

The WA Health Traffic Light System

Healthy choices WA: Food and Nutrition Policy for WA Health Services uses a 'traffic light' colour system of food categorisation to identify and promote foods and drinks supplied to WA Health staff, visitors and the general public through food outlets, vending machines, catered events and fundraising activities at WA Health facilities.

Food categories

Under the traffic light system, food and drink sold within WA Health services will be classified into categories based on their nutritional value, energy density and levels of saturated fat, added sugar, salt and fibre.

BACKGROUND

Schools can make a difference. They are in an ideal position to promote and maintain the health of children, school staff and the wider community. According to the Health Promoting Schools Framework initiated by the World Health Organisation, a health promoting school is one that is based on a social model of health. This model takes into account the physical, and social and emotional needs of all members of the school community. Together, members work towards providing students with positive experiences and structures that promote and protect their health.

Childhood obesity is now recognised as a world wide epidemic. In Western Australian the number of children and young people who are overweight or obese has tripled since 1985, with a quarter of boys and a third of girls aged 7-15 years overweight or obese in 2003. Young people who carry excess weight or are obese have a greater risk of a number of immediate and long-term health and behavioural problems.

The Western Australian government has set a new policy and standards for healthy food and drink in public schools. The policy and standards are based on:

The National Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia and the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating (AGTHE).

A whole school approach which includes canteen workers, principals, teachers, students and parents/caregivers

A 'traffic light system' for rating the suitability of foods and drink. (see appendix);

GREEN This category is encouraged. These fill the menu.
AMBER These should be select carefully and eaten in moderation.
RED These are off the menu.

Green Foods and Drinks

Foods and drinks classified as Green are the healthiest choices. They are excellent sources of important nutrients needed for health and wellbeing, and low in saturated fat, added sugar and salt, and are lower in energy density.

Can be eaten *every day* or at *every meal*.

Examples include: Plain or whole grain breads and cereals, vegetables and salads, fruit, low fat milks and dairy products, lean meats, fish and poultry, eggs, and nuts and legumes.

Fill the menu - at least 50% of all items displayed and offered

Should be:

- available from all key food outlets as much of the day as possible
- actively promoted at point of sale as healthier options
- prominently displayed compared to Amber foods
- attractively presented, tasty and competitively priced

Amber Foods and Drinks	
<p>Foods and drinks classified as Amber are mainly processed foods. They have some nutritional value but contain moderate levels of saturated fat, added sugar and/or salt and can, in large serve sizes, contribute to excess energy intake.</p> <p>Should be carefully selected and eaten in <i>moderation</i>.</p> <p>Examples include: Full fat milk and dairy products, some breakfast and cereal bars, some un-iced, plain, lower fat cakes and muffins, some processed meats (e.g. ham, pastrami), poly- or mono-unsaturated spreads, breakfast cereals with no added sugar or fat.</p>	<p>Choose carefully - approximately 30% of all items displayed or offered</p> <hr/> <p>Should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not dominate the menu at the expense of healthier Green items • be provided in small serve sizes • not be actively promoted, especially through signage or 'deals' • where possible, comprise the healthiest alternatives available from within the category <p>All labels need to be checked against the Red-Amber nutrient criteria</p>

Red Foods and Drinks	
<p>Foods and drinks classified as Red are energy dense and nutrient poor foods and drinks that are high in saturated fat, sugar and/or salt. They can contribute to excess energy intake if consumed in large amounts or on a frequent basis.</p> <p>Red foods also include deep fried foods, confectionary and chocolate (energy size limit), crisps, corn chips and similar salty snacks (energy size limit), sugar sweetened soft drinks, energy and sports drinks (energy size limit).</p> <p>Should only be eaten <i>occasionally</i>.</p> <p>Examples include: Fried foods, savoury commercial products such as pies and sausage rolls, snack bars, sweet biscuits, cakes and sweet pastries, small size confectionary and packets of crisps, some sweetened drinks and processed meats such as salamis.</p>	<p>Limit / remove - no more than 20% of all items displayed or offered</p> <hr/> <p>Should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not be promoted or advertised in any way • not be displayed prominently • stocked in the smallest available portion size <p>All labels need to be checked against the Red-Amber nutrient criteria.</p>

Background to the approach

The 'traffic light' system has been adopted by a number of other government agencies, including the Western Australian Department of Education and Training's school canteen policy, the Queensland school canteen strategy and Queensland Health food policy, and the NSW school canteen policy and NSW Department of Health food policy.

The nutrient criteria to distinguish between categories for the WA Health policy were based on the Fresh Tastes @ School NSW Healthy School Canteen Strategy: Canteen Menu Planning Guide (the first policy developed in Australia), A Better Choice – Healthy Food and Drink Supply Strategy for Queensland Health Facilities and the FOCiS (Federation of Canteens in Schools) National Criteria for Product Registration for school canteens, amended to meet Western Australian requirements.