

Healthy Food and Drink Guidance – Early Learning Services

2019 draft for consultation

Citation: Ministry of Health. 2019. *Healthy Food and Drink Guidance – Early Learning Services*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Published in October 2019 by the Ministry of Health
PO Box 5013, Wellington 6140, New Zealand

ISBN 978-1-98-859735-5 (online)
HP 7261



This document is available at health.govt.nz



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence. In essence, you are free to: share ie, copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format; adapt ie, remix, transform and build upon the material. You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the licence and indicate if changes were made.

Contents

Healthy eating is important	1
Purpose	2
Scope	3
Principles	4
Food-related choking in young children	5
Developing a policy for early learning services	6
Food and drink groups	6
Nutrient criteria tables	8
Vegetables and fruit	8
Breads, cereals and grains	8
Milk and milk products	9
Legumes, nuts, seeds, fish and other seafood, eggs, poultry (eg, chicken) and red meat	9
Mixed meals/ready-to-eat and ready-to-heat meals	11
Fats and oils, spreads, sauces, dressings and condiments	12
Packaged snack foods	13
Baked items	13
Drinks	14
Notes on Health Star Ratings	15

Healthy eating is important

Good nutrition is essential for the healthy growth and development of children. Children in early childhood education services may eat much of their food each weekday in these settings. When children eat a nutritious diet, they find it easier to learn. Teachers report improvements in children's attendance, attention, behaviour and levels of concentration in early childhood education services where healthy eating is accepted practice.

Purpose

This Healthy Food and Drink Guidance for early learning services helps services develop a policy to promote and provide healthy food and drinks in your licensed early childhood education service, ngā kōhanga reo and certificated playgroup (early learning service). It shows your commitment to improving wellbeing of children, staff and the early learning service community.

The Guidance supports early learning services to invest in people's wellbeing. Such services are in a unique position to create a healthy food environment by making small changes that can have a long-term impact. It is about creating supportive environments for children where healthy choices are easy.

This Guidance enables children to:

- access healthy food and drink in the early learning service
- develop healthy food and drink preferences
- learn to make positive and informed choices about food.

Scope

For the purposes of this Guidance, 'early learning services' are defined as licensed early childhood education services, ngā kōhanga reo and certificated playgroups.

The Guidance applies to:

- all food and drink provided by, or served within, an early learning service
- food for special occasions or celebrations
- free/charitable food provided to early learning services.

The Guidance excludes:

- gifts of food or drink to children or staff (not funded by the early learning service)
- food brought by staff for personal consumption.

In early learning services where food and drinks are not provided by the service, parents and carers should be encouraged to provide a lunchbox consistent with the Guidance.

The Guidance recognises the benefits of breastfeeding. The Ministry of Health encourages early learning services to support the continuation of breastfeeding, by providing a suitable place where mothers can breastfeed their babies or express breastmilk.

Principles

The principles of this Guidance are as follows.

1. Offer a variety of healthy foods from the four food groups:
 - plenty of vegetables and fruit
 - grain foods, mostly wholegrain and naturally high in fibre
 - some milk and milk products
 - some legumes, fish/other seafood, eggs, poultry (eg, chicken) and/or red meat with fat removed.
2. Food should be prepared with or contain minimal saturated fat, salt (sodium) and added sugar, preferably unpackaged and appropriate for the child's age and stage.

This means:

- some foods containing moderate amounts of saturated fat, salt and/or added sugar may be available in small portions (eg, some baked goods) but not served daily
- no deep-fried foods
- no confectionery (eg, sweets and chocolate).

3. Offer only water and unflavoured milk as cold drink options.

This means:

- no sugar-sweetened drinks
- no drinks containing 'intense' (artificial) sweeteners
- no fruit or vegetable juices (including 100 percent juice, no-added-sugar varieties).

4. Consider people's cultural preferences, religious beliefs and special dietary requirements, including gluten-free, vegetarian and vegan options. Where meals are provided, healthy food and drink choices appropriate for a wide range of children should be available.

