

Healthier breaks



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Introduction

This healthier breaks guidance is intended to help schools examine and improve the type of food and drinks they offer at break time. It will help schools to look at the practical issues surrounding the provision of healthier breaks.

A survey of children's eating habits has shown that only 11% of children aged 5–17 years consumed the recommended five or more portions of fruit and vegetables per day, with 20% not eating any fruit or vegetables on a regular basis. Yet almost half (47%) reported eating confectionery at least once a day.¹

In light of this, many individual schools are now encouraging fruit, vegetables, milk and water as nutritious snacks and drinks. Particularly in primary schools, healthier breaks policies are supported by local community dental teams and dietitians.

One regional initiative, the Fresh Fruit in Schools pilot scheme, provided a piece of fruit per day to children in Primary 1 and 2 with the objective of raising awareness of the benefits of eating fruit from an early age. Over half of the children (54%) were eating more fruit at the end of the scheme than before it began.²

The healthier breaks initiatives your school takes are likely to make a real difference to children's health.

Benefits of a healthier breaks scheme

A healthier breaks scheme can:

- encourage children to achieve the recommended five a day target for fruit and vegetables;
- foster healthier eating and drinking habits;
- provide pupils with a useful source of energy and refreshment during the busy school day;
- generate a small income for the school or caterer;
- increase the variety of healthier food and drinks available;
- help keep pupils on site during break time;
- show parents and the local community that your school takes the health of its pupils seriously.



What is a healthier break?

Break time is a period in which pupils have the opportunity to buy from a food and drinks selection that provides essential nutrition and refreshment in an environment that encourages healthier eating and drinking habits.

Healthier breaks are usually underpinned by healthier breaks policies, arrived at through a whole school approach. Schools that implement healthier breaks have the support of the board of governors, senior school management team, teachers, pupils and parents. Local community dental teams and community dietetic departments are also frequently involved in providing support for creating healthier break policies. They can provide advice, useful information and guidance, including appropriate letters to parents informing them of the healthy eating changes.

Your school may wish to introduce a policy on food and drinks at break time or modify an existing one. The step by step section in this booklet shows a useful way forward. You will find details of your local community dentists and dietitians in the *Useful contacts* booklet of *School food: the essential guide*.

Step-by-step plan

1. Getting started

A useful starting point would be to review your existing whole school food policy or develop one by conducting an audit of the school's current provision (see booklet two: *Establishing a whole school food policy*). Involve the whole school community, pupils, parents, teachers, caterers, governors, health professionals, perhaps through a school council or school nutrition action group (SNAG).

Working with partners in the local community will also ensure that the school has support to achieve its aims and can help with suggestions for a healthier break. You could contact your local community dietetic department, community dental team or school nurse. By incorporating a healthier breaks or break time policy into your whole school food policy, you will ensure that it is linked to other health initiatives at school. It will provide consistent information on healthier food and drink choices, and become part of your school's development plan. It will also ensure that the healthier break is not seen in isolation, but as part of a whole school approach to food and drinks provision throughout the day.

A keen and enthusiastic healthier break planning group, made up from members of the school community, is a necessary part of setting up and keeping it going. It is important to have a named person leading the project, so that someone has ultimate responsibility. Senior management support and involvement will ensure its success. In addition, having your caterers on board is essential, especially in post-primary schools.

Case study

At a large primary school, where no food had been sold at break time, a healthier fruit tuck shop has now been established. Every piece of fruit is sold for a small amount of money, which is collected every term from pupils. The school uses a local wholesaler to supply the fruit and a teaching assistant washes and prepares the fruit every day. Primary 4 and 5 pupils help to distribute the fruit to the other pupils. Bins have been provided in the main hall and playground for litter.

Step by step plan

Assess demand

Before implementing a healthier break scheme or starting a healthier tuck shop, assess demand from the school community. A simple survey to assess views could be undertaken, perhaps by pupils. This could be achieved at an assembly, parents' evening or via the school newsletter. The results will help provide information on whether pupils and parents want changes to break time.

