

# How to improve your school canteen menu

Schools

The Healthy Eating Advisory Service supports Victorian primary and secondary schools to provide healthier foods and drinks in line with the Department of Education and Training's Canteens, Healthy Eating and Other School Food Services Policy.

### The policy helps schools to:

- offer a variety of nutritious foods and drinks
- classify foods and drinks
- make it easy for students to choose healthy snacks and meals, and
- promote foods that are consistent with the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

The policy applies to all school food services, such as vending machines, classroom/curriculum activities, sports days, special events, external lunch order services from milk bars or breakfast clubs.

It is strongly recommended for all Victorian Government schools, and in independent and Catholic schools.

The policy also outlines the importance of food selection to reflect the Australian Dietary Guidelines and cultural diversity.

Food selection also includes choosing fresh foods over processed foods, and appropriate portion sizes for varying age groups.

## Food and drink categories

### Everyday category (green)

Everyday foods and drinks should be included as the main choices available and be made available every day. As a general guide, Everyday items should ideally represent more than 50 per cent of the menu.

Typical foods found in this category are whole foods such as fresh fruit, wholegrain breads and cereals, lean cuts of meat, legumes, canteen made soups, and reduced fat dairy products.

### Select carefully category (amber)

Select Carefully foods and drinks should not dominate the menu. These items are often processed and therefore should be offered in smaller serving sizes.

As a general guide, Select Carefully items should ideally represent less than 50 per cent of your menu items. They can be made 'greener' by partnering with Everyday foods.

Typical foods found in this category include commercially prepared pastas, noodles, soups, meat products, cakes, dairy desserts, and fruit juice.

## Occasionally category (red)

Foods and drinks in the **Occasionally** category should not be on the regular canteen menu or be regularly available in other areas of the school such as vending machines, foods used in curriculum activities and school events such as celebrations and sports days.

Foods and drinks that are categorised **Occasionally**, are typically high in kilojoules, high in saturated fat, and high in salt.

Schools should limit the availability of these foods and drinks within the school to no more than two occasions per term.

Confectionery and high sugar content soft drinks should not be supplied through school food services at any time, under the Canteens, Healthy Eating and Other Food Services Policy. This includes energy drinks and flavoured mineral waters with high sugar content.



## Steps to increasing Green (Everyday) and removing Red (Occasionally) items

Once you know which categories your food and drink items fall into, then creating a healthy food service is as simple as 1, 2, 3!

Foods and drinks are categorised as **Green (Everyday)**, **Amber (Select Carefully)**, or **Red (Occasionally)** based on their nutrition content.

### Step 1

Remove all **Red (Occasionally)** items including confectionery and sugary drinks.

### Step 2

Increase the amount of **Green (Everyday)** items to more than 50% of your menu.

### Step 3

Reduce the amount of **Amber (Select Carefully)** items to less than 50% of your menu.

See the suggestions below for simple and easy ways to achieve step 1, 2 and 3.

## Step 1

### Remove all **Red (Occasionally)** items

**Red (Occasionally)** items should not be supplied on the regular school food service menu, and should not be provided more than twice per term.

Confectionery and sugary sweetened drink must not be provided.

Try these ideas to remove **Red (Occasionally)** items from your food service:

#### Remove **Red (Occasionally)** item/s without replacement

- This works best for items that are less popular, as they're unlikely to be missed.

#### Replace **Red (Occasionally)** item/s with a healthier alternative

- Look for **Green (Everyday)** or **Amber (Select Carefully)** alternatives to popular **Red (Occasionally)** items.

Take a look at healthier food and drinks swaps for a range of great ideas.

Buyers' guides are also useful, as they identify commercially prepared **Green (Everyday)** and **Amber (Select Carefully)** items.

#### Phase out **Red (Occasionally)** items

- Phasing out **Red (Occasionally)** items over a period of time can help you adjust to the changes.
- This can be achieved by restricting how often the item is available, reducing the number of varieties available, or removing larger sizes and offering smaller options.
- E.g. if four flavours of chips are currently sold, remove one flavour per week until crisps are no longer available. Or, only sell chips on Fridays, then stop selling them after four weeks.

For information and resources to help you plan changes and phase out unhealthy foods and drinks, see the Action plan template and the Phase in, phase out template in our resources.

## Step 2

### Increase the amount of Green (Everyday) items

Green (Everyday) items are the best choices for schools to provide. They should be always available, as the main choices, and be actively promoted.

