

The National School Fruit Scheme



The NHS Plan

By 2004, the government will introduce a new National School Fruit Scheme where every child in nursery and aged four to six in infant schools will be entitled to a free piece of fruit each school day, as part of a national campaign to improve the diet of children. The government will examine the practicalities of the scheme through pilots before rolling it out nationally.



Ministers' Foreword

Every child deserves the best start in life. A healthy childhood provides the foundation for health later in life. That is why the government is committed – through the NHS and the Healthy Schools Programme – to investing in improving children's health.

But research shows that today too many children are not getting the healthy diet that could protect them against serious illnesses later on in life.

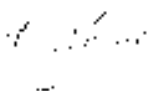
Experts recommend that eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day can protect against heart disease and cancer, as well as cutting the symptoms of asthma in childhood.

Yet on average, children are eating just two portions a day. Many children – particularly those growing up in poverty – are eating considerably less. Consumption of fruit and vegetables by children seems to have fallen over the last twenty years.

For too many families, access to healthy food is limited, especially in some low income areas where affordable fruit and vegetables can be hard to find. These inequalities are reflected in health, as people on low income are three times more likely to die early from coronary heart disease than those from professional backgrounds.

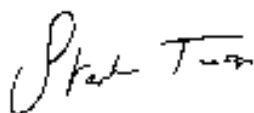
The government believes that every one should have access to healthy food, and that children in particular need a better chance of a healthy start in life. After all, opportunities and lessons learnt in schools can stay with us for many years to come.

That is why we are introducing the National School Fruit Scheme, which will entitle our youngest school children to free fruit each day. Alongside new nutritional standards for school meals, and community projects to improve access to healthy food, this is a vital step towards improving all children's health and tackling health inequalities across the country.



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The health value of fruit and vegetables

Fruit and vegetables have long been recognised as healthy foods and a valuable source of vitamins and minerals. But their contribution to good health goes much further than this. It is now well-recognised that fruit and vegetables have a protective effect against some of the wide range of chronic diseases affecting our society.

In 1991, the World Health Organization¹ recommended that people should eat at least 400g (around five portions) of fruit and vegetables every day, primarily to reduce the risk of cancer. In 1994, the UK government's own advisory body, the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA)², examined the links between diet and heart disease and concluded that fruit and vegetables were protective. COMA recommended that consumption in the UK should increase by 50%, from an average of three portions to at least five portions per day. This was endorsed by COMA's subsequent review of the links between diet and cancer in 1998³ and more recently in The NHS Plan⁴.

Experts around the world recommend that eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day promotes good health and helps to prevent cancer, coronary heart disease and other diseases.



Eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day could lead to estimated reductions of up to 20% in overall deaths from chronic diseases, such as heart disease, stroke and cancer. Current average consumption by the population of fruit and vegetables is only about three portions a day.

THE NHS PLAN⁴

Evidence for the protective effects of fruit and vegetables

Disease and premature death rates amongst populations eating diets rich in fruit and vegetables are lower than in populations with poor intakes. The UK has one of the lowest fruit and vegetable intakes in Europe. It also has among the highest death rates in western Europe from chronic diseases such as heart disease.

Heart disease and stroke

Cardiovascular diseases (coronary heart disease and stroke) are England's biggest killers, accounting for more than one death in three. Despite some recent improvements, death rates from heart disease in England are still high and the number of people suffering from heart disease (morbidity rates) may even be rising.

- International research shows that diets rich in fruit and vegetables are protective against cardiovascular disease, including heart disease and stroke⁵.
- Researchers have found that eating more fruit and vegetables can reduce blood pressure and cholesterol levels and is accompanied by an increase in levels of beneficial compounds, such as antioxidants in the blood⁵.
- Increasing fruit and vegetable consumption could lead to a significant reduction in the risk of cardiovascular disease⁵.