Food-related choking in young children

Children under the age of five years, and particularly those younger than three, are at a higher risk of choking on food. This is because they have small air and food passages, and are still learning to move food around in their mouths. Their biting, chewing and food-grinding skills are in some cases still developing. Early learning services must consider the nutritional requirements of children when determining how they will serve foods that pose a high choking risk for children. Further guidance on food-related choking can be found in the toolkit and is available **here**.¹

¹ Ministry of Health. 2015. Food-related choking in young children. URL: www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/food-activity-and-sleep/healthy-eating/food-related-choking-young-children (accessed 30 September 2019).

Developing a policy for early learning services

Toolkits will be available to support all early learning services to use the information in this Guidance to adopt and implement their own 'Healthy Food and Drink Policy'. These are currently being developed and will be accessible via digital and hardcopies.

When developing a policy for your early learning service, you should consider:

- the needs of different cultures and religious groups and people with special dietary needs
- discouraging association with products and brands inconsistent with the Guidance
- the choking risk certain foods pose to young children
- designating a suitable space for breastfeeding and storing breastmilk
- encouraging sustainable, seasonal and locally grown and manufactured food and drinks, where possible.

Food and drink groups

The purpose of the colour-coded food and drink classification is to provide a practical guide for food service providers within early learning services (eg, cooks/caterers) to identify foods as 'healthy' and 'less healthy'. It should not be used to convey messages about the healthiness of items at a consumer level. For example, it is not intended to be used to educate children and whanau about food.

The toolkit will provide more examples of food and drinks in each category.

If a Health Star Rating (HSR) for a particular food or drink is unavailable, refer to the toolkit resource 'Healthy Food and Drinks reference document' for supporting information on various categories (currently in development).

Food groups are defined as follows.

Green group items	Amber group items	Red group items
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a good source of nutrition • the basis of a healthy diet • low in saturated fat, added sugar and added salt • mostly whole and less processed • come from the four food groups: vegetables and fruit, grain foods (mostly wholegrain and those naturally high in fibre), some milk and milk products (mostly low and reduced fat), some legumes, seafood, eggs and lean meat (and meat alternatives) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not part of an everyday diet • may have some nutritional value • often more processed • have moderate levels of saturated fat and/or added sugars or salt. • in large serving sizes, can contribute to excess kilojoule/calorie consumption. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have poor nutritional value • high in saturated fat and/or added sugars and salt • can contribute to excess kilojoule/calorie consumption. • are often highly processed foods and drinks.

Healthy food and drinks should be the easy choice. Green group food and drink items should predominate. Health options should make up at least 75 percent of food and drinks served.

Early learning services should manage the availability of green group, amber group and red group items as follows.

Green group items	Amber group items	Red group items
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dominate the food and drinks available • are always available in sufficient quantities to be the main option 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are 'selected carefully' by early learning services, and do not dominate menus • may be available in limited amounts and portion sizes (according to the nutrient criteria table) • are not served at the expense of green-group items 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are not provided, or are phased out over time in accordance with each early learning service's implementation plan

Nutrient criteria tables

The following tables provide a guide to help school food providers classify specific foods as green, amber or red.

Vegetables and fruit

Category	Green	Amber	Red
Vegetables	Fresh, frozen, canned and dried plain vegetables, including fresh potatoes, kūmara and taro	Vegetable products (eg, hash browns) with an HSR* of ≥ 3.5 * See the notes below	Vegetable products with an HSR of < 3.5
Fruit	Fresh, frozen and canned fruit	Fruit products with an HSR of ≥ 3.5	Fruit products with an HSR of < 3.5 Choking hazard: dried fruit as an ingredient or part of a fruit and nut mix, or dried fruit on its own

Breads, cereals and grains

Category	Green	Amber	Red
Breads and crackers	All wholegrain, multigrain, wheatmeal and wholemeal bread with $\geq 5g$ fibre/100g and $< 450mg$ sodium/100g All wholegrain, multigrain, wheatmeal and wholemeal crispbreads and easily ingestible crackers with an HSR of ≥ 3.5	Other bread products with $< 5g$ fibre and or $> 450mg$ sodium/100g All other easily ingestible crispbreads and crackers with an HSR of ≥ 3.5 HSR	Choking hazard and low nutrition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> popcorn all other crispbreads and crackers with an HSR of < 3.5
Breakfast cereal	Wholegrain breakfast cereal with an HSR of ≥ 3.5 and $\leq 15g$ sugar/100g	Other breakfast cereal with an HSR of ≥ 3.5	Breakfast cereals that do not meet the green or amber criteria
Other grains	Wholegrain/brown/high-fibre rice, wholemeal pasta, couscous, quinoa, buckwheat, rye	Refined grains and white rice, plain pasta and unflavoured noodles and couscous with an HSR of ≥ 3.5	Flavoured packets with an HSR of < 3.5

