



Menu Standards for Tasmanian School Lunches

Ensuring nutritious
meals in schools

APR 2026

Department of Health





Menu Standards for Tasmanian School Lunches

In their 12 years of schooling, a child will consume around 2,400 lunches (1). A school lunch program (SLP) holds the potential to improve childhood nutrition, but only if the meals provided are of a high standard. SLPs are a novel approach in Australia to ensure equitable distribution of nutritious food.

It is important that careful planning considers the variety of foods provided across the course of a menu cycle (week, fortnight or term) and that each individual meal provides students with the opportunity to meet their energy and nutrient needs.

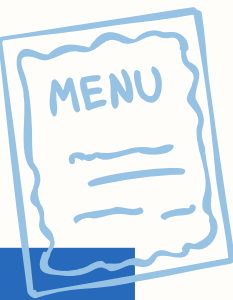
The Menu Standards are informed by the Australian Dietary Guidelines (ADGs) (2) and build upon menu development guidelines published in the Health Promotion Journal of Australia (3).

Scope

The Menu Standards for Tasmanian School Lunches set out the nutrition requirements for menu development and meal composition for Tasmanian Government schools who provide school lunches. The Standards provide Dietitians involved in school lunches with practical guidance to support the development of a nutritious menu that aligns with the ADGs.

Schools engaged in the SmartFood Program (canteen accreditation program) should follow guidance set out in the [SmartFood Guide](#).

Table 1: Standards for menu composition



Standard	Further information and rationale
The menu is based on the ADGs and made up of ingredients from the five food groups (vegetables, fruit, dairy and alternatives, lean meat and alternatives, grains and cereals).	The ADGs summarise the best scientific evidence to provide information on eating patterns and practices that promote health and reduce the risk of diet-related conditions and chronic disease (2,3).
Discretionary choices (foods high in added fat, sugar and/or salt) and deep-fried foods may not be included on the menu. Salt should not be available to students to add to their meals after serving.	This includes (but is not limited to) cream, butter, coconut cream and confectionery. Some foods, like puff pastry, sausages and bacon are high in saturated fat and sodium and are not encouraged on the menu. There may be some options that meet the 'AMBER' nutrient criteria in the Tasmanian SmartFood Program (see the SmartFood Nutrient Criteria), however the inclusion of these foods will displace more nutritious options and should be minimised. Australian children are provided ample opportunity to consume these foods outside of school (3).
No more than 20% of dishes may be AMBER (no more than 2 dishes in a 10-dish menu cycle). The remainder must be GREEN.	The menu should align with best practice standards set out in the Tasmanian SmartFood Program. A PLATINUM menu (the highest level of Award) consists of mostly canteen-made dishes, at least 80% of which are 'GREEN'. The SmartFood Nutrient Criteria are based on the ADGs. Criteria are further explained in Table 2.
Every meal will be provided in two portion sizes: • Junior meal – students aged 4-8 years (kinder-grade 3) • Standard meal – students aged 9-17 years (grade 4-grade 12)	No consensus could be drawn from other countries to guide age groupings, so age groups for the Menu Standards were agreed upon in collaboration with School Food Matters. This was largely based on their experiences of mealtime waste and student interactions (3).
At every meal, there will be a lacto-ovo vegetarian alternative option available.	Providing a vegetarian option ensures that people with diverse dietary preferences are supported to participate in the program. A lacto-ovo vegetarian meal excludes meat, poultry and fish but may include cow's milk products and eggs.



