

Your guide to **secondary school meals**



Introduction

This guide will help you and your child understand the differences at lunchtime when your child moves from primary to secondary school.

It's an exciting time for your youngster so we want to offer you reassurance about their new lunchtime experience. This guide explains what their different dining options may be and what you and your child can expect when they choose school meals at secondary level.

Contents

1. School lunches – the healthy choice
2. What your child can expect from school lunches at secondary school
3. School lunches are good value for money
Free meals for your child
4. Need to know more?



1. School lunches – the healthy choice

Over the last few years the quality of school food has improved dramatically. National standards for school food mean that secondary schools now provide all pupils taking school lunches with a healthy and balanced range of foods and drinks to choose from.

Food-based standards also apply across the school day including breakfast clubs, mid-morning break tuck shops, vending machines and after school clubs.

School lunches must include a portion of fruit and a portion of vegetables for each pupil and there are strict controls on the nutritional content. The standards specify a maximum amount for fat, saturated fat, added sugars and salt, and minimum amount for vitamins and minerals.

There are also calorie limits, which mean that the average school lunch contains energy which is appropriate to the levels children need.

Cooks are also trained to make sure that portion sizes are appropriate for children.

Research shows that pupils are more likely to concentrate in afternoon lessons if they have eaten a nutritionally balanced lunch in a pleasant environment. **Compared to an average packed lunch, secondary school lunches contain significantly more essential vitamins such as vitamin C and folate, and essential minerals such as iron and calcium. These are vital nutrients for young people's health and development.**

This means that by choosing school lunches, not only will you be saving yourself the time and hassle of preparing a packed lunch every day, but you can also be sure that your child is getting the range and amount of food that will help contribute to their health and well-being.



2. What your child can expect from school lunches at secondary school

More choice, more options

In secondary schools the range of food on offer tends to be wider and more varied than in primary schools. This is because secondary schools have to cater for children's changing and developing tastes and expectations during teenage.

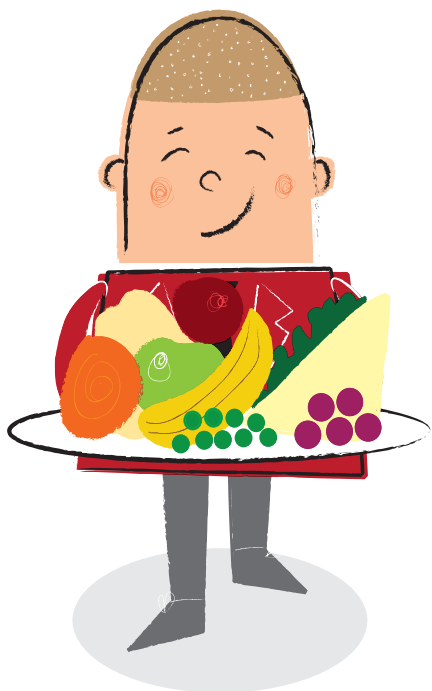
Most secondary schools offer a wide range of options, such as traditional hot dishes and meal deals (which generally offer both good value for money and are nutritionally balanced), salad bars, jacket potatoes and fillings, sandwiches and healthy drinks.

A bigger, busier dining experience

Most secondary schools serve food in a cafeteria and pupils may have the option to serve themselves from hot and cold meal stations.

The dining room is likely to be bigger and noisier than your child was used to at primary school, but there are usually professional lunchtime staff and supervisors around to reassure new pupils and to help them make healthy choices. Many schools will also allow the year 7s to go in first to get used to the new environment.

Check with your child's secondary school to see what arrangements they make for the new year 7 pupils.



Meet new friends, build social skills

It's normal for young people to want to sit together with their friends, and schools will often make every effort to help them do this. Research has shown that children in year 7 like to have a school lunch as it helps them to make the transition from primary to secondary school. That's because by taking a school lunch, they will be doing something familiar to their previous routine and it's also a good way to make new friends.

