

# How to limit sugars and increase fibre:

## *A guide for schools and school caterers in England*

### Introduction

In July 2015, new recommendations for sugars and fibre intakes were published for adults and children in the UK.<sup>1</sup> This guide outlines these recommendations, the reasons for them, and how you can limit sugars and increase fibre in food and drinks you provide for children.

### Recommendations for sugars

Most children in the UK eat too much sugar.<sup>2</sup> Eating foods high in sugar too often can mean having too many calories, which can lead to weight gain and obesity, and increased risk of health conditions like type two diabetes. Eating sugary food and drinks too often can also cause tooth decay.

The new dietary recommendations for sugars include:

- reducing the amount of 'free sugars' (added sugars) we eat<sup>i</sup>, so they make up no more than 5% of our daily energy (calorie) intake.
- minimising consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages.

**Free sugars include any sugars added to food and drinks, or found in sugar, honey, syrups and fruit juice, but not the sugars found in fresh fruit, vegetables or milk**

How these recommendations translate into maximum sugars intakes for children and adults is shown in the table below

New free sugars recommendations for children and adults		
Age	Recommended maximum free sugars intake g/day	Equivalent number of sugar cubes (4g/cube)
4 - 6 years	No more than 19g/day	5 cubes
7 - 10 years	No more than 24g/day	6 cubes
Children over 11 years and adults	No more than 30g/day	7 cubes

Source : Public Health England (2015). Why 5%?<sup>3</sup>

This equates to 6.5g free sugars (just over 1.5 cubes of sugar) for a primary school lunch and 9g free sugars (just over 2 cubes of sugar) for a secondary school lunch.

### Tips for reducing the free sugars content of school food

The standards for school food help to limit the amount of free sugars in school food, by prohibiting confectionery such as cereal bars, sugary drinks, and snacks with added sugar, limiting cakes and biscuits to lunchtime, limiting the portion size of fruit juice and combination drinks, and restricting the amount of sugar added to combination drinks. The tips on page 2 help further reduce the amount of free sugars in food and drink provided.

i Free sugars include all monosaccharides and disaccharides added to foods by the manufacturer, cook or consumer, plus sugars naturally present in honey, syrups and unsweetened fruit juices. They do not include sugars naturally found in milk and milk products or in fruit and vegetables.

ii Measured as non-milk extrinsic sugars (NMES).

## Menu planning and procurement<sup>4</sup>

- Plan menus to include a wide variety of starchy foods, fruit and vegetables, dairy foods and non-dairy protein – the more varied your provision, the more likely it will be nutritionally balanced
- Follow the typical portion size information included in ‘School Food Standards: A practical guide for schools their cooks and caterers’<sup>5</sup>
- When buying food, ask suppliers for nutrition information for their products, and compare products to choose those lower in sugars.

### Understanding food labelling information about sugars

**‘Low sugars’** means no more than 5g total sugars per 100g

**‘High in sugars’** means more than 22.5g sugars per 100g

**‘Reduced sugars’** means 30% less sugars than a similar product

**‘Sugars-free’** means no more than 0.5g sugars per 100g

**‘No added sugars’** means no sugars have been added, but naturally occurring sugars may still be present (e.g. in unsweetened fruit juice)

### Main courses

- Cook from scratch where possible, and avoid using ready made sauces containing added sugars
- Limit the use of honey in recipes and marinades
- Choose reduced sugar and salt baked beans
- Choose vegetables and pulses canned in water with no added sugar
- Limit the use of condiments such as ketchup, salad cream and chutneys.

### Desserts

- Choose fruit canned in juice rather than syrup
- Reduce the amount of sugar added to dessert recipes – instead use stewed, canned or dried fruit to flavour and sweeten cakes and puddings
- Provide a variety of desserts across the week, instead of providing cakes, biscuits and puddings each day.
- Always offer fresh fruit as an alternative to the main dessert option
- Try swapping ice cream for frozen yoghurt for a lower-sugar alternative
- Try scones, malt loaf or fruit bread instead of cakes as a lower-sugar dessert.

### Food other than lunches

- Choose breakfast cereals that are ‘low’ or ‘medium’ in sugar, or provide porridge with fresh or dried fruit
- Don’t provide sugar for children to add to breakfast cereals
- Choose lower-sugar toppings such as lower-fat cream cheese or banana for toast instead of marmalade or jam
- Provide whole fruit, chopped fruit or vegetable sticks as a snack
- Check the sugar content of yoghurts, and choose those lower in sugars, or provide plain yoghurt flavoured with fruit
- Remember that snacks with added sugar, cakes, biscuits and desserts shouldn’t be provided.