Table 2: Standards for meal composition

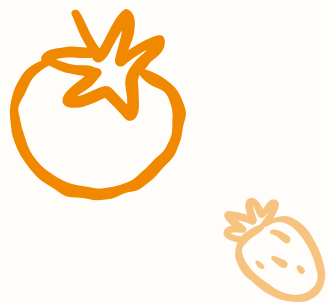
Standard	Further information and rationale
Achieving a variety of foods from within each food group across the school term is important for dietary diversity. For every two-week equivalent (for every ten dishes), there should be at least: • Three or more types of grain/cereal foods • Three different sub-groups of vegetable (subgroups are outlined in portion size guidance, see Appendix 2) • Two lacto-ovo vegetarian dishes which all students receive • Two different types of meat or meat alternatives such as beef, lamb, fish, chicken, tofu, brown lentils or chickpeas.	The ADGs endorse the inclusion of a range of foods from within each food group to consume a diversity of nutrients. Providing a range of foods increases the likelihood of exposure to foods not normally provided at home, assisting in children becoming more diverse eaters (3). Vegetarian dishes give students the opportunity to be exposed to diverse protein sources. Vegetarian sources of protein are nutritious and cost-effective (3). Specific parameters for diversity from within each essential food group have been provided as they allow for objective targets. These have been adopted from the <i>UK Checklist for School Lunches</i> (6).
Efforts will be taken to provide a menu that reflects the cultural and religious demographics of the community, ensuring inclusivity and respect while aligning with the ADGs.	Representation within a SLP menu can contribute to a sense of belonging and inclusivity within the school community and provides an opportunity for cultural exchange.

A sample menu is available in Appendix 1.



Standard	Further information and rationale
Energy requirements for each meal (in megajoules) are outlined by age group: • Junior serve - 4-8 years old (kindergarten 3): 1.4-1.8 MJ/meal • Standard serve - 9-17 years old (grade 4 – grade 12): 1.9-2.5 MJ/meal If the main meal does not meet minimum energy targets, a suitable side dish (featuring foods from the five food groups) will be selected.	The energy targets for the two age ranges were calculated using the Estimated Energy Requirements (EER) (4), for the least active and smallest person within each group (5). Based on the best available evidence, each meal should provide the opportunity for students to consume between 25-33% of their EER for the day (3). The best practice method for calculating a meal's nutrient composition is to use FoodWorks or a similar nutritional analysis software. This process should be completed by an Accredited Practising Dietitian (see Table 4).
Each meal should contain at least one portion of food from each of the following essential food groups: • Meat or meat alternative/s • Vegetable/s • Grain/cereal food/s Portion size guidance for these food groups is provided for junior and standard meal sizes in Appendix 2.	While lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, and non-animal alternatives are acknowledged as an important component of Australian cuisine, 96% of children do not meet the recommended daily number of serves. Inclusion of vegetables is prioritised as 91% of children aged 2-17 do not eat the recommended serves of vegetables (while the relatively smaller 37% do not meet fruit intake recommendations). Grain (cereal) foods are the primary contributors of carbohydrates to the diet, and the ADGs state that the diet should be made up of 45%-65% carbohydrate to minimise the risk of chronic disease (3). Portion size targets have been developed based on the rationale (as for energy) that each meal should give students the opportunity to consume 25-33% of food group requirements for the day. For each food group (and sub-food group), quantities were calculated to meet the 25-33% target from the ADG daily food group recommendations and extrapolated into raw, uncooked gram measures where required. Following portion size guidance ensures that recipes are consistent in energy and macronutrient composition.

Standard	Further information and rationale
Each meal may contain foods from the following optional food groups: • Fruit • Dairy foods or alternatives These foods are recommended but not essential. Portion size guidance for these food groups is set out in Appendix 3.	While dairy foods (or plant-based alternatives) are an important part of the diet, they are expensive to provide at scale. Most other countries did not consider them essential at lunch (3). These Menu Standards set out energy and other nutrient targets that should be met at lunch. If targets are met by a main meal alone, a side dish does not need to be provided. Mandatory dairy and fruit targets would be challenging to meet as part of a main (savoury) meal. Portion size targets have been developed based on the rationale (as for energy) that each meal should give students the opportunity to consume 25-33% of food group requirements for the day. For each food group (and sub-food group), quantities were calculated to meet the 25-33% target from the ADG daily food group recommendations and extrapolated into raw, uncooked gram measures where required. Following portion size guidance ensures that recipes are consistent in energy and macronutrient composition.
Methods of cooking and ingredients will minimise added sodium and saturated fat.	The ADGs recommend that intake of foods high in saturated fat and sodium are limited (2). Recipes based on foods from the essential and optional food groups will be lower in saturated fat and sodium, however the following must also be considered: • Deep fried food is not permitted • Choose salt-reduced ingredients when possible • Avoid ingredients high in saturated fat, such as butter, cream, coconut oil and coconut cream.