Changing your current break time

How you implement a healthier break will depend on the school and the facilities available. Some schools will introduce a break time policy that will only allow healthy foods and drinks to be brought in from home. Other schools will provide a healthier break or have a healthier tuck shop. Whatever the approach, it will need the support of parents and pupils, and will need to be monitored by the school. Local community dietitians and community dental teams will give you guidance and help on this. A good time to implement a new break time policy or introduce a healthier break scheme is at the start of the school year in September or at the beginning of a term. Some schools may take a phased approach and introduce healthier break days within the week to monitor response from parents and pupils, or start with one or two classes initially before including the whole school. Find an approach that suits your school and build on your success from there.

If you plan to change what is provided at break time, or implement guidance on what food and drinks can be brought into school at break time, you may meet some resistance. It is important that the school community is consulted early, with a clear explanation of what the school is trying to achieve.

2. Setting up a healthier break time

If a school decides to implement a healthier break, either through a policy on what can be brought to school or through a tuck shop, the following guidance will help you get started.

The main ways of managing healthier breaks in schools are through food and drinks brought in from home, through a service run by the caterer, or one run by the school, ie staff, pupils and volunteers.

At the outset, you will need to decide what method best suits your school. All food and drinks provided for sale within a school must meet the standards as published in the *Nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools*.³

Brought to school

Schools can implement a healthier break policy or initiative which gives clear guidance on what snacks and drinks can be brought in by pupils.

Caterer

A school caterer can run a healthier tuck shop or break time service on your behalf. The advantage of this is that catering staff will order, prepare, serve and clear up. Discuss and agree issues relating to pricing, type and variety of food and drinks to be sold.

School

If the break time service is not run by a caterer, it is a good idea to make one person responsible overall, ideally an adult. It is recommended that the adult has training in basic food hygiene. Please refer to the *Useful contacts* booklet for details of your local environmental health department, which will be able to provide you with guidance and advice on food safety matters and food hygiene training.

The key to a successful healthier break time is to find willing volunteers to organise its day-to-day running, eg ordering, preparation, service and clearing up. Try to have a list of standby volunteers in case one of the regulars drops out. Develop a rota to share the work and make sure any procedures are well documented in case your main volunteer is unavailable.

Step by step plan

There are a number of ways of attracting volunteers including:

- notices in the school newsletter;
- asking for help in school assemblies, parents' evenings and parent teachers association meetings;
- offering food hygiene training as an incentive;
- offering a free break item for each volunteer.

Check the education and library board's policy on who can work with children in school; this may involve police checks.

Usually, volunteers include:

- parents;
- grandparents;
- teachers;
- classroom assistants;
- school nurse.

Pupil volunteers

In addition, pupils can benefit from becoming volunteers in helping to run a healthier break, eg increased self-esteem and confidence. Many schools have a rota of pupils who help out and some healthier tuck shops are run almost entirely by pupils.

Financial considerations

If the school provides the food and drinks, you will need to decide whether you want to make a small profit. Remember, if you charge too much you may deter potential customers and disadvantage pupils from lower income families. This will affect your pricing policy. Even if you are not intending to make a profit, you will need to sell your break a little above cost price to allow for wastage. If you do make a profit, you will have to decide what to do with the extra money. You may want to fund other healthy eating projects, purchase sports equipment or other resources, eg books. This type of decision is best made by asking the school community for its ideas.

Check that the school's public liability insurance is in place and that it covers your scheme. Check specifically with the education and library board insurance officer or the insurer to make sure you are covered.

Case study

At a busy primary school, the principal along with support from the parents and pupils introduced a healthier breaks policy which gave parents and pupils specific guidelines on what snacks and drinks could be brought in. They contacted their local community dietetic department and community dental team who supported the school with a range of activities and information sessions for parents and pupils. All the children now bring in a piece of fruit and milk or water to drink.

3. Deciding what to provide

No single food can provide all the essential nutrients, which is why it is important to eat a wide range of foods.

The choice of what to sell should be decided by the school, preferably through the school council or SNAG, or after consultation with the school community, eg community dental team. All food and drink provided for sale must meet the Department of Education's nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools.

