

# School dinners vs. packed lunches

We've listened to parents and heard some reasons why they prefer for their children to have a packed lunch instead of a school dinner. However, there is mounting evidence in support of school meals, as they are more nutritionally complete than a packed lunch and provide the right amount of energy for children.

Here are some of the reasons why parents prefer their children to have a packed lunch and our responses:

## "It's too expensive".

A school meal is cheaper than a Costa coffee! Plus children in KS1 are entitled to a Free School Meal.

## "School meals are not healthy".

Today's school meal has to meet strict guidelines on salt, fat

and sugar. Every school meal is nutritionally balanced and meets the exact energy requirements your child needs to thrive and flourish (see table below).

## "There's not enough choice"

There are 3 main options and 3 dessert options every day.

## "My child's a fussy eater".

Children are more likely to eat a wider range of different foods when they eat a school dinner.

## "My child has allergies/medical condition"


Speak to our Dietitian Patricia who works with families on an individual basis to risk assess and implement safe delivery of non-allergen containing foods for your child.

If you would like to discuss any of the topics mentioned in this article please contact [lesley.mcfarlane@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:lesley.mcfarlane@cambridgeshire.gov.uk) or [patricia.herbert@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:patricia.herbert@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)

## So why choose a school lunch?

### Children having a school lunch are:

- ✓ Encouraged to eat and enjoy a wider variety of foods
- ✓ More likely to eat fruit and vegetables every day
- ✓ Less likely to drink sweet drinks and have water instead
- ✓ Able to develop their social skills, sitting at the lunch table chatting with friends and eating with cutlery
- ✓ Served balanced meals that are more likely to reach the guideline amounts of vitamins and minerals
- ✓ Able to enjoy food which has been freshly prepared, unlike a packed lunch which may have been sitting in their school bag for up to 5 hours.



**Nutrient and Energy Targets for Children aged 5 - 10 years**

	Children GDA aged 5-10	GDA lunchtime targets	Typical CCS meal (mean)	Typical packed lunch	Typical packed lunch (mean)
Energy	1,800kcal	500kcal	519.2kcal	699kcal	624kcal
Protein	24g	8g	19.9g	14g	18.1g
Carbohydrates	220g	70g	67.2g	80g	95.7g
Sugar	85g	28g	20.5g	32g	39.6g
Fat	70g	23g	18.7g	34.9g	21g
Saturates	20g	6g	6.4g	14g	8.3g
Fibre	15g	5g	?	3.9g	3.6g
Salt	4g	1g	1.3g	1.9g	1.9g

**GDA - Guideline Daily Amounts**

**Parents can be reassured that CCS school lunches exceed the School Food Standards.**

### References:

A cross sectional survey of children's packed lunches in the UK: food and nutrient based results. CEL Evans, DC Greenwood, JD Thomas, JE Cade. Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health. 64(11). 977-983

Column A: Represents the nutrient analysis averaged across the 3 week menu cycle, CCS. Column B: Represents the nutrient analysis of a "Typical Packed Lunch", supplied from home consisting 1 cheese sandwich on white bread and butter, 1 Capri Sun drink, 1 packet of crisps and a penguin biscuit bar. Column C: Represents the nutrient analysis of 1294 lunch boxes (1).