Standard	Further information and rationale
Meals are assessed against saturated fat and sodium criteria to ensure alignment with the 'GREEN' or 'AMBER' standard set out in SmartFood Nutrient Criteria: A dish is GREEN if it: • Consists of GREEN and/or AMBER ingredients • Contains 2.5 grams or less of saturated fat per 100 grams • Contains 300 milligrams or less of sodium per 100 grams. A dish is AMBER if it: • Consists of GREEN and/or AMBER ingredients • Contains 2.5-5 grams of saturated fat per 100 grams • Contains 300-450 milligrams of sodium per 100 grams.	The menu should align with best practice standards set out in the Tasmanian SmartFood Program. Quantitative assessment of dishes for saturated fat and sodium content alongside qualitative review of ingredients will help to ensure that the menu consists of recipes that are consistent with the ADGs.



Table 3: Other standards for school lunches

Standard	Further information and rationale
It is recommended that plain bread is available at every meal and, where possible, different types will be offered across a menu cycle. This will not be counted in the energy content of the meal.	Best practice guidelines for feeding children recommend the inclusion of a familiar food at mealtimes to help children with acceptance of unfamiliar foods and suggest that high-carbohydrate foods are generally well accepted. Education should be provided to support the implementation of this strategy and ensure that children have access to familiar foods without restriction from adults. As energy targets per serve have been calculated based on the minimum EER for an age range (see Table 2), some students may need more energy than is provided by a single serve of the main meal and/or side dish. The availability of bread will support students who have higher energy requirements to meet their needs. Bread is low risk for food safety issues, cheap, and is easily frozen, making it low-waste (3). The ADGs recommend mostly wholegrain or wholemeal varieties are preferable due to the higher fibre and nutrient content (2), however both refined and wholegrain varieties are suitable.
Students will have access to water during all mealtimes. Unflavoured milk may also be provided depending on school choice and availability. Milk will not be factored into the energy content of the meal.	The ADGs state that most fluid needs should be met through the consumption of water and that milk and water are the recommended drinks for children. It is also advised that children limit intake of sugar-sweetened drinks. Milk is not factored into the energy content of the meal as it may be intermittently available or not available at all (3). As energy targets per serve have been calculated based on the minimum EER for an age range (see Table 2), some students may need more energy than is provided by a single serve of the main meal and/or side dish. The availability of milk will support students who have higher energy requirements to meet their needs.
Meals will be safely modified to be suitable for students with different dietary requirements wherever possible. Where meals cannot be safely modified, all attempted efforts made and the reason the student cannot be catered for will be documented.	Students with allergies, intolerances and other medical requirements are more likely to feel excluded from school activities where food is involved (7). Promoting inclusion and a sense of belonging is important wherever this can be done safely.



Standard	Further information and rationale
The use of local and seasonal produce should be considered in menu design.	Benefits of a local food procurement strategy include reduction in waste, enhanced environmental sustainability, economic benefits and increased sense of community through direct supplier-consumer relationships (8)
Food waste is minimised through creativity with recipes and ingredients, managing leftovers, composting, the collection of feedback and responsive menu design, and other waste management strategies.	A priority in minimising food waste must be ensuring that food safety is maintained. Implementation of food waste reduction strategies is best practice in most municipalities in European Union countries (9). Uneaten food that goes to landfill accounts for around 3% of Australia's annual greenhouse gas emissions - redirecting any food that is unsafe for consumption into compost, worm farms or animal feed is a low-effort, socially responsible activity that supports greenhouse gas reduction targets (10).