Make sure you consider any possible food allergens or any children who would have a food allergy such as nuts. For further information go to www.eatwell.gov.uk

Overcoming barriers

In practice, demand, cost and nutritional content are the main determinants of what is sold in schools. Ensure that food and drinks on offer are varied and appealing, and are promoted and marketed competitively. Involving pupils and ensuring that the healthier break is part of a whole school approach will support this. The Department of Education's nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools support healthier breaks, eg, no crisps, sweets, chocolate or fizzy, sugary drinks can be sold in schools.

A healthier break time should reflect healthy eating and drinking messages by offering a wide range of foods that complement other foods eaten throughout the whole school day, eg a piece of fruit is a good choice for someone who has eaten cereal and semi-skimmed milk. The eatwell plate will help you choose foods that will represent each food group (find it at www.eatwell.gov.uk). The variety of foods on offer will reinforce the importance of variety in the diet and should be low in fat, sugar and salt. Try to:

- vary the type of food and drink available to promote balance and variety;
- establish theme or special event days, offering different or unusual foods;
- consider competitive pricing on different foods, eg fruit pots or yogurts.

As a school you will need to discuss what is best for you. Find out what the school community would like to see available. Food and drinks provided could be discussed at the school council or SNAG.

Step by step plan

Examples of healthier breaks

Drinks	Fruit and vegetables	Today's special
Water	Banana	Fruit pots
Milk (semi-skimmed)	Clementine	Fresh fruit of the day
*Unsweetened fruit juice	Pear	Plain or wholemeal scone
*Fruit smoothie	Carrot stick pot	Filled rolls, sandwiches and baguettes
*Milkshakes (less than 5% added sugar)	Cherry tomato pot	Breadsticks and cheese
		*Yogurt/fromage frais
		Weetabix or Cornflakes with milk

* Some of the foods and drinks on offer may not meet the criteria for some of the healthy break award schemes. Check with your local community dental team to make sure that they comply.



4. Where to place your healthier tuck shop

If your school runs a healthier tuck shop, where you site it will depend on who manages it. If the tuck shop is run by the school caterer, then the dining room would be the most appropriate place. However, if it is run by school staff or volunteers, find a place which is safe for pupils and workers, preferably with appropriate storage facilities.

As most tuck shops operate in the same place each day, it is important for it to be sited close to storage and preparation areas, and to be easily accessible to the pupils. In many cases, your tuck shop may simply be a table or trolley placed in a convenient location – somewhere where there is adequate room for queuing and where it will not cause an obstruction, eg to fire exits. The venue for the healthier tuck shop should be warm and welcoming. There are a number of ways you can achieve this, such as:

- using brightly coloured plastic tablecloths;
- displaying items in wicker baskets or coloured bowls;
- having music playing in the background;
- displaying interesting and informative posters.

Some schools choose to have a mobile tuck shop on a trolley which can be wheeled around each classroom in turn at break time. This has the advantage of being able to be wheeled outside when the weather is good. Other schools provide the break in the classroom. This can be useful, especially for younger children.

Equipment

Facilities and equipment will depend on the types of food and drinks you choose to sell in your healthier tuck shop. It is important that everything meets with the appropriate health and safety and food safety requirements. Contact your local environmental health department or school health and safety representative for advice and support.

Step by step plan

Useful equipment includes:

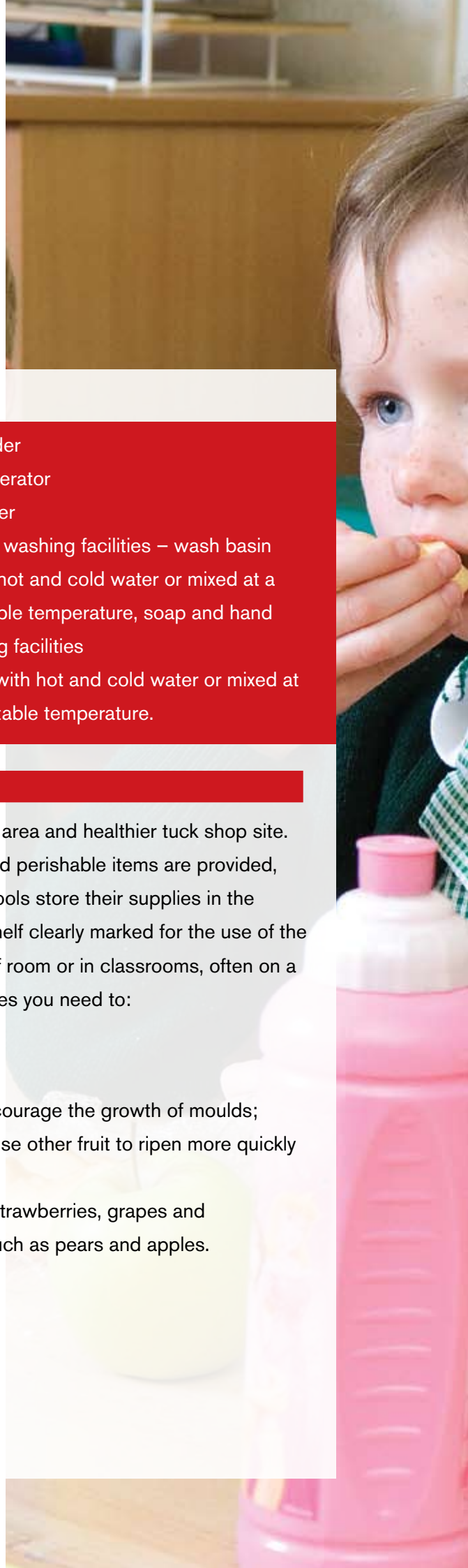
- aprons
- chopping board
- knives
- scissors
- paper towels or napkins
- paper bags
- kettle
- plastic cups
- tin for money

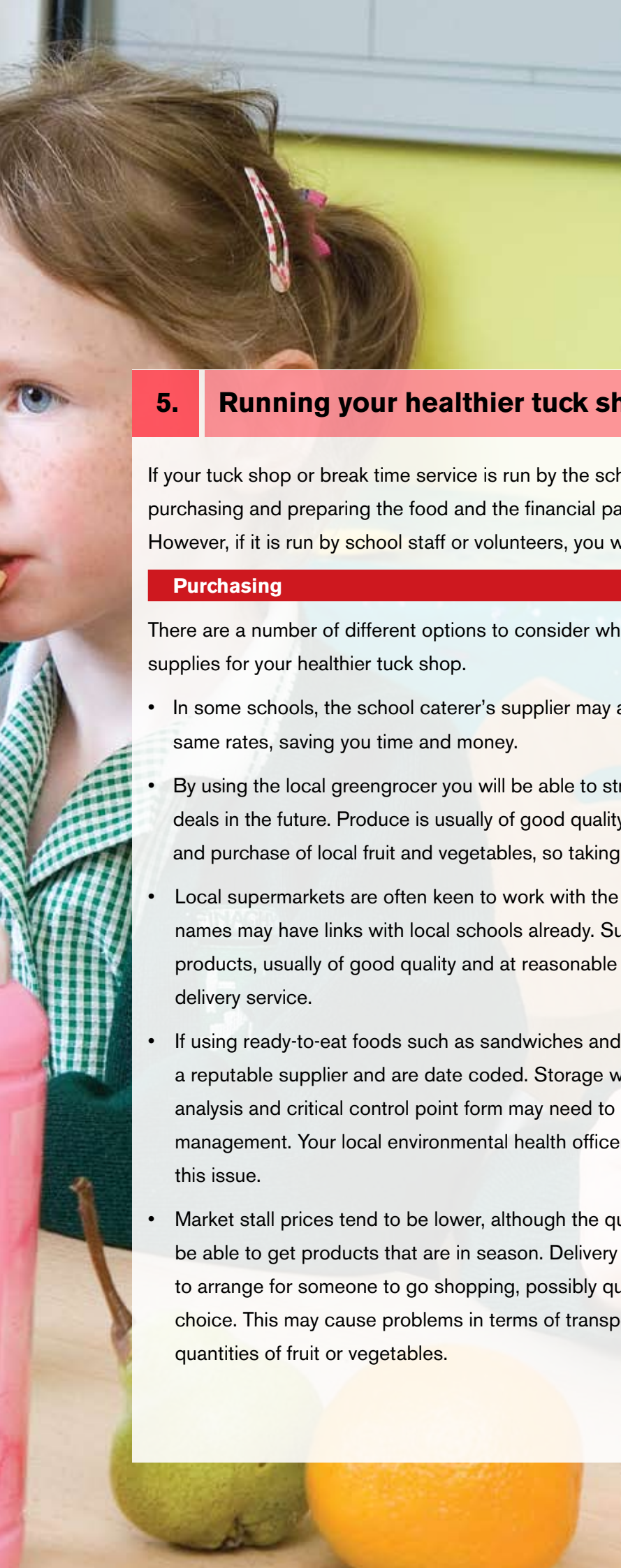
- blender
- refrigerator
- toaster
- hand washing facilities – wash basin with hot and cold water or mixed at a suitable temperature, soap and hand drying facilities
- sink with hot and cold water or mixed at a suitable temperature.

