

# Kids' lunches revealed : Foodbank WA warns of lunch box dangers

The Sunday Times  
March 2014

WA's biggest hunger relief charity says it's not uncommon for primary school students aged just six to have soft drink or adult portions of chocolate in their lunch boxes. Foodbank says lunch boxes brimming with biscuits, lollies and crisps are also common. Some parents will even deliver fast food at lunch time instead of packing a healthy meal.

*The Sunday Times* this week visited a Year 3 class at Beckenham Primary School – about 14km southeast of Perth – to record what every student had in their lunch box. One seven-year-old was sent to school with a handful of rice and some frankfurts. Another had a packet of CC's chips, a packet of Paradise-branded chocolate biscuits and a tub of Milo yoghurt. The child also had a plum.

One student's lunch contained pizza-flavoured Shapes, a Kellogg's LCM snack bar, Jatz crackers, Gingerbread Babies biscuits, rice crackers and a white bread ham sandwich. Others had Nutri-Grain energy bars, Twisties and Tiny Teddy biscuits.

Foods rated as no-go products and "not every day" foods were found in all but two lunch boxes. Perth North Metro Medicare Local dietician Felicity Willis analysed each of the lunchboxes viewed by *The Sunday Times*, using the traffic light system she developed based on the Australian eat for health guidelines.

Ms Willis said ensuring children ate enough vegetables was a constant difficulty for parents, especially in the face of junk food marketing. "One of the huge things that we face is the battle against marketing to children," she said. "I have heard parents say for example that simply because say the Lion King is featured on a muesli bar or on a Hungry Jacks meal that becomes very appealing for the child. "These factors all contributed to what we call discretionary or extra foods becoming everyday foods." On this particular day, the students could also choose to order a Subway meal as part of a school fundraising activity.

Only two students in the class had sandwiches made using wholemeal bread. Foodbank WA spokesman Rex Milligan said many parents simply had no understanding about what was healthy for their children. "It's a big misconception that parents who give their kids unhealthy food do so because they don't care or they can't be bothered," he said. "It's not that they don't care, almost all parents passionately care about their children, the problem is they don't have the knowledge or the skills or the money to do it."

Mr Milligan said the lunch boxes viewed by *The Sunday Times* on Wednesday were fairly typical. But he said Beckenham Primary School's commitment to the government-sponsored Crunch&Sip healthy eating program meant the children's lunch boxes were probably healthier than what would be found at some other schools.

Mr Milligan said Foodbank regularly found children who had been given energy drinks high in kilojoules to take to school, which he attributed to advertising campaigns aimed at children. “(Energy drinks) are often caffeinated with high sugar levels and kids won’t just have one – they will have multiple cans,” he said. “It makes it difficult for the teachers and for the whole learning experience if there’s a primary school kid there who’s had a couple of energy drinks, they’re going to be pretty hard to teach and they’re not going to be very good at concentrating on learning.”

School deputy principal Jo Harper said the school did not operate a canteen because it was too expensive. She said the school made every effort to encourage healthy eating among students, including a two-hour cooking lesson once a fortnight. But she said what children brought for lunch was ultimately up to parents.

“The biggest noticeable thing for me is the amount of packaged food that comes from home,” she said. Ms Willis the free PNML Healthy Families for Happy Futures Program, which helps children and their families with weight or lifestyle concerns improve their nutrition, physical activity and lifestyle.

***The ratings and comments courtesy of Perth North Metro Medicare Local dietitian Felicity Willis.***

**KEY:** **RED** bad      **AMBER** OK, but look for healthier option      **GREEN** Well done.

### **LUNCH BOX 1**

- 1 x sausage and lettuce sandwich **AMBER**
- 1 x Fruit Roll-Up **RED**
- 1 x Goulburn Valley diced peach and mango **GREEN**
- Water **GREEN**

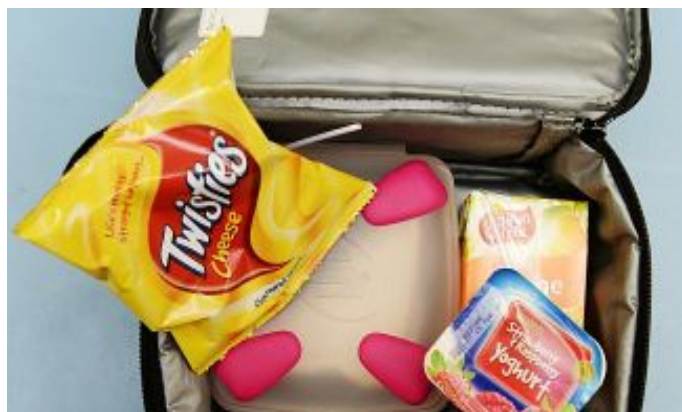
Dietician says: “Go for tinned fruits in natural juices rather than syrup for a green light choice. Lean sausages such as Chevrups or Peppercorn food Company are great, lean choices. Swap the fruit roll up for 1 cup of strawberries for over twice the fibre!”



