This will help children learn to choose foods which are good for them and to eat more healthily, supporting your customers to have a healthier lifestyle.

You may already be achieving several of these tips but be prepared to go further and make real changes to help your customers make healthier choices.



Fruit and vegetables

Fruit and vegetables are good sources of vitamins, minerals and fibre. To ensure children can eat their 5 a day, all main meals should include at least one portion of vegetables and/or fruit as standard (at least 40g). These can be fresh, frozen or canned.

- Experiment with different presentation of colourful vegetables, such as veggie sticks served with a sandwich or with a dip as a starter. Vegetables could also be added to sauces, such as pasta sauce, and as pizza toppings.
- Vegetable soups, particularly blended versions, are often popular with children and can include a wide variety of vegetables.
- Offer a portion of fruit as a dessert choice. This could include cooked fruit (e.g. fruit crumble).
- Chopped fruit is often far more appealing to children than whole fruit.
- Fats (such as butter or cream), salt or sugar should not be added to vegetables or fruit before serving.
- Where a packed lunch in a box is offered, always include fruit and/or vegetables as a choice.



Starchy foods

Starchy foods are a key part of a healthy diet. They can be a good source of fibre and should make up around a third of the food we eat.

- Include a portion of starchy food (e.g. potatoes, bread, rice or pasta, ideally with no added fat) with all meals. Try to ensure a variety are on offer across the menu.
- Provide a choice of brown/wholemeal or 50/50 varieties of bread or pasta to boost fibre intake.

Sugar

Most children in Scotland have too much sugar in their diet which can contribute to tooth decay.

- For pudding and dessert choices, offer those lower in fat and sugar and/or smaller portion sizes or replace with fruit options such as fresh fruit without sugar or syrup.
- Maximise the provision of plain milk and water and minimise the availability of sugary drinks.
- Always offer tap water on arrival.
- Replace sugar-sweetened drinks with water and plain milk. If you want to offer other choices, go for low calorie or no added sugar varieties.

- If drinks which are high in sugar are still available to purchase, leave them off children's menus and do not include them in meal deals.
- If providing fruit juices, try to serve in a 150ml serving size or as close to this volume as possible as they are high in sugar.
- Avoid offering unlimited refills of sugar-sweetened drinks to children.
- Minimise the amount of confectionery, biscuits and cakes offered to children. Either replace these with healthier items (e.g. a piece of fruit), or reduce the size offered.

Fats and frying

Too much saturated fat can lead to the build-up of harmful fat in the body that you can't see. This can cause serious diseases in the future.

- Minimise the amount of fried food that is on children's menus.
- Ensure non-fried options are always available for example, not serving all meals with chips.
- Use healthier cooking oils when frying such as sunflower or rapeseed oil.
- Grill or bake foods rather than frying where possible e.g. sausages, and consider making this the default option.



Salt

More than half of children are eating too much salt every day.

- Avoid foods high in salt, such as bacon, sausages and crisps.
- Maximise use of alternative seasonings such as herbs and spices and avoid adding salt to meals during cooking.
- Remove salt and other condiments from tables and supply them only if requested. Many businesses are already doing this.
- Choose lower salt varieties of products where available e.g. reduced salt and sugar tomato ketchup.

Portion Size

Children often like adult meal choices but the portions are usually not appropriate for them.

- Where practical, make children's portions available, or offer smaller (or half) portions, especially of popular dishes. These might be popular with adults too.
- Consider the size of portions you are serving to children, particularly of fried foods items which are high in fat and calories. Reduce these where you consistently have a lot of plate waste.

Promote healthier options

Ensure healthier choices are included in any meal deals or promotions and actively encourage the uptake of these.

- Have the healthier choice as the default choice for example, sausages with mash rather than chips.
- If only offering meal deals, consider also offering the option of purchasing the main meal on its own to account for children's varied appetites.
- If offering a two course meal deal, consider offering a savoury starter, such as soup or veggie sticks with a dip, as an alternative to a dessert.
- Where food and drinks are positioned where children can reach their choice, position healthier options such as water, plain milk and fruit at eye level and in the most prominent positions.
- If providing crisps and savoury snacks, offer smaller size packets of 30g or less. You could also try offering a selection of baked or popped versions – they're not fried so have a lower fat content than standard crisps.



Source healthier ingredients and food products from suppliers

Check the nutrition information about the foods and drinks you buy in and choose options with higher fibre and less salt, sugar and fats. Your supplier may be able to assist you.