Storage

Ideally your storage area should be close to the preparation area and healthier tuck shop site. Keep dry goods in a cool, dry area or cupboard. If chilled and perishable items are provided, eg yogurts and smoothies, you will need a fridge. Many schools store their supplies in the school kitchen (with permission), and have a cupboard or shelf clearly marked for the use of the healthier tuck shop. Other schools keep supplies in the staff room or in classrooms, often on a trolley for easy transport. If you are selling fruit and vegetables you need to:

- store in a cool place, preferably off the ground;
- discard any damaged items on delivery;
- remove any plastic wrappings before storage as they encourage the growth of moulds;
- remember that bananas ripen quicker in the dark and cause other fruit to ripen more quickly when placed beside them;
- remember that certain fruits will need to be washed, eg strawberries, grapes and cherries and any other fruit where skin is to be kept on such as pears and apples.





5. Running your healthier tuck shop

If your tuck shop or break time service is run by the school caterer, then the management of purchasing and preparing the food and the financial paperwork will be dealt with by them. However, if it is run by school staff or volunteers, you will need to consider these issues.

Purchasing

There are a number of different options to consider when thinking about where to order supplies for your healthier tuck shop.

- In some schools, the school caterer's supplier may agree to sell items to the school at the same rates, saving you time and money.
- By using the local greengrocer you will be able to strike up a good relationship to allow better deals in the future. Produce is usually of good quality and you may be able to arrange delivery and purchase of local fruit and vegetables, so taking advantage of buying products in season.
- Local supermarkets are often keen to work with the local community, and many of the big names may have links with local schools already. Supermarkets have a wide range of products, usually of good quality and at reasonable prices. Many supermarkets provide a delivery service.
- If using ready-to-eat foods such as sandwiches and dairy products, ensure they are from a reputable supplier and are date coded. Storage will need to be considered and a hazard analysis and critical control point form may need to be completed for food safety management. Your local environmental health officer would be able to advise your school on this issue.
- Market stall prices tend to be lower, although the quality of produce may vary. You will easily be able to get products that are in season. Delivery may be possible, but if not you will have to arrange for someone to go shopping, possibly quite early in the morning to get the best choice. This may cause problems in terms of transportation, especially if buying large quantities of fruit or vegetables.

Step by step plan

- Local growers, producers or farm shops will provide seasonal produce which is relatively cheap and might be delivered to you if the school is nearby or on a delivery route. Some producers will also visit the school to speak at assemblies or to deliver taster sessions and some will be happy for children to visit their farm or orchard.
- Discount wholesalers are useful for low cost bulk buying, but remember to consider how much storage space you have. Think about teaming up with other schools so that you can share out the products – and the cost.

You may, of course, decide to get your supplies from more than one place. This will increase your workload, but you may be able to get better deals by doing so. Whichever supplier you choose, remember to think about backup should your usual supplier let you down. Also remember that if you get your supplies delivered, someone will have to be around to receive them.

Food preparation

Consider how long it will take you to set up shop at your chosen venue, as well as the time needed to prepare the food and drink, eg wash and chop fruits and vegetables, make sandwiches.

You may be able to prepare things in the school kitchen. Alternatively, cover a table with a clean plastic cloth, spray with a detergent sanitiser and then wipe before and after use. You will also need the use of a sink for washing your hands, and a separate one for washing any fruit or vegetables and washing utensils and equipment.