### **LUNCH BOX 2**

- 1 x strawberry and raspberry yoghurt **GREEN**
- 1 x packet Twisties **RED**
- 1 x jam and butter white bread sandwich **AMBER**
- 1 x orange juice **AMBER**
- 1 x small banana (not pictured) **GREEN**
- Water **GREEN**

Dietician says: “The best sandwich fillings include lean protein and salad. Tuna and sweet corn, chicken and avocado, or lean beef with tomato relish are great combinations along with salad. Why not swap twisties for some popcorn as a healthy swap.



### LUNCH BOX 3

- 1 x packet gingerbread cookies **RED**
- 1 x LCM bar **RED**
- Ritz crackers **RED**
- 1 x apple juice **AMBER**
- 1 x pizza twist **AMBER**
- 1 x packet Pizza Shapes **RED**
- 1 x packet rice sticks **RED**
- 1 x ham and cheese white bread sandwich **AMBER**

Dietician says: "Aim to choose less processed snacks, fruit bread, olives, popcorn, fruit, yoghurt, cheese, a corn cob. These are snacks which come from the five main food groups and would be ideal choices."



### LUNCH BOX 4

- White rice **AMBER**
- Sausage/hot dog **AMBER**

Dietician says: "This is not a very colourful lunch box. The addition of fruit and some frozen peas, corn or mixed veg to the rice would be a very time efficient way of packing colours and therefore nutrients into the lunch box. Growing minds and bodies need a range of nutrients, so go for plenty of coloured fruit and vegetables in their school lunches."



### LUNCH BOX 5

- 2 x apples **GREEN**
- Chicken flavoured biscuits **RED**
- 1 x ham white bread sandwich **AMBER**
- Water **GREEN**

Dietician says: "Adding some salad (lettuce, English spinach, carrot, cucumber, beetroot, tomato and avocado) to the sandwich would convert this sandwich to a green choice. Why not pack salads in a separate container to prevent the bread getting soggy."



### LUNCH BOX 7

- 1 x Nutri Grain bar **RED**
- 1 x Tasti double choc bar **RED**
- 1 x packet rice crackers **GREEN**
- 1 x apple **GREEN**
- 1 x ham white bread sandwich **AMBER**
- Water **GREEN**

Dietician says: "If using bars in lunch boxes we would aim for one with fibre (wholegrain cereals) and nutrients (dried fruit, seeds etc). A healthier swap here would be a be natural trail bar"



## LUNCH BOX 8

- 1 x hot dog in white bread bun **AMBER**
- 1 x Up & Go drink, vanilla flavoured **AMBER**
- 1 x Happy Cow cream cheese portion **GREEN**

Dietician says: "Milk based drinks can be a bit of a trap. Milk is defiantly an everyday food with calcium for strong bones. Aim to avoid sweetened milks, which are a sometimes food. A glass of hill milk with one teaspoon of milo is a good choice considering small portion of milo and that it provides essential nutrients, including iron."



## LUNCH BOX 9

- 1 x Uncle Toby's apricot muesli bar **AMBER**
- 1 x Le Snack **AMBER**
- 1 x packet Jumpy's snacks **RED**
- 1 x Oreo chocolate wafer stick **RED**
- 1 x plum **GREEN**
- 1 x wholemeal bread sandwich (filling unknown) **GREEN**
- 1 x apple **GREEN**
- 1 x yoghurt sachet **GREEN**
- Water **GREEN**



Dietician says: "Thumbs up for the wholemeal bread, and this lunch box has some great snacks including fruit and yoghurt. Make some healthier swaps with a fruit hot cross bun, or cheese and crackers or roasted chickpeas for the amber and red coded snacks."

## The Perfect School Lunch

The perfect lunch box contains each of the vital food groups — vegetables, fruit, breads and cereals, dairy, proteins — and none of the processed, pre-packaged nasties.

*The Sunday Times* this week worked with nutritionists from Foodbank WA to construct the ideal school lunch box for children. It includes carrot sticks, cucumber sticks, a cut up apple, a small tub of low-fat yoghurt, a water bottle and a wholemeal chicken wrap with avocado and baby spinach.

Foodbank WA spokesman Rex Milligan said school lunches should look enticing and be colourful. They should also be housed in a sturdy container that is age appropriate. Mr Milligan said a frozen water bottle or ice brick was also a good idea to help keep food cool. Water was essential.



“You need variety so you get a range of nutrients and it’s important the you have something from each food group,” he said. Palmyra mother-of-two Lisa McCarthy, whose nine-year-old daughter Laura taste tested the perfect lunch box this week, said providing kids with the right food was essential to ensuring they could concentrate at school.

“As a mum and a teacher I know they need something filling in their lunch box,” she said. “Usually I give my girls a sandwich or rice crackers to fill them up. I always try to pack their lunch box with lots of fruit, some fibre like a sandwich or rice crackers, and occasionally vegetables or cheese. “The girls are both very active and do plenty of exercise so a healthy lunch ensures they have enough energy and wards of any bugs or sickness.”