

Making the most of your free school meals food vouchers or payments



During this period of uncertainty, it remains important to **maintain good nutrition and hydration**. It's recommended that children are provided with three regular well-balanced meals per day and appropriate snacks in between. Regular meals can help provide structure to new daily routines.

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the Welsh Government has made funding available to your local authority for the provision of food vouchers or payments in place of free school meals. The Welsh Local Government Association is assisting partnership working and providing support.

Your food vouchers or payments should be spent on food for your children. In practice, your food vouchers or payments will supplement your family's budget for food shopping. Food shops include supermarkets and convenience stores but not takeaways. This leaflet provides useful tips on planning, shopping and preparing food for your family, along with a list of useful ingredients.

Top Tips...



... for planning your food shop:

- Plan your meals first to determine what ingredients you need to buy.
- Ask your children and other members of your household for meal and snack ideas, using the [Eatwell Guide](#) to get a healthy balance.
- Check your cupboards, fridge and freezer before making your shopping list and ensure that you have space to store the food, and are not buying things you already have.
- Consider foods that can be used for several dishes (e.g. frozen and tinned vegetables, minced beef).
- Your children's school menu and our list of useful websites may be helpful for planning evening meals.
- The Welsh Government's [Healthy lunchboxes](#) leaflet contains useful suggestions for lunch.
- Your children may be able to use supermarket websites to find out food costs and calculate the cost of your shopping in advance, as a home-schooling activity.



... for shopping for your food

- There's no need to stockpile food as food shops are expected to remain open. However, the choice may be more limited than usual.
- Shopping trips should be kept to a minimum and undertaken alone, where possible, practicing social distancing.
- Makes sure you follow guidance from individual food shops when shopping.
- Your food voucher or payment will go further if you're able to select budget varieties. These are just as good for you as premium brands, and are sometimes even healthier!
- Prioritise what's on your shopping list. However, you may need to be flexible and buy alternatives (e.g. turkey mince instead of beef mince).
- Tinned and dried beans, pulses and lentils are a good source of protein and are a cheaper alternative to meat; or you can mix these with meat to make your meal go further.
- Choose wholegrain varieties, where possible, to keep you feeling fuller for longer.
- Limit pre-prepared foods and snacks that are high in fat, sugar and salt. Look at front-of-pack traffic light labels and try to buy foods which are classed as green or amber.



... for preparing your meals, snacks and drinks:

- Cook from scratch where possible, as this is often cheaper.
- To reduce waste, only prepare what you need.
- If there are leftovers, store these in your fridge or freezer appropriately for another day.
- Involving your children in the preparation and cooking process can be fun and educational, if it's safe and appropriate.
- Nutritious snack choices include fruits, chopped vegetables, multigrain toast, wholegrain cereals, oatcakes or crumpets.
- Keeping hydrated is important. Water and lower-fat milks are always the best choices; plus water is free! If children will not drink water or low-fat milk, then choose sugar-free or no added sugar drinks.

List of useful websites with some great recipe and snack ideas:

- www.nhs.uk/change4life/recipes
- www.lovefoodhatewaste.com/recipes
- www.bbc.co.uk/food

Suggested foods for your shopping list

Below is a list of useful ingredients based on the [Eatwell Guide](#) for a healthy balanced diet.

Fruit and vegetables:



- Onion and garlic
- Tinned tomatoes
- Tinned fruit (in juice) and vegetables (in water)
- Fresh and frozen fruit and vegetables

Protein:



- Tinned tuna or other fish in water or tomato sauce
- Frozen fish
- Minced meat or chicken (such as thighs or breasts)
- Eggs
- Tinned or dried lentils, beans (including baked) and pulses
- Meat alternatives (e.g. tofu, soya products, mycoprotein foods such as Quorn™)

You may also want to consider:



- Herbs and spices
- Stock cubes (choose low-salt varieties if available)
- Tomato puree

Starchy food and carbohydrates:



(choose whole grain varieties if possible)

- Pasta
- Rice
- Couscous
- Noodles
- Potatoes
- Lower-sugar/salt and high fibre breakfast cereals (e.g. cornflakes, rice-based cereal, wheat-based cereal, porridge).
- Bread
- Crumpets, plain rice cakes and crackers

Dairy and alternatives:



- Lower-fat milk
- Cheese
- Plain or lower-sugar yogurt