Milk and milk products

Category	Green	Amber	Red
Milk and milk products	<p>Children (1-2 years)</p> <p>Plain, full-fat milk or added calcium plant based milks</p> <p>Children 2+ years</p> <p>Reduced or low fat varieties ≥ 3.5 HSR:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • milk and added calcium plant based milks eg, rice, almond, oat, soy • yoghurt/dairy food (≤ 80ml portion) • custard (≤ 80ml portion) • cheese (≤ 20g portion) 	<p>Children 2+ years</p> <p>Full fat ≥ 3.5 HSR:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • milk and added calcium plant based milks (eg, rice, almond, oat, soy) • yoghurt/dairy food (≤ 80ml portion) • custard (≤ 80ml portion) • cheese (≤ 20g portion) <p>Reduced or low-fat cream, sour cream and cream cheese</p> <p>Lite² coconut milk or coconut cream, or coconut cream diluted with water</p> <p>Frozen desserts (eg, yoghurt, ice cream) with an HSR of ≥ 3.5 (≤ 50g portion)</p>	<p>Standard cream, sour cream and cream cheese</p> <p>Frozen desserts with an HSR of < 3.5 or > 50g portion.</p> <p>All sweetened cold milk drinks</p> <p>Standard coconut milk and coconut cream</p>

Legumes, nuts, seeds, fish and other seafood, eggs, poultry (eg, chicken) and red meat

Category	Green	Amber	Red
Legumes	<p>Fresh, dried and canned beans and peas eg, baked beans, red kidney beans, lentils, chickpeas, split peas and tofu (preferably with reduced salt/sodium).</p>		

² 'Lite' refers to reduced fat/salt/energy/sugar version of the standard variety.

Category	Green	Amber	Red
Nuts and seeds ³			<p>Choking hazard:</p> <p>all large or whole nuts and seeds, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plain, raw unsalted nuts • salted nuts and seeds • sugared or candy-coated nuts and seeds • nuts and seeds with confectionery⁴ <p>(Refer to choking advice)</p>
Fish and other seafood,	<p>Fresh or frozen fish or seafood</p> <p>Canned and packaged fish with an HSR of ≥ 3.5</p>	<p>Canned or packaged fish with an HSR of < 3.5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • $\leq 30g$ in sandwiches, rolls, wraps or salads • $\leq 60g$ as a main meal 	<p>Processed fish, and portions that do not meet the amber serving size</p>
Eggs	Eggs		
Poultry (chicken)	<p>Skinless, lean poultry</p> <p>Processed and packaged chicken (eg, coated skinless chicken/turkey) with an HSR of ≥ 3.5</p>	<p>Poultry with small amounts of visible fat and skin remaining</p> <p>Processed chicken with an HSR of < 3.5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • $\leq 30g$ in sandwiches, rolls, wraps or salads • $\leq 60g$ as a main meal 	<p>Processed and packaged poultry that do not meet the amber criteria</p> <p>Choking hazard and low nutrition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sausages served either as part of a meal or as an individual item
Red meat	<p>Lean meat</p> <p>Premium or prime mince⁵</p> <p>Processed and packaged meat with an HSR of ≥ 3.5</p>	<p>Meat with small amounts of visible fat only</p>	<p>Meat where fat is clearly visible</p> <p>Standard mince without the fat drained off</p>

³ Note that exposure to peanuts/gluten can have severe consequences for children and young people who are allergic to those products. Your school should consider limiting exposure to these items if you have students with allergies.

⁴ 'Confectionery' includes boiled sweets, toffees and caramels, fudge, fondants, gums (including sugar-free gums), pastilles and jellies, chocolate, fruit leathers, yoghurt-covered items, candied fruit/nuts and compound chocolate.

⁵ 'Premium or prime mince' means mince with ≥ 95 percent visual lean meats or ≥ 90 percent chemical lean.