Here are some tips to increase Green (Everyday) items in your food service:

#### Use more Green (Everyday) ingredients

- Add extra vegetables to meals such as sandwiches, burgers, hot rolls, pastas and pizzas.

#### Increase Green (Everyday) flavours and varieties of existing items

- Increase your sandwich, jaffle (toasted sandwich), wrap and burger varieties, baked potato toppings, yoghurt and milk flavours, or fruit snack options.

#### Introduce new Green (Everyday) items to increase your healthy range

- Continue to search for new Green (Everyday) items and trial them as a 'special' to test their popularity.
- E.g. run a special 'noodle day' to test out a range of noodle-based dishes and introduce the most popular option into the regular menu.

### Swap Amber (Select Carefully) for Green (Everyday)

- Look for Green (Everyday) versions of popular Amber (Select Carefully) items. There are many Green (Everyday) alternatives available.
- E.g. swap regular yoghurt for reduced fat yoghurt, swap regular cheese for reduced fat cheese, or swap crumbed chicken to skinless chicken.

#### Prepare more items yourself

- Foods and drinks made on site are more likely to be Green (Everyday) than commercially prepared items, which generally contain more added fat, salt and sugar.
- Preparing foods in the kitchen will also allow you to use more Green (Everyday) ingredients and control portion sizes.

## Step 3

### Reduce the amount of Amber (Select Carefully) items

Amber (Select Carefully) foods and drinks should be limited across the school food service, as they contain some nutrients, but also some unhealthy ingredients.

Try these options to reduce the number of Amber (Select Carefully) options available:

Reduce the number of Amber (Select Carefully) flavours and varieties

- E.g. if you sell five flavours of Amber (Select Carefully) chips, removing three flavours from sale will decrease the number of Amber (Select Carefully) items on your menu.

Reduce the number of similar Amber (Select Carefully) items

- E.g. if your savoury snack range includes many similar Amber (Select Carefully) items (potato crisps, corn chips, savoury biscuits, 'vege' chips and rice sticks), remove some of these options and provide a smaller number of food types. You could start by removing the larger sized items.

Tip: Start reducing the slower selling products, brands and flavours.

For more Green (Everyday) food and drink ideas visit the Food and drink ideas section.



## Making Amber foods healthier

Foods and drinks in the **Select Carefully (amber)** category contain some valuable nutrients, but may also include unhealthy ingredients. They are mainly processed foods that contain high fat, sugar or salt added.

Schools are encouraged to limit the availability of these foods. Design your canteen to actively promote **Everyday (green)** category foods and drinks.



### Checklist for Select Carefully foods

- Reduce the number of these foods on the canteen menu (aim for less than 50%).
- Reduce the serving sizes.
- Select healthier choices within this category.
- Select choices of these foods that contain fruits and/or vegetables or serve with fruits and/or vegetables.

With limited equipment and preparation time, it can sometimes be challenging to provide tasty, nutritious Everyday meals. Jazz up your Select Carefully commercial 'heat and serve' foods with these simple ideas:

### Create a vegetable version

- Swap traditional lasagne with vegetable lasagne.
- Swap meat-based pizzas with vegetarian pizzas.
- Try Select Carefully vegetarian fried rice.
- Try Select Carefully sausage rolls or pies with added vegetables.
- Swap steamed dim sims with oven-baked vegetable spring rolls.

### Meal deals

Serve all hot foods with a small side salad or as a meal deal, coupled with a corn on the cob or a piece of fruit.

### Boost it with vegetables

- Add frozen diced vegetables to Select Carefully commercial pasta meals before heating.
- Top Select Carefully commercial pizzas with extra vegetables before cooking.



## Amber recipe ideas

### Instant noodle box (Oodles of Noodles)

Cook cakes of instant noodles with diced frozen vegetables. Strain, add diced lean ham and some sweet soy sauce. Stir through and reheat.

### Warm chicken salad

Place chicken strips or four to five oven-baked nuggets on top of a bed of salad or vegetables in a foil or plastic tray and drizzle with reduced fat mayonnaise or dressing.

### Winter warmer

Serve three to four oven baked chicken nuggets or meat balls, two Potato Smilies (TM), a corn on the cob and a couple of pieces of broccoli or other green vegetables in a foil container (which can be kept warm in a pie warmer).



## Important information for menu planning:

- Where possible choose reduced fat, reduced salt, and/or no added sugar varieties of products.
- When selecting commercially made food and drink products, remember to check their nutrition information panel against the 'Nutrient criteria for occasionally foods' table in the Healthy Canteen Kit - Food Planner