Financial considerations

It is important to keep records of money taken and spent on supplies, and that this is checked at least on a weekly basis. Pupils could be involved in this process, with adult supervision. Encouraging pupils to be involved in this gives them a chance to improve their numeracy and ICT skills, eg collecting data on Microsoft Excel charts.

In post-primary schools there should be no problem with pupils bringing money into school to use at break time. However, a small number of primary schools report that this may be an issue with younger children. Many schools have got around this problem by collecting money daily, weekly or even half termly from children, and in some cases issuing vouchers which can be swapped for items at the healthier tuck shop. In practice, this will only work if things are similarly priced (a set price) and if you have someone who is willing to collect the money, eg teacher, office staff or parent.

Reducing and managing wastage

Factors, such as the size of your school, storage facilities and the number of customers you expect, make managing stock a very individual matter. If you have promoted and advertised your healthier tuck shop well beforehand, you can expect a high level of interest in the first few weeks. After this, customer numbers usually drop slightly. In general it is better to under order at first, but do have a backup plan if sales are much higher than expected, eg discuss extra deliveries with your supplier. Most schools estimate their needs very quickly after establishing their healthier tuck shop. Whether you decide to shop or receive deliveries daily, weekly or on demand is up to you. However, there are a number of general issues to consider.

- Try to go shopping or arrange for deliveries at the start of the week.
- Run down your stocks before school holidays.
- Keep records of what you sell to make it easier to judge your ordering needs in the future.
- Think about buying some products wrapped in individual portions, which will reduce wastage but may cost more initially.
- Anticipate that there may be seasonal variation in the demand for certain products.



Step by step plan

Queuing

Queuing can be an issue if your healthier tuck shop is very popular. However, a few ways in which this problem can be managed include:

- making sure you have everything ready before you open, eg fruit chopped up, sandwiches made;
- having more than one queue, if possible, to enable you to serve more people in the same amount of time;
- considering different break times for classes;
- having a list of items available and prices clearly displayed where pupils queue so that they make up their minds and have the money ready by the time they reach the front of the queue;
- making your healthier tuck shop mobile – many smaller schools have a trolley that visits the different classrooms before break.

Litter

To reduce litter, many schools have replaced a healthier tuck shop selling pre-packaged items with unpackaged fruit and vegetables. However, it is essential to ensure that there are adequate bins available for waste. Some schools have introduced special bins to allow for recycling and composting. In coastal regions particularly, there have been problems with seagulls scavenging for food in the playground. If this is an issue in your area you should consider an indoor site for your healthier tuck shop and provide hard, covered bins in the playground for waste.

6. Promoting your healthier tuck shop

To encourage people to use the healthier tuck shop you could:

- write regular articles for the school newsletter, and promote the healthier tuck shop at school council meetings, school assemblies with parents;
- display posters designed by pupils promoting the healthier tuck shop around the school;
- present the healthier tuck shop attractively, invest in a few brightly coloured bowls or baskets and arrange items neatly on your table or trolley;
- make the prices of items obvious and consider making healthier products such as fruit cheaper and more competitive;
- start up a loyalty card scheme, eg for every four pieces of fruit bought, a free piece is offered;
- encourage visitors to the school to visit the healthier tuck shop;
- introduce new products routinely – get ideas from pupils about the types of healthier items they would like to see available in their healthier tuck shop;
- link and promote with other events if possible, eg harvest festival, Chinese New Year, Food First Month, National Apple Day, Smile Week, National School Milk Day;
- include special offers, especially if you are introducing a new product;
- offer pupils the chance to taste new or unfamiliar products before they buy;
- promote the use of seasonal or local fruit and vegetables (or other food products in your area);
- publicise the healthier tuck shop in your school prospectus and website.

Step by step plan

7. Evaluating success

It is important to review and monitor your healthier tuck shop to evaluate its impact.

For example, you could:

- keep notes from planning group meetings;
- record numbers of people using the healthier tuck shop;
- calculate the money taken and profit made;
- note the type and amount of produce sold to identify best sellers;
- assess the attitudes of pupils, staff and parents towards the healthier tuck shop. This can be done by carrying out a simple survey designed and administered by the pupils as part of classroom activities, eg mathematics and literacy, home economics, personal development and mutual understanding;
- record mistakes made and lessons learned along the way;
- monitor any changes in the food and drink choices of pupils, eg at lunch time;
- note improvements in the school environment, pupil behaviour and school attendance rates.