Category	Green	Amber	Red
		Standard mince, ⁶ cooked and with the fat drained off Processed and packaged meat ⁷ with an HSR of <3.5: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ≤ 30g in sandwiches, rolls, wraps or salads • ≤ 60g as a main meal 	Processed meat that does not meet the amber criteria Choking hazard and low nutrition: sausages served either as part of a meal or as an individual item

Mixed meals/ready-to-eat and ready-to-heat meals

Category	Green	Amber	Red
Mixed meals and ready-to- eat meals (two or more items or ingredients from different food groups) (eg, pizza, soup, lasagne, macaroni cheese)	Meals that contain at least 75 percent green items, ⁸ and minimal amounts of amber items or ingredients (no more than 25%), as determined visually or by an assessment of the ingredient list Packaged meals with an HSR of ≥ 3.5 that meet the above criteria	Meals that contain vegetables and/or fruit and are prepared with green and amber items only Packaged meals with an HSR of ≥ 3.5 that meet the above criteria	Meals that contain no vegetables, fruit or green items or ingredients, and/or has an HSR of < 3.5
Sandwiches	Sandwiches prepared with green items only, including the bread	Sandwiches prepared with green and amber items only, including the bread	Sandwiches prepared with red items
Sushi	Sushi prepared with green items only ³	Other sushi, excluding sushi containing deep-fried ingredients	Sushi containing deep-fried ingredients

6 'Standard mince' means mince with ≥ 90 percent visual lean meats or ≥ 85 percent chemical lean.

7 Examples of processed meats include: fresh sausages, smoked chicken, smoked fish, luncheon, bologna, cooked sausages, salami, pepperoni, ham, corned beef, pastrami, cooked uncured meat products (eg, roast beef), bacon, dry-cured meat products (eg, prosciutto) and meat patties.

8 Foods not classified as amber or red can also be included (eg, cornflour or baking powder).

Fats and oils, spreads, sauces, dressings and condiments

Category	Green	Amber	Red
Fats and oils and spreads ⁹	<p>Low-salt mono- or poly-unsaturated fat spreads eg, margarine, nut butter¹⁰</p> <p>Vegetable oils eg, canola, olive, rice bran, sunflower, soya bean, flaxseed, peanut or sesame</p>	<p>Standard spreads eg, nut butter</p> <p>A single serve of butter ($\leq 10g$)</p>	<p>Saturated fats and oils eg, lard, palm oil and coconut oil</p> <p>A single serve of butter ($> 10g$)</p>
Sauces and dressings	<p>Reduced fat/sugar/salt salad dressings, mayonnaise, tomato sauce¹¹</p> <p>Use in small amounts or serve on the side.</p>	<p>Standard salad dressings, mayonnaise, tomato sauce</p> <p>Use in small amounts or serve on the side.</p>	
Savoury condiments	<p>Reduced fat/sugar/salt sauces (chilli, soy, fish, etc), pastes (tomato), relishes, stocks, yeast and vegetable extracts (Marmite, Vegemite) or, if using standard items, don't add salt</p> <p>Mustard, herbs and spices</p> <p>A small amount of iodised salt</p>		
Sweet condiments	<p>Reduced-sugar jam, honey or commercially made compote</p>	<p>Standard jam, honey or commercially made compote (< 1 Tbsp portion)</p>	
Deep-fried foods			All deep-fried foods ¹²

9 Refer to the 'Milk and milk products' section for cream, sour cream and cream cheese.

10 Make margarine the default option for single-serve spreads.

11 Use sauces and dressings in small amounts or serve on the side.

12 Where applicable, in place of deep-frying, use healthier cooking methods (eg, braise, bake, steam, grill, pan-fry or poach).

Packaged snack foods

Category	Green	Amber	Red
Packaged snack foods ¹³		Packaged snack foods with an HSR of ≥ 3.5 and ≤ 600 kJ per packet	Choking hazard and low nutrition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • popcorn • packaged snack foods with an HSR of < 3.5 HSR or > 600 kJ per packet
Confectionery ⁴			Choking hazard and low nutrition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all confectionery.