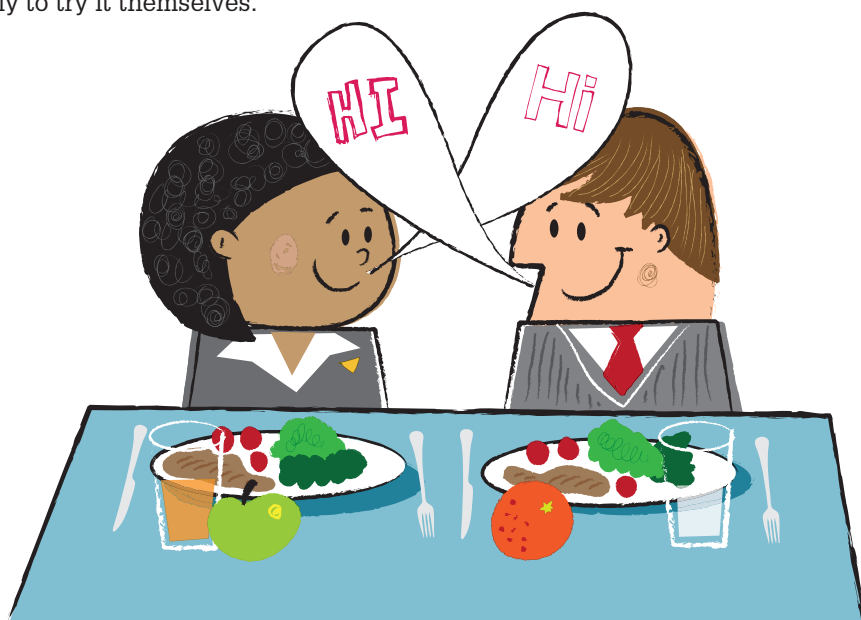
Fussy eaters

Parents often have concerns about what their child will eat at school – whether they will like the food or what will happen if they don't. Many schools offer special taster portions at lunchtimes to help pupils establish new favourites. The cooks will know what each dish contains. Research indicates that if a child sees a friend eating an unfamiliar food they are more likely to try it themselves.

Many schools share their lunch menu with parents and pupils in advance. This will help you decide with your child which meals they will want to choose. Ask for a menu from the school caterer if you haven't already received one.

Specific dietary requirements

Whilst school meals are suitable for the majority of pupils, your child may have special dietary requirements. Many schools have developed policies that cater for medical, religious and cultural needs to provide an inclusive and safe lunchtime experience for every pupil. If your child has special dietary requirements, contact your school for more information. The Children's Food Trust recommends that you also obtain medical advice if your child requires a special diet.



3. School lunches are good value for money

A school lunch offers great value for money. On average, a healthy, two-course meal will cost around £2.00 and schools offer a number of flexible ways to pay.

You or your child may be able to pay daily, weekly, monthly or even termly. The school may also operate one of a number of payment systems.

1. **Cash cafeteria:** pupils pay with cash at the till point for their chosen meal or food and drink items.
2. **Smart card/cashless:** a cashless system means pupils do not need to carry cash to school as cards can be topped up in advance.
3. **Biometric:** similar to the cashless system, although pupils are identified at the till point by their fingerprint instead of a card

All options offer a chance for children to learn about money and how to take responsibility. Why not contact your school for more information on the different payment options available?



Free meals for your child

Families entitled to register their child for a free school meal can save up to approximately £350.00 per child per year.

If you think your child may be entitled to register for free school meals, contact the school secretary and complete the required form before your child's first term at secondary school begins. Visit this website for more information www.gov.uk

Understandably, many parents worry about their children having a free school meal. Secondary schools are generally very sensitive about ensuring that the identity of children having free school meals remains confidential – some operate smart card, cashless or biometric systems and others will have more traditional systems to protect children's privacy.

If you have any questions or concerns about applying for free school meals, contact your child's school or your local council.



4. Need to know more?

We hope this booklet has given you the information you need about school food in secondary schools and helps you understand more about the options open to your child at lunchtime.



If you have any more, specific questions about how your child's future secondary school operates its school lunches service, whether it's how much they cost, how you pay for them, whether pupils can sit together, what's on the menu or indeed anything else you feel is relevant, please contact your new secondary school, local council or look through the school's induction information.

If you would like to find out more about the Children's Food Trust please visit www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk or follow us on **Twitter**.

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 with local authorities across the country. We campaign on key issues for 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.

Website: www.letsgetcooking.org.uk

Contact us

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cooking

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Eat Better Do Better