Healthier tuck shop checklist

- ✓ Is there demand for a healthier tuck shop?
- ✓ Have you identified the benefits of a healthier tuck shop for your school?
- ✓ Are you clear about what you want to achieve?
- ✓ Have you involved the school council, SNAG or pupils?
- ✓ Have you identified sources of funding?
- ✓ Have you identified a suitable venue for your healthier tuck shop?
- ✓ Have you identified adequate storage and preparation areas?
- ✓ Have you contacted the local environmental health department for advice on registration, food safety and hygiene training?
- ✓ Is all the necessary equipment available?
- ✓ Has a list of who will run your healthier tuck shop (eg canteen staff or volunteers) been drawn up?
- ✓ Have health and safety issues been addressed?
- ✓ Have you identified any pupils with allergies?
- ✓ Have you decided which food and drink options to offer?
- ✓ Have you identified suppliers?
- ✓ Have you planned a strategy to promote your healthier tuck shop?
- ✓ Have you planned how you will monitor and evaluate the impact of your healthier tuck shop?

Integrating with other school food projects

There are many natural links that can be made to other school food projects, depending on your school. Links to healthier break schemes could include:

- Ensuring that the breakfast menu and healthier breaks scheme offer a good range and balance of items rather than supplying the same foods, and that they reinforce healthier eating and drinking messages. You might use surplus fruit for smoothies.
- Creating opportunities for developing compost from leftover waste.
- Using posters to promote healthier eating messages if the healthier breaks scheme is held in the dining room.

Curriculum links

Healthier breaks schemes provide a context for a wide variety of curriculum links.

Primary

The arts

Art and design – pupils can look and talk about the use of food in art or design and display a piece of healthy food related artwork.

Personal development and mutual understanding

Individuals and groups can take and share responsibility for ordering supplies, making sales and keeping financial records of income and expenditure. They will make real choices. This will help them to develop self-esteem.

Mathematics and numeracy

Pupils can conduct a simple survey to identify the best selling options, sales data can be recorded and analysed using Microsoft Excel. Wastage rates can be monitored or a volunteer rota can be set up.

Post-primary

Learning for life and work

Home economics – pupils can interview tuck shop customers to canvass their views on the food and drink options provided, and suggestions for broadening the range of healthier options on offer. The suggestions could be implemented for customers and then evaluated and comments fed back.

Mathematics and numeracy

Groups of pupils can take responsibility for running the healthier tuck shop, including correlating its impact on school attendance rates, and projecting likely sales figures over a school term.

For further advice and suggestions, go to:

www.ccea.org.uk

www.nicurriculum.org.uk

References

1. Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland. Eating for health? A survey of eating habits among children and young people in Northern Ireland. Belfast: HPA, 2001.
2. Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland. Fresh fruit in schools evaluation 2002–2004: summary report. Belfast: HPA, 2005.
3. Department of Education. Nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools. Belfast: HPA, 2009.



Sources of further information

The following list provides links to further resources and information that may support you in developing your healthier breaks scheme.

Department of Education

www.deni.gov.uk

Provides detailed information on nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools.

Food Standards Agency

www.food.gov.uk

The document *Fruit tuck shops in primary schools – a practical guide to planning and running a school fruit tuck shop* is available on this website.

The Comic Company

www.comiccompany.co.uk

Provides popular illustrated health information resources in print and on the internet, including activity books, posters, booklets and stickers. Many of the resources are specifically targeted at schoolchildren.

Sustain

www.sustainweb.org

Provides top tips and practical advice on setting up a range of activities that promote fruit and vegetables, such as growing schemes, fruit tuck shops and breakfast clubs in schools.

NHS 5 a day site

www.5aday.nhs.uk

Top tips for eating more fruit and vegetables. This site has a separate section for schools which provides more information and materials for whole school activities and links to the curriculum in English schools.

The School Milk project

www.schoolmilk.co.uk

This site has useful information on promoting milk in schools, including a relevant resource section.

This resource was originally developed and produced by the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland as part of the School food: top marks programme. It was jointly funded by the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.