Baked items

Category	Green	Amber	Red
Baked items		<p>More than half of the selection of baked products offered (packaged or unpackaged) must contain some wholemeal flour, wholegrains (eg, oats, bran) and/or fruit or vegetables (eg, fresh, frozen or dried)</p> <p>Items with less saturated fat, salt and sugar</p> <p>No confectionery² within products.</p> <p>Muesli bars (easily ingestible) with an HSR of ≥ 3.5</p> <p>No icing.</p>	<p>Products that do not meet the amber criteria</p> <p>Sweet bakery items that contain confectionery</p> <p>Sweet bakery items with icing</p> <p>Choking hazard and low nutrition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sausage rolls • energy bars and protein bars • other muesli bars with an HSR of < 3.5 and/or whole nuts and/or dried fruit

¹³ 'Packaged snack foods' here refers to packaged foods not covered by other categories (eg, bakery items). All packaged food and drinks served, including multi-serve packaged foods, should have an HSR of ≥ 3.5 and any other criteria that apply per packet may be sold (eg, crackers, cereal, biscuits, canned or packaged soups, plain popcorn).

Category	Green	Amber	Red
		<p>Portion sizes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scones, cake or dessert (\leq 50g portion) • Loaf, muffins (\leq 50g portion) • Slices (\leq 40g portion) • Biscuits, pikelets (\leq 20g portion) • Small pastries (\leq 30g portion) • Pies and quiches (\leq 80g portion) 	

Drinks

Category	Green	Amber	Red
Cold drinks	<p>Plain, unflavoured water</p> <p>Reduced- or low-fat milk</p> <p>Unsweetened reduced- or low-fat plant-based milks (eg, rice, almond, oat, soy) with added calcium</p>	<p>Plain full-fat milk and plant-based milks (eg, rice, almond, oat, soy) with added calcium</p>	<p>Sugar-sweetened drinks¹⁴</p> <p>Artificially sweetened drinks</p> <p>Milk-based drinks with added sugar (eg, milkshakes and liquid breakfasts)</p> <p>100 percent fruit and/or vegetable juices, including those diluted with no added sugar, and unflavoured coconut water</p> <p>Energy drinks and sports drinks</p> <p>Flavoured waters</p>
Smoothies (all varieties, including dairy and non-dairy)		<p>No-added-sugar, reduced- or full-fat milk or yoghurt-based smoothies made with fresh/frozen fruit, or canned fruit with no</p>	<p>Smoothies prepared with concentrate, fruit juice or added sugar and/or not milk-based</p>

¹⁴ 'Sugar-sweetened drinks' refers to any drink that contains added caloric sweetener, usually sugar. This includes soft drinks/fizzy drinks, sachet mixes, fruit drinks, cordials, flavoured milk, flavoured water, cold tea/coffee and energy/sports drinks.

Category	Green	Amber	Red
		added sugar with an HSR of ≥ 3.5 and $\leq 150\text{ml}$ portion	All smoothies that do not meet the amber criteria
Hot drinks			All hot drinks

Notes on Health Star Ratings

The Health Star Rating system¹⁵ is a front-of-pack labelling system that rates the nutritional profile of packaged foods. It helps compare the nutrition of products that you typically see shelved side by side in a grocery shop. The system assigns a rating from one-half a star to five stars. The more stars a product has, the healthier it is. The star rating is meant to provide a comparison within similar product categories only. For example, the system helps choose between one breakfast cereal and another, not between yoghurt and pasta sauce.

This Guidance uses an HSR of 3.5 as an indication of 'healthiness' for various packaged items. Please note that the recommended availability (green/amber/red) of packaged items varies across categories.

Source material

Commonwealth of Australia. 2019. Health Star Rating System. URL: www.healthstarrating.gov.au/internet/healthstarrating/publishing.nsf/Content/How-to-use-health-stars (accessed 30 September 2019).

Ministry of Health. 2012. *Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Healthy Children and Young People (Aged 2–18 years): A background paper. Partial revision February 2015.* Wellington: Ministry of Health. URL: <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/food-nutrition-guidelines-healthy-children-young-people-background-paper-feb15-v2.pdf> (accessed 30 September 2019).

The guidance for early learning services will include introducing solid foods, choking hazards, milk and fibre. Based on: <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/food-and-nutrition-guidelines-healthy-infants-and-toddlers-aged-0-2-background-paper-partially> (accessed 30 September 2019).

¹⁵ For more information, see www.healthstarrating.gov.au/internet/healthstarrating/publishing.nsf/Content/How-to-use-health-stars