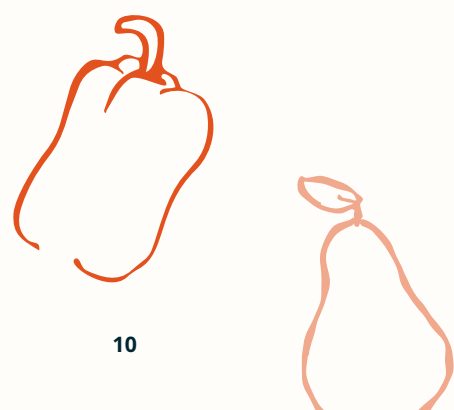


Table 4: Standards for implementation, monitoring and continuous quality improvement

Standard	Further information and rationale
An Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD, or eligible) must have oversight of the menu development process, including: • Menu composition • Analysis of meals (including nutrient composition) • Supporting practical implementation in the central kitchen and in schools.	Dietitians are leaders in the field of nutrition science and food service. They have training to ensure the translation of nutrition standards, nutrition guidelines and policies into practical application for food service management. Dietitians are trained to consider food safety risks within menu design but are encouraged to seek input from a suitably qualified food safety specialist as required. Dietitians are also trained to conduct quality audits. Eligibility for APD status ensures the dietitian has received training at an accredited university (11).
It is recommended that feedback (formal and informal) is regularly collected on the menu and meal composition to allow for continuous quality improvement and to inform the review of these Menu Standards.	Maintaining an optimal SLP requires accountability, auditing and monitoring of meals (1).
Issues or complaints about the SLP food and/or processes are documented, responded to and reported appropriately. This includes any concerns relating to foodborne illness, allergen exposure, quantity or quality of food, or food handling practices.	Food safety is one of the most significant risks of a SLP and it is essential that all legal and best-practice obligations are adhered to.
These Menu Standards will be reviewed and updated every two years, or more frequently to reflect emerging evidence, policy and program data, under the oversight of the Department of Health with input from relevant stakeholders.	Next review: June 2027.

References

1. Manson A, Johnson B J, Smith K, Dunbabin J, Leahy D, Graham A, Gallegos* D, Golley* R K (*co-senior author). Do we need school meals in Australia? A discussion paper. 2022, Flinders University; <https://doi.org/10.25957/rqer-r406>
2. National Health and Medical Research Council (2013) Australian Dietary Guidelines. Canberra: National Health and Medical Research Council
3. Galloway C, DePaoli K, Smith K J, Reardon M. Beyond the lunchbox: menu development guidelines for the Tasmanian School Lunch Project. Health Promot. J. Austral. 2025;36(1):e871. <https://doi:10.1002/hpja.871>
4. National Health and Medical Research Council. Nutrient reference values Australia and New Zealand [Internet]. Canberra: Australian Government; 2022 [cited 2022 Nov 24]. Available from: <https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/nutrient-reference-values>
5. National Health and Medical Research Council. Australian dietary guidelines. Canberra: National Health and Medical Research Council; 2013.
6. Department for Education UK. Checklist for school lunches. UK; 2022 [cited 2025 Mar 13]. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/627b9b55d3bf7f5c0c1c7049/Checklist_for_school_lunches.pdf
7. Wooley K, Fishbach A, Wang RM. Food restriction and the experience of social isolation. J Pers Soc Psychol. 2020;119(3):657-671. <https://doi.10.1037/pspi0000223>
8. Galloway C, Devine S, Parison J, Jones HA. Procurement from local producers for food service in primary and secondary school settings: a scoping review. Health Promot. J.Austral. 2025;34;316-327. <https://doi:10.1002/hpja.618>
9. Piirsalu E, Varov I, Kaaret K, Uiboleht K, Kuldna P. (2022). Mapping the school food system. D 2.2 joint report of mapping. SchoolFood4Change project. <https://www.sei.org/publications/mapping-study-of-the-school-food-systems-in-12-eu-countries>
10. Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water. Reducing Australia's food waste [Internet]. Canberra: Australian Government; 2025 [cited 2025 March 21]. Available from: <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/waste/food-waste>
11. Dietitians Australia. Food service role statement [Internet]. Canberra: Dietitians Australia; 2022 [cited 2025 March 21]. Available from: <https://dietitiansaustralia.org.au/working-dietetics/standards-and-scope/role-statements/food-service-role-statement>



