

› Making the changes

There are many approaches in changing to a healthier canteen. Approaches vary depending on how many days per week the canteen is open, the canteen's food preparation facilities and where the canteen is currently placed with respect to making healthy changes. Changes can be implemented over a period of time depending on the school's individual circumstances.

It is important to:

- make healthy changes gradually
- communicate to students, staff and the wider community why the changes are being made
- use marketing and promotion to highlight the positive aspects of the menu changes
- advertise and promote these changes well in advance
- don't draw attention to the removal of certain foods
- be positive.

Introducing healthier choices

Below is a list of strategies canteens can use to make changes.

- The canteen reopens (for example after the holidays) with a totally new healthy menu and image. This approach works well with support from the wider school community, with strong communication, promotion and marketing and links to the school curriculum. This approach may require a larger initial outlay of resources to make such a large change.
- All foods and drinks in the Occasionally category are removed and replaced with new healthier choices.
- New healthy foods are trialed using theme days or specials. If they are popular, they are added to the regular menu.
- The regular menu is reviewed and streamlined by replacing slow sellers with regular healthy daily specials.
- The canteen runs a healthy menu once a week, eventually introducing this as the regular daily menu. This gives time for the new menu to be refined and accepted by students.
- The time and quantity of sale of foods is restricted. This will encourage children to purchase healthy options first.

Most canteens will usually use a combination of these approaches.

Once changes and goals have been identified in the canteen policy, the canteen menu should be assessed against the *'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Food Planner*. When planning a new menu, consider the amount, variety and range of foods.

Children need a variety of different foods across all five food groups. Ensure that several choices from all the food groups are offered.

Foods and drinks which fit into the Occasionally (red foods) category should be supplied on no more than two occasions per term.

From 2007, high sugar content soft drinks should not be supplied through school food services. This includes energy drinks and flavoured mineral waters with high sugar content.

From 2009, no confectionery should be supplied through school food services.

Limiting the menu to a smaller range of foods, but providing variety by having a daily or weekly special (such as a hot prepared dish) can:

- reduce the cost of goods by reducing the range of products purchased and can bring bulk buying discounts
- save time on preparation and help
- allow more time to prepare fresh foods, trial new healthy products and run promotions.

Use the 'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Food Planner to plan a new canteen menu or assess existing menu items.

When planning a menu:

- ensure all staple ingredients and products such as milk, cheese, spreads* and sauces are low or reduced fat and that flours, breads and cereals are high fibre
- limit use of high-fat spreads*
- ensure low-fat cooking methods are used as standard
- read labels and check prepared recipes to see that they are healthy and suitable
- ensure fruit and vegetables are included daily on lunch and snack menus (this may include using canned and frozen options if the fresh version is not in season)
- include a variety of different food textures and colours (for example, both raw and cooked vegetables and fruit)
- consider the serve sizes, as students are of varying ages and appetites. Smaller children sometimes prefer to eat in a small snacking pattern, so half-sizes of healthy meals are a good idea. Mini items are also a novelty.

HINT: Younger students enjoy mini salad rolls made with dinner rolls, mini pizzas made with French sticks, small pieces of corn cob, fruit pieces, nibble bags of finger foods and bite-size pieces of vegetables and cheese rather than a salad plate.

- consider the different cultural groups in the school community and their special food and dietary needs, for example halal foods, kosher foods or vegetarian meals
- consider the practicality of the menu:
 - the new menu item should be relatively simple and able to be prepared under food safety and hygiene procedures
 - the new menu item should not require expensive ingredients
 - check that the equipment, time and resources needed to prepare the proposed menu item, as well as space to store it, are available
 - decide if there are any restrictions on when the menu item may be available
 - check if the menu item requires extra packaging
- consider whether the menu reflects the new healthier changes. The menu layout should be easy to read and healthier products should be highlighted by being at the top of the menu choices, in a bold or interesting font. Pictures and catchy names can be devised for the healthy choices
- state which products are available over the counter and which require pre-ordering
- include a section on the menu for regular new messages or interesting food facts
- include a regular specials or meal deal section.