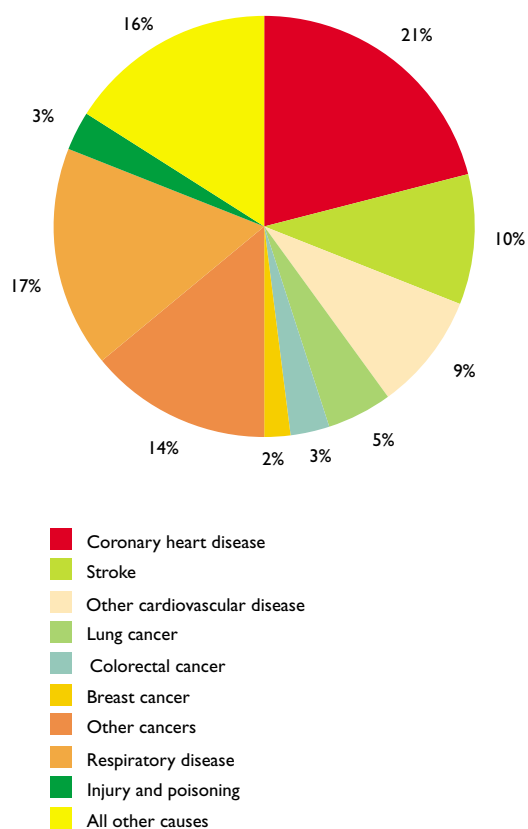
Cancer

Cancer is a major cause of death and ill health in England, causing one death in four. Diet is the biggest contributor to cancer deaths after smoking, and may be responsible for up to a third of all cancer deaths.

High intakes of fruit and vegetables are associated with a reduced risk of several common cancers, including colorectal and stomach cancer. Researchers have found that compounds in fruit and vegetables can prevent the formation of tumours or suppress their growth during the cancer development process⁶.

- Increasing fruit and vegetable consumption is regarded by experts as the second most important strategy for cancer prevention after reducing smoking⁷.

Main causes of death in England – all ages



Persons in England, 1999

Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS)

Other diseases in adulthood

- Diabetes is a growing problem in England, and now affects between 1.4 and 2 million people. It can double a person's risk of developing heart disease. Evidence suggests that diets rich in fruit and vegetables may also help the management of diabetes.
- Fruit, vegetables and fruit juices may also delay the development of cataracts, and can help to keep the bowel functioning comfortably.

What makes fruit and vegetables protective?

Fruit and vegetables contain more than 100 beneficial compounds which may be responsible for their protective effects. These include antioxidants such as vitamins C and E, carotenoids and flavonoids, dietary fibre, folic acid, phytoestrogens and other phytochemicals, potassium, magnesium and many others. It appears that the protective effect of fruit and vegetables is due to the range of compounds present working together rather than any single compound on its own. Taking dietary supplements containing just one of these compounds has not proved effective, and in some cases has even been harmful⁶.



Increasing fruit and vegetable consumption is regarded by experts as the second most important strategy for cancer prevention after reducing smoking⁷.

Protection against cancer and heart disease appears to be dose related – the more fruit and vegetables you eat, the better the potential protection.



Antioxidants

Reduce oxidative damage caused by normal bodily processes and physiological stresses. Oxidative damage can be a starting point for heart disease and cancer.

Phytochemicals

Phytochemicals such as flavonoids may help to block or reverse the cancer process.

Fruit and vegetables and children's health

Every child deserves a healthy start in life. Health at the very beginning of life is the foundation for health throughout life. Diet is central to health, and children's diet can be an important influence on their health now and in the future. A healthy diet is one that is rich in fruit and vegetables and cereals, and low in fat, salt and sugar.

A good diet in childhood helps ensure that children grow well and helps protect them against chronic diseases in later life.