Appendix 1. Example two-week menu

Main meal	Side	Variety within essential food groups			Classification of main dish
		Meat/ alternative foods	Vegetable sub-groups	Grain (cereal) foods	
Asian beef noodle salad	–	• Beef	• Orange veg	• Vermicelli noodles	AMBER
Vegetarian option: Asian tofu noodle salad		• Tofu	• Other veg		
Teriyaki chicken bowl	Fruit	• Chicken	• Green & brassica veg	• Rice	GREEN
Vegetarian option: Teriyaki tofu bowl		• Tofu	• Orange veg • Other veg	• Quinoa	
Chicken burger + coleslaw	Fruit	• Chicken	• Green & brassica veg	• Bread roll	GREEN
Vegetarian option: Veggie burger + coleslaw		• Tofu	• Orange veg • Other veg	• Breadcrumbs	
Meatloaf	Pasta salad	• Beef	• Green & brassica veg	• Bread	GREEN
Vegetarian option: Vegetable loaf		• Black beans	• Other veg	• Pasta	
Butter chicken + rice	–	• Chicken	• Orange veg	• Rice	GREEN
Vegetarian option: Butter tofu + rice		• Tofu	• Other veg • Starchy veg		
Beef cottage pie	Green salad	• Beef	• Green & brassica veg	[Replaced by potato]	GREEN
Vegetarian option: Lentil cottage pie		• Brown lentils	• Other veg		
Beef pasta bolognese	Green salad	• Beef	• Orange veg	• Pasta	GREEN
Vegetarian option: Lentil pasta bolognese		• Brown lentils	• Green leafy veg • Other veg		
Moroccan chicken + couscous	Yoghurt	• Chicken	• Green & brassica veg	• Couscous	GREEN
Vegetarian option: Moroccan chickpeas + couscous		• Chickpeas	• Orange veg • Other veg		
Vegetarian option: Lentil lasagna	Green salad	• Brown lentils	• Orange veg • Green leafy veg • Other veg	• Pasta • Flour	GREEN
Vegetarian option: Jacket potato + curried chickpeas	Yoghurt	• Chickpeas	• Green & brassica veg • Orange veg	• Flour [Replaced by potato]	GREEN
Summary (targets met)		2X vegetarian 4X beef 4X chicken	5 subgroups	7 different foods	90% GREEN
 Two-week target		At least 2 vegetarian, 2 other types of meat	At least 3 sub-groups	At least 3 types	80% GREEN (at least 8/10 dishes)

Appendix 2. Portion size guidance for essential food groups

Every meal should contain at least one portion of food from each of the essential food groups listed below. The portion size (listed in raw gram weight) provided for each subgroup is equal to one portion, however it is encouraged that a meal contains a variety of different subgroups for dietary diversity.

For example, a meal for 9-17 year old (a standard serve) would provide a total of 1.25 portions of vegetables if it contained:

- 200 grams zucchini **OR**
- 60 grams of broccoli (0.46 portions), 30 grams of carrot (0.23 portions), 30 grams of zucchini (0.19 portions) and 40 grams of potato (0.35 portions) - this would be the preferred option as a diversity of vegetables is included.

A singular portion size has been provided for each sub food group for simplicity; however reaching an exact figure for each recipe is not always realistic or necessary: a quantity within 10% either side of the portion size target provided is a good aim.

For example, a portion of raw orange vegetables for a child aged 9-17 years is 130g, but an acceptable range for this portion size (+10%) would be between 117 and 143 grams (within this region would still be considered 1 portion).