### Drinks

- Check that the drinks you provide meet the healthier drinks standard
- Limit fruit juice - stick to just water and lower-fat milk, or provide fruit juice only occasionally
- Where fruit juice is provided, dilute it to reduce the sugars content
- Limit flavoured milk drinks, and stick to plain milk instead.

## Recommendations for fibre

Dietary fibre is found in the cell walls of vegetables, fruits, pulses and cereals. Eating enough fibre is important for a healthy digestive system. Some types of fibre can also help to reduce the amount of cholesterol in our blood. As fibre is quite bulky, higher-fibre foods are filling, so they can also help to maintain a healthy weight.

Children and adults in the UK typically don't eat enough fibre.<sup>2</sup> The new recommendations include increasing intakes of dietary fibre (to approximately 20g/day for children aged 5-11 years, 25g/day for children aged 11-16 years and 30g/day for adolescents aged 16-18 years and adults), and eating a variety of foods containing fibre.<sup>1</sup>

## Tips for increasing the fibre content of school food

The standards for school food help to increase fibre intakes by requiring provision of fruit and vegetables and wholegrain starchy foods at lunchtime. The tips below help further increase the amount of fibre in food and drink provided at lunchtime, and at other times of the school day.

### Menu planning and procurement<sup>4</sup>

- Follow the typical portion size information included in 'School Food Standards: A practical guide for schools their cooks and caterers'<sup>5</sup> to ensure that portion sizes of starchy foods and fruit and vegetables are sufficient.

### Main courses

- Wholemeal flour is higher in fibre than white flour, so use wholemeal flour (or a mixture of both) in pastry, pizza bases and bread
- Choose wholegrain starchy foods where possible – brown rice, wholemeal pasta and wholegrain breads are higher in fibre than the white equivalents
- Leave the skins on potatoes where possible e.g. for jacket potatoes or wedges
- Incorporate vegetables into main dishes (e.g. curries, bolognaise, pasta sauces)
- Make sure that a portion of vegetables or salad is available for every child having a school lunch
- Add lentils, or pulses such as chickpeas, and kidney beans to main dishes such as casseroles and curries, and add pulses and barley to soups and stews to increase the fibre content and add texture
- Use a variety of breads to make sandwiches (e.g. granary or wholemeal breads, rolls and wraps), and as the 'extra bread' provided daily. If wholemeal and granary breads aren't popular, try higher fibre white varieties instead
- Offer a variety of different starchy foods across the menu
- Provide a salad bar with a variety of different salads as an accompaniment to main meals
- Include a portion of fruit and a portion of vegetables or salad in each meal deal.

### Desserts

- Use wholemeal flour (or a mixture of white and wholemeal) in cakes, puddings and pastry
- Include oats or crushed breakfast cereals in crumble toppings and traybakes for increased fibre.

### Food other than lunches

- Choose breakfast cereals that are high in fibre (containing at least 6g fibre per 100g) and low or medium in sugars (containing less than 22.5g per 100g)
- Try making your own muesli with oats, seeds and dried fruit
- Serve porridge and other breakfast cereals with fresh or dried fruit
- Provide wholegrain toast or bagels as a mid-morning or after school snack
- Try soups containing lentils or beans as a warming winter snack
- Offer vegetable sticks and houmous or other dips as a snack option.

## References

- 1 Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (2015). Carbohydrates and Health. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/sacn-carbohydrates-and-health-report](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sacn-carbohydrates-and-health-report)
- 2 Public Health England and the Food Standards Agency (2014). National Diet and Nutrition Survey: Results from years 1-4 (combined) of the rolling programme (2008/9 - 2011/12). Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-diet-and-nutrition-survey-results-from-years-1-to-4-combined-of-the-rolling-programme-for-2008-and-2009-to-2011-and-2012](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-diet-and-nutrition-survey-results-from-years-1-to-4-combined-of-the-rolling-programme-for-2008-and-2009-to-2011-and-2012)
- 3 Public Health England (2015). Why 5%? An explanation of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition's recommendations about sugars and health, in the context of current intakes of free sugars, other dietary recommendations and the changes in dietary habits needed to reduce consumption of free sugars to 5% of dietary energy. Available at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/sacns-sugars-and-health-recommendations-why-5](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sacns-sugars-and-health-recommendations-why-5)
- 4 See also Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering Standards. Further information for schools is available at: [www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/thestandards/ingredients](http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/thestandards/ingredients)
- 5 School Food Standards: A practical guide for schools their cooks and caterers. Available at: [www.schoolfoodplan.com/standards](http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/standards)

## The Children's Food Trust

The Children's Food Trust aims to reduce childhood obesity and malnutrition and enhance educational performance through improving the food our children eat in early years settings, schools and beyond.

We work with health and education commissioners in local authorities, and directly with early years settings, schools, parents and children across the country. 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.

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