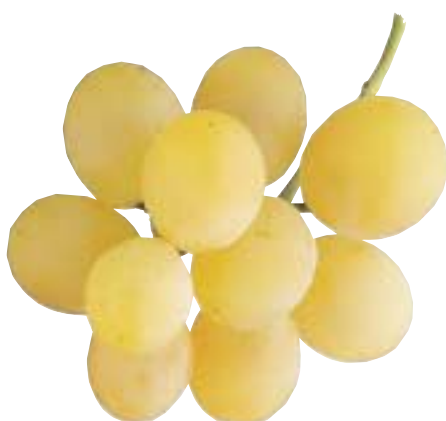


Growing children need more nutrients

- Young children need adequate nutrients for growth and development and nutritional experts have found that, relative to body weight, their nutrient requirements are higher than adults⁹. But their calorie requirements are lower so they need to eat foods which provide a lot of nutrients (vitamins and minerals) for their calories. Fruit and vegetables are rich in vitamins and minerals and can improve the nutrient density of the diet.

Adult diseases begin in childhood

- Many of the processes linked with the development of cardiovascular disease begin in childhood and the early stages of cancer development may be initiated many years before there are any detectable signs.
- Evidence from the Bogalusa Heart Study, tracking early risk of heart disease among children in the United States¹⁰, suggests that good eating habits in childhood have a potential to reduce risk factors and lower the risk of heart disease in later life.



Asthma and Wheezing

- Asthma now affects one in seven school children in the United Kingdom, and research indicates that rates among under five year olds has almost doubled in less than a decade¹¹. Researchers have found that eating fruit and vegetables seems to improve lung function^{12, 13} and reduces the symptoms of asthma and bronchitis among children as well as adults.
- A study in Italy among children has found that even low intakes of fruit, for example, eating citrus or kiwi fruit several times a week, can reduce wheezing and the symptoms of asthma. The effects are most noticeable in children with a history of respiratory problems¹².

Obesity

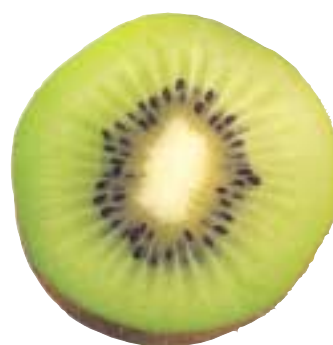
- Obesity is associated with an increased risk of chronic diseases, such as heart disease.
- Obesity levels among adults in England have almost tripled since 1980. Studies suggest that up to one in ten (10%) six year olds may now be obese, and that this represents a doubling in the past 10 years^{15, 16}.
- A diet which includes plenty of fruit and vegetables can help in tackling obesity.

Improves whole diet and child health

- Studies in adults find that when people eat five or more portions of fruit and vegetables, their consumption of fatty or sugary foods can decline. Eating fruit and juices rich in vitamin C improves the absorption of iron from plant sources and can help reduce iron deficiency (anaemia).



A study of British school children found that children who ate fruit more than once a day had better lung function compared with those who did not. The difference was evident even after controlling for possible confounding factors such as social class and passive smoking¹⁴.



One small orange or one kiwi fruit provides all the vitamin C a child needs in a day.

Action now to influence the diets of the very young could have very real long-term health benefits as well as having an impact on the family diet. NHS CANCER PLAN 2000¹⁷

Children should begin to eat more fruit and vegetables from the age of two, so that by the time they are five years old they fully meet the target of 'at least five a day'. COMA 1994²



How much fruit and vegetables do children eat?

Children’s consumption of fruit and vegetables is particularly low. Today, less than 4% (one in 25) of four to six year olds eat the recommended five or more portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Average consumption in this age group is only around two portions per day (170g per day) and is worse than among adults, who eat an average of around three portions a day (250g). But these average figures mask wide variation between individuals.

Results of the government’s National Diet and Nutrition Survey¹⁸ show that, among four to six year olds, in a typical week:

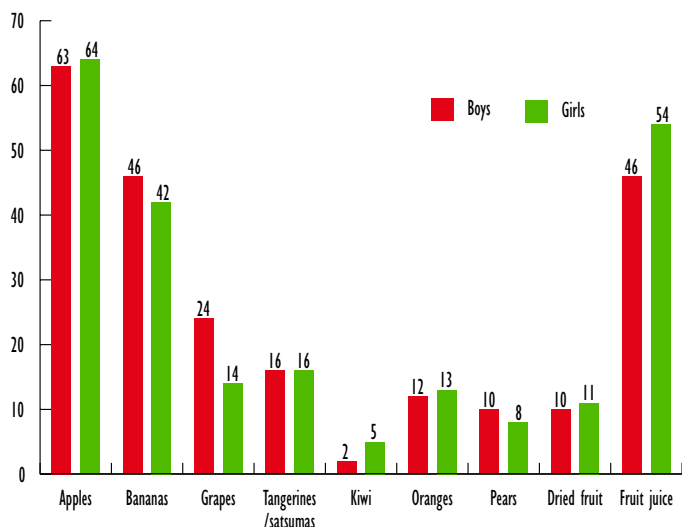
- One in 10 eat no fruit
- A third eat no apples or pears
- Half drink no fruit juice
- Only three in 10 eat tomatoes
- About half eat no peas
- Three in five eat no leafy green vegetables

Overall, the survey found that among four to 18 year olds, one in five eat no fruit at all in a week. Even those who eat any fruit and vegetables at all, eat less than one portion of fruit and one portion of vegetables a day.

How does this compare?

- Consumption of fruit and vegetables among children seems to have fallen since 1983. It was low in 1983, averaging about three portions a day. By the late 1990s, it was even lower – averaging only about two portions a day^{18, 19}.
- Furthermore, average consumption of fruit and vegetables among children in the UK seems to be substantially less than in other countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands and the US^{18, 19}.

Percentage of 4–7 year olds eating different types of fruit in a week



Source: National Dietary and Nutrition Survey of Children, 2000¹⁸

Lifelong eating habits

Research has found that health-related behaviour patterns and attitudes towards food can be acquired during childhood. One study in the United States found that one of the strongest determinants of fruit and vegetable consumption in adults was whether they had been in the habit of eating many fruit and vegetables in childhood²⁰.

Giving children an equal start

There are large inequalities in health, throughout life. For example, the death rate from heart disease is now three times higher among unskilled men than among professionals, and the gap has widened sharply in the past 20 years. Health in early life is the foundation for health throughout life. Researchers have found that socio-economic environment in childhood is as good a predictor of cardiovascular disease risk as social status in adulthood²¹. Improving nutrition is fundamental.

- National data show that some of the greatest nutritional inequalities are found in fruit and vegetable consumption. People in low-income groups eat substantially less fruit and vegetables than those in the highest income groups, and this contributes to the health inequalities in later life.
- Children growing up in disadvantaged families are about 50% less likely to eat fruit and vegetables than those in high-income families. The social class gap is greatest for fruit consumption.

People make their own choices about what to eat, but too many people feel that a diet rich in fruit and vegetables is not a real option. Affordable fruit and vegetables are not always accessible, particularly in low-income areas. For example, in a MORI poll²² carried out for the Department of Health, people said that lack of access to affordable healthy food stopped them eating the healthy diet they wanted. An analysis for the Social Exclusion Unit²³ found that, for communities in deprived neighbourhoods where access to shops was a problem, people lacked the choice, access and affordability that they wanted.

Improving access to healthy food for children is particularly important. Through the National School Fruit Scheme, school children aged between four and six will be entitled to a free piece of fruit each school day.