Food group	Subgroup and common foods	Portion size:	Portion size:
		Junior serve: Students 4-8 years (Kinder – grade 3)	Standard serve: Students 9-17 years (Grade 4 –12)
Vegetables	Raw green and brassica vegetables: • Cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, silverbeet, peas, beans	120g	130g
	Raw orange vegetables: • Carrot, pumpkin	120g	130g
	Raw green leafy vegetables: • Lettuce, spinach, rocket	95g	110g
	Raw other vegetables: • Zucchini, onion, tomato, capsicum, celery, mushroom	145g	160g
	Raw starchy vegetables: • Potato, sweet potato, sweet corn	105g	115g
	Canned legumes, beans or lentils, drained: • Brown lentils, kidney beans, cannellini beans	95g	110g
	Dried legumes, beans or lentils: • Red lentils, green lentils, dried chickpeas	30g	35g

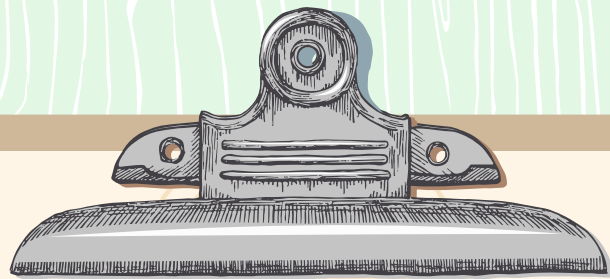


Food group	Subgroup and common foods	Portion size: Junior serve: Students 4-8 years (Kinder – grade 3)	Portion size: Standard serve: Students 9-17 years (Grade 4 –12)
Meat/ meat alternatives	Raw lean meat: Beef, lamb, pork, kangaroo	45g	60g
	Raw lean poultry: Skinless chicken, turkey	45g	70g
	Raw fish fillet or canned fish: Salmon, hoki, tuna	50g	80g
	Eggs	55g	85g
	Canned legumes, beans or lentils, drained: Brown lentils, kidney beans, cannellini beans	65g	105g
	Dried legumes, beans or lentils: Red lentils, green lentils, dried chickpeas	30g	35g
	Tofu	75g	120g
	Nuts and seeds: Tahini, sesame seeds, pumpkin seeds, pine nuts	15g	20g
Grain/cereal foods	Bread, roll or flat bread	45g	60g
	Uncooked rice, pasta, noodles, barley, buckwheat, semolina, polenta, bulgur, or quinoa	40g	50g
	Flour	40g	50g
	Raw oats	40g	50g
	Crumpet	70g	85g
	English muffin or scone	40g	50g
	Muesli or breakfast cereal flakes	35g	45g

Appendix 3. Portion size guidance for optional food groups

The fruit and dairy and alternatives food groups are optional, and therefore portion size guidance is provided as a starting point to help decide on quantities if they are included at mealtimes. They may also be useful when reflecting on the number of portions of each food group provided at each meal across a term or year.

Food group	Subgroup and common foods	Portion size: Junior serve: Students 4-8 years (Kinder – grade 3)	Portion size: Standard serve: Students 9-17 years (Grade 4 –12)
Fruit	Fresh or frozen fruit: Apple, banana, orange, pear, apricots, kiwi, plums	70g	90g
	Diced or canned fruit (no added sugar)	80g	110g
	Dried fruit	10g	20g
Dairy and alternatives	Milk: Fresh, UHT, reconstituted, buttermilk or non-dairy alternative (containing at least 100mg of calcium per 100mL)	110mL	175mL
	Evaporated milk	55mL	85mL
	Hard cheese	20g	30g
	Ricotta cheese	55g	85g
	Yoghurt	90g	140g



School lunches, explained

The menu will...

- Include ingredients from the five food groups outlined in the Australian Dietary Guidelines.
- Prioritise ingredients and methods of cooking that are low in saturated fat, sugar and salt.
- Offer a variety of interesting, delicious seasonal Tasmanian foods across the school term.
- Have a vegetarian option for every dish; with schools offering a vegetarian meal regularly.

The meals will...

- Consist of a main dish, and may include a side dish.
- Offer serving sizes based on age so that students have the chance to meet their energy needs with minimal waste.
- Be served alongside water as the main drink. Unflavoured milk may also be provided depending on availability.
- Be modified to be suitable for students with different dietary requirements wherever possible.



Notes

