

Healthy food and drink choices in schools

GREEN
Fill the
menu



AMBER
Select
carefully



RED
Off the
menu



Australian Better Health Initiative: A joint Australian, State and Territory initiative. Acknowledgement NSW Health

What's all the fuss about sugar, fat and salt?

Fat, sugar and salt get lots of bad publicity but what is all the fuss really about? Adults and children need sugar, fat and salt – however too much in your diet can lead to problems.

Sugar

Sugar is a carbohydrate and can be found in many different types of foods and drinks. Most people eat more sugar than they need. Sugar is added to sweeten foods and is also used to extend shelf life by slowing the growth of bacteria.

Sugar masquerades under many different names such as glucose, fructose and sucrose.

Foods high in added sugar often have minimal nutritional value. Sugar provides a burst of energy that our bodies are able to use quickly. However, the effects of sugar fade fast and can leave you craving more to provide another burst of energy. If you consume more sugar than you burn up in physical activity your body will convert it into fat which can lead to weight gain.

Fat

Fat is used to improve the texture and taste of many common foods. It provides more than twice the energy of carbohydrates. If you are eating a lot of fat and not burning up the extra energy in physical activity, it will be stored as excess fat in the body. As well as contributing to overweight, obesity and high cholesterol levels, excess fat stores clog the arteries and can lead to heart disease.

Saturated and trans fats should be kept to a minimum in your diet. Saturated fats are usually solid at room temperature and are found principally in animal products such as full fat dairy foods, fatty meat and sausages, tropical oils such as palm and coconut oils, and products such as copha. Trans fats are made by adding hydrogen to vegetable oil and are found in many baked and fried foods such as cakes, biscuits, crackers, donuts and hot chips.

The healthiest fats are unsaturated – and these can be polyunsaturated or monounsaturated. These fats help to lower cholesterol levels and reduce the risk of heart disease. Unsaturated fats are usually either soft or liquid at room temperature such as canola, olive and sunflower oils. Healthy fats are also found in nuts, seeds and oily fish such as salmon, tuna and sardines.

Salt

While it is essential for good health to eat some salt, most people have far more than their bodies require. Increased salt consumption can cause high blood pressure and increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.

Salt is made up of sodium and chloride. The sodium helps the nervous system to regulate blood pressure and transmit messages around the body. Chloride is used by the stomach to make acid that helps kill unhealthy bacteria and in food digestion. Salt is mostly listed as sodium on food labels.

Many processed foods contain high quantities of salt. Salt can even be found in foods you may not expect to find it in such as biscuits and breakfast cereals.

A liking for salty foods usually develops in childhood so it is important that children learn to avoid eating foods that are high in salt. Children should also be discouraged from adding extra salt to their meals.

Unprocessed foods and fresh foods are the best choices.

Information sourced from:

The Parents' Jury at www.parentsjury.org.au.