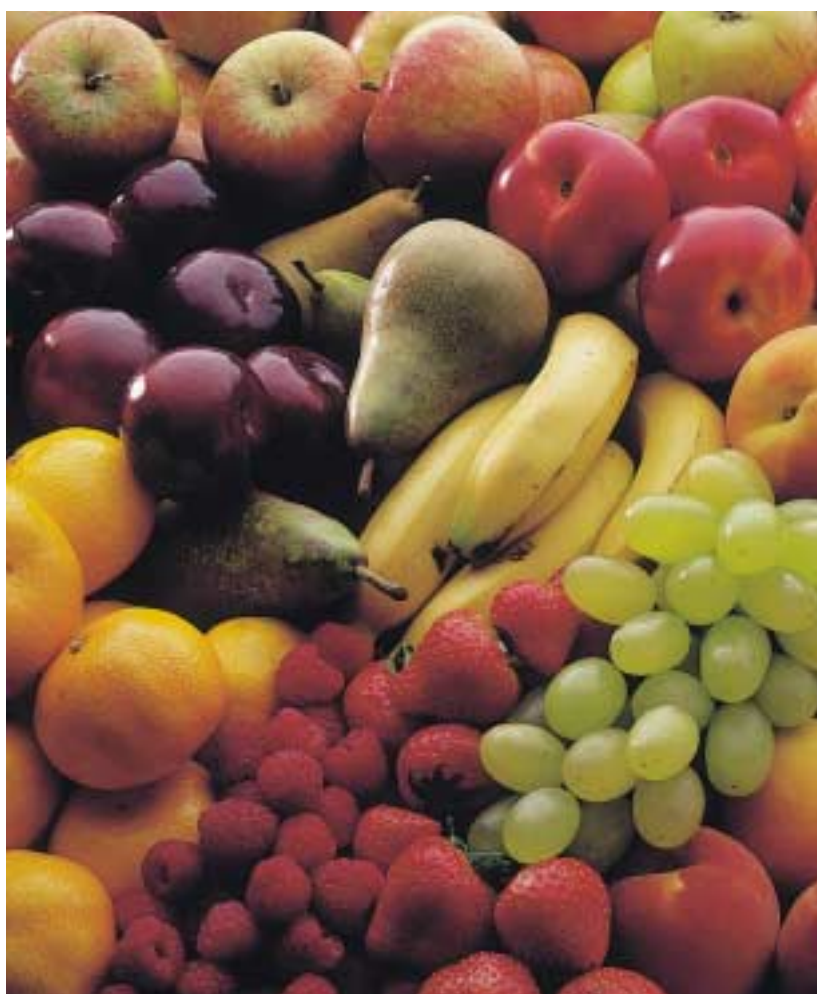
“A healthy country would be one where health was not dictated by accident of birth and childhood experience. Everyone should have a fair chance of a long and healthy life.”

**OUR HEALTHIER NATION,
GREEN PAPER (1998)²⁴**

Prevention – a government priority

The NHS Plan⁴, the NHS Cancer Plan¹⁷ and the National Service Framework for Coronary Heart Disease²⁵, all published in 2000, have set out a framework for a strong focus on prevention and tackling health inequalities. The government's priority is to reduce early deaths from cancer and coronary heart disease. Recognising that good health depends upon social, environmental and economic factors such as poverty, unemployment, education and housing, the NHS will work with other partners to prevent ill health. This will help tackle health inequalities, as the burden of these diseases falls heavily on the most disadvantaged.

But the government's strategy also concentrates on tackling the major risk factors for these chronic diseases, such as smoking and nutrition. Recognising the links between diet and later disease, the NHS Plan highlights diet and nutrition as a key area for action.



It is not the role of government to tell people what to eat – but to ensure that people have information and proper access to healthy food wherever they live. So, as part of its commitment to preventing disease and reducing health inequalities, the government is developing a national five-a-day programme to increase fruit and vegetable consumption and help make a healthy diet a real choice for everyone. The government will work with producers, retailers and other key stakeholders, to increase provision and access to fruit and vegetables – particularly in deprived communities, schools and hospitals.



As part of this programme, five local Five-a-day pilot initiatives, focusing on deprived communities, were set up in 2000 in Airedale and Craven, County Durham, Hastings, Sandwell and Somerset including a range of activities – from breakfast clubs, tasting and cooking sessions, competitions in schools and community allotments. Evaluation has shown that the initiatives had a positive impact on awareness of, access to and intake of fruit and vegetables. Lessons learnt have informed the setting up of more local initiatives, including 66 Primary Care Trust led projects to be funded by the New Opportunities Fund.

The National School Fruit Scheme, which will be fully operational from 2004, is being established to increase provision in schools. It will entitle school children aged four to six to a free piece of fruit each school day.