*Food allergies are the most common triggers for anaphylaxis (severe allergic reactions) in children. Eight foods cause 90 per cent of food allergies: peanuts, cow's milk, egg, wheat, soybean, tree nuts (for example, cashew), fish and shellfish. Schools should be aware of the risk of hidden allergens. Check your school's policy regarding students with severe allergies.

HINT: Some primary schools place smiley symbols beside the healthier choices on the menu for students to use as a guide to select healthier choices and to encourage and promote healthier choices. For example, 😊 for Everyday foods and 😊 for Select Carefully foods.

Making changes successful and sustainable

A healthy canteen policy is the key to the success and sustainability of healthy food provision in schools. A successful policy will be developed by identifying the needs of the school community and will clearly communicate the accountability of the canteen to the community. The policy will provide support to justify the changes being made in the school canteen, and will make it clear that the healthy canteen program is a long-term innovation.

Health promoting schools

A health promoting school is one which endorses and supports healthy practices. Such schools regard the health of the students and the school community as a priority. This is reflected through the school's curriculum, environment (for example, canteen) and links with the local community.

A health promoting canteen:

- offers and promotes a variety of nutritious foods and drinks and encourages children to make healthy food choices
- supports and complements classroom nutrition and health activities
- does not promote foods low in nutrients or high in fat, salt or sugar
- has an active role in the wider school community.

A whole-school approach to healthy eating

The school food services should complement those areas of the curriculum related to healthy eating. Ideally, positive peer pressure within the education setting will help create a culture in which nutritious food and a healthy lifestyle are actively chosen. The Health Promoting Schools Framework, developed by the Health Promoting Schools project, provides a useful model for schools to promote and protect the health of students.

The framework highlights the importance of the relationships between:

- curriculum, teaching and learning
- school organisation, ethos and environment
- community links and partnerships.

'A health promoting school is a place where all members of the school community work together to provide students with integrated and positive experiences and structures that promote and protect their health. This includes both the formal and informal curricula in health, the creation of a safe and healthy school environment, the provision of appropriate health services and the involvement of the family and wider community in efforts to promote health.' (World Health Organization, 1996)

Information about health promoting schools can be accessed at: www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/hps

Linking the canteen with the school community

A health promoting schools approach should be taken to ensure that changes to healthier eating in schools are successful and sustainable.

Linking healthier eating with other areas of the school such as curriculum, teaching and learning, school organisation, ethos and environment and community links and partnerships will not only ensure that the changes to the canteen are successful and sustainable, but will be more effective in promoting healthy eating.

Below are some suggestions for linking the canteen with other areas of the Health Promoting Schools Framework.

Linking the school canteen to the curriculum

- Ask year levels to take turns to cook a healthy product for sale in the school canteen.
- In art classes, ask students to help with colourful posters, menu boards or promotional material for the new healthy options.
- Invite students to help out in the canteen as part of their food technology subject.

Linking the school canteen to the environment

- Use produce from the school vegetable patch in canteen recipes.
- Link the canteen to the Sustainable Schools or Waste Wise program, for example using a recycling system with separate bins for paper, plastic and food scraps in the canteen.
- Investigate Clean Up Australia Day activities in the school.

Linking the school canteen to the wider community

- Have special family days in the canteen where students' families are invited to come and eat lunch with the students. For example, organise a family and friends picnic day.
- Develop contacts with local retailers, such as greengrocers and bakers who can supply fresh, healthy foods for the canteen.
- Invite the local newspaper to do an article on your healthy school canteen.

In addition to linking the canteen across all areas of the Health Promoting Schools Framework, the effective promotion of healthy eating in schools also requires schools to implement healthy eating activities and initiatives within the other areas of the Health Promoting Schools Framework.

Curriculum, teaching and learning

Teachers need to incorporate nutrition education across all areas of the curriculum (see the curriculum activities for year levels Prep to 10 that are available in the *'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit – Student Learning Activities* for ideas and sample units).

Teachers should support the promotion of healthy eating by not providing unhealthy food rewards in class and should implement classroom fruit and water breaks.

School organisation, ethos and environment

Establish a vegetable patch, a breakfast program or other initiative that supports healthy food.

Community links and partnerships

- Request sponsorship for fresh fruit and vegetables for a healthy foods expo or a fruit and vegetable week.
- Provide nutrition information in the school newsletter and run healthy lunchbox workshops for parents.