The National School Fruit Scheme complements the National Healthy School Standard, which encourages schools to consider diet and nutrition issues in all aspects of school life. This is part of the Healthy Schools Programme, led jointly by the Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Health. Its overall aim is to help schools become healthier through the development and improvement of local schools programmes²⁶.



About the National School Fruit Scheme



The National School Fruit Scheme is an exciting and ambitious initiative, and the government is keen to make it a success. A series of pilot schemes, in autumn 2000 in three pilot areas, and spring 2001 in over 20 areas and hundreds of schools, were carried out in Health Action Zones. These were then carefully evaluated to identify the most effective way to implement the scheme with the minimum disruption and burden to schools. The intention is to develop a robust, practical national scheme, which has a positive impact on the whole school community. The scheme will be rolled out nationally from 2004.

In these pilots and in ongoing evaluation the following issues are being considered:

From farm to school gate – getting the fruit to schools

What is the best way to purchase and distribute the fruit? Who should be involved? How can the best quality and value be obtained? How much local flexibility is needed?

School gate to child's hand – distributing fruit in the school

What time and method is best for distribution of the fruit – in morning or afternoon break? Could fruit be part of breakfast clubs and tuck shops? What factors are key to avoiding a burden on teachers?

Hand to mouth – encouraging children to eat the fruit

What can we learn from programmes across the country which successfully encourage children to eat fruit and vegetables? Are there useful support materials? What do teachers find most effective and helpful?



Following the success of the pilots, the National School Fruit Scheme is being extended to other parts of England starting in the summer term 2002, with funding from the New Opportunities Fund.

“We want children to have a positive and enjoyable experience of fruit and vegetables from an early age.”

Making a success of the Scheme

The National School Fruit Scheme will provide and deliver a selection of fruit for children in infant classes. The Scheme aims to involve the whole school community – younger and older children, as well as school staff, parents and others – as part of a wider programme to support access to healthy food for children.

There are a number of successful programmes in schools aimed at encouraging children to eat healthy diets, and the National School Fruit Scheme will use the lessons learned from these.

Leading researchers in the field have found that there are several key features of successful initiatives, set out below.

Positive and fun – making fruit and vegetables part of children’s culture

Integrating fruit and vegetables into children’s culture in a positive way seems to be a key to effective initiatives. Overall, research indicates that schemes that have a high profile across the school community can help to create such a culture.

Reward schemes, for example, using stickers and other prizes, and tasting sessions seem to be very effective in getting children to try new fruits and vegetables repeatedly, and to develop a taste for them. Teachers in one project, the *Food Dudes*²⁷, found that children who habitually failed in normal classroom activities gained self-confidence by being able to succeed and win rewards by eating their fruit. Using positive and fun role models and posters, for example, also seems to help integrate fruit and vegetables into children’s culture.

Involving older children

It is well established that older children can be important role models for younger children. Initiatives which have involved older children, for example in running fruit-only tuck shops, fruit tasting sessions, assessing fruit and vegetable intakes, and in videos, have met with success and helped generate a positive culture towards fruit and vegetables across the school. Research also indicates that peers now have a stronger influence on children’s eating habits than family, so children may be particularly motivated to eat fruit at school because of the group activity.





Videos and rewards

The Food Dudes programme²⁷ uses a 'peer modelling video' featuring heroic Food Dudes (a group of slightly older peers) and a series of rewards (stickers and prizes) for tasting and/or eating fruit and vegetables. The programme runs for three weeks and takes teachers 10-15 minutes each day. Results show that it can more than double the consumption of fruit and vegetables and that the effects can persist up to 15 months later, spilling over into meal times at home and school.

Enthusiasm and positive adult role models

School initiatives which have the commitment of senior teachers, as well as other adults such as classroom assistants, caterers and parents, have met with success. For example, teachers in some schools have endorsed children's eating of fruit and vegetables by their enthusiasm and by acting as role models. Some schools have found that young children seem to be particularly encouraged to taste fruit by a teacher who is regularly introducing them to new ideas. Some schools also offer tasting sessions in the school canteen.

Classroom activity

Classroom activities to enhance children's understanding of the importance of fruit and vegetables have been found to be useful. Teaching around fruit and vegetables fits in with, and can benefit, several areas of the National Curriculum, and can help make fruit fun and enjoyable. Some schools have used classroom teaching to teach children about the five-a-day health message, about sharing, and to taste new and different fruit and vegetables.

Opportunities in the National Curriculum

There are many opportunities in the National Curriculum to teach children about fruit and vegetables. For example, food can be used as a focus in many activities within 'Knowledge and understanding of the world' in foundation stage teaching. In Key Stages 1 and 2, within the science curriculum, pupils learn that eating the right types and amounts of food helps humans to keep healthy. They should also have the opportunity to design and make their own meals – perhaps a fruit salad, within design and technology. In PSHE, pupils are taught how to make simple choices that improve their health and wellbeing.

Further details on linking fruit and vegetables with the curriculum can be found in Guidance on Food and Nutrition in Primary Teacher Training: Food and Nutrition produced by the Department of Health²⁸. See also the National Healthy School Standard²⁶.



Involving the whole school and family

Involving the whole school, as well as the family (particularly of younger children), seems to enhance effectiveness of schemes. There is evidence that long term changes in fruit and vegetable consumption can be achieved – at school and at home – when school programmes to increase fruit and vegetable consumption are supported and reinforced by parents and the wider school environment. The biggest changes have been found among those with lowest consumption levels before the programme²⁷.

Compulsory nutritional standards for school lunches came into effect in April 2001. To meet the new standards, fruit *and* vegetables must be on offer every day as part of the school lunch.



The Food Standards Agency has funded projects to test the effectiveness of different ways to encourage primary school children to eat more fruit and vegetables.

- Researchers working in Bristol and parts of Wales set up fruit tuckshops in primary schools and tested their effect on the intake of fruit compared to the intake in control schools without tuckshops. This is the first large-scale study of its kind that fills an important gap in the evidence base about children's nutrition. Based on the study's success, a booklet for schools detailing how to set up and run a fruit tuck shop is available on the Healthy Schools Programme 'Wired for Health' website. The following are the links for the English and Welsh versions of the booklet on how to set up a fruit tuck shop:

<http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/teaching/nut/english.pdf>
and

<http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/teaching/nut/welsh.pdf>

- In Scotland the effect of a whole school approach on children's fruit and vegetable consumption has been tested. Bash Street Kid's cartoon characters were used to promote the increased availability of fruits and vegetables through school tuck shops and school lunch options; tasting opportunities; posters and quizzes; newsletters and curriculum materials. Researchers concluded that the 'Five a Day – the Bash Street Way' whole school intervention had a modest (0.5 pieces per child per day) yet significant and positive effect on fruit intake and children's attitudes and knowledge of fruit and vegetables. Some of the educational material developed for this project will shortly be available on the Agency's website: www.food.gov.uk

“When it comes to eating healthily, children should not be written off. Far from it. They can change quite easily to eating healthy diets, if they are helped to do so.”





Eating five portions a day: what counts?

How much is a portion?

In most cases, a 'portion' is a typical serving or decent-sized helping of fruit and vegetables. For example, an apple, a cupful of grapes, a glass of fruit juice. The photographs on this page illustrate the amount that makes a typical portion. For very young children, the portion size may be smaller, but they can still aim for five child-sized portions. The emphasis should be on getting children to eat a variety of different types of fruits and vegetables, so that they consume a range of the beneficial compounds that they contain.

What's included?

Fresh, frozen, tinned, dried and cooked fruit and vegetables	all count
Fruit juice	only counts once per day, however much is drunk
Fruit and vegetable dishes	can count – provided they contain a good portion of fruit or vegetable
Beans and pulses	count, but only once a day
Potatoes, squashes and other fruity drinks	don't count

Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables each day

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The photographs in this publication are of children attending St Alban's Primary School, Holborn, London. Thank you to the pupils and Headteacher

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For the latest information on what is happening in the National School Fruit scheme, visit the [Wired for Health](http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk) web site on www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk



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