

Introduction:

Balanced diet is the key foundation for establishing children's health, whereas schools are an important setting for children to develop healthy eating habits from an early age. In this context, the Department of Health encourages all kindergartens and child care centres to design menus with reference to its "Nutrition Guidelines for Children Aged 2 to 6" under the "StartSmart@school.hk" Campaign, so as to create for children a campus conducive to healthy eating, and to bring their diets in line with the principle of "3 Lows 1 High" (i.e. low fat/oil, low salt, low sugar and high dietary fibre).

Winter is coming. What good choices are there for a healthful, seasonal menu? Let's take a look at the sample menu below, which comes with several features:

1. The menu features dishes made with a variety of seasonal winter vegetables like watercress, Indian lettuce, spinach, Chinese kale, carrots, white radishes, potatoes, taros, hairy gourds, papayas, mandarins and pomelos. This not only gives the dishes a rich variety of colours, smells and flavours, but also provides a wide range of nutrients.
2. Besides fruit and bread, healthful and hot snacks like boiled corns, boiled sweet potatoes and congee are also served to keep body warm in cold weather.
3. A variety of foods are served as breakfast and snacks to give children a broader intake of nutrients and increase the diversity of the menu.
4. The menu uses fresh natural ingredients such as garlic, onions, shiitake mushrooms and straw mushrooms to substitute ready-made seasonings and sauces that are high in sodium. By doing so, dishes can be made healthier and tastier.
5. Based on the recommendations of the 'Healthy Eating Food Pyramid', this menu provides children with foods from the essential food groups to ensure a balanced intake of nutrients.

To learn more about the recommendations on healthful ingredients and cooking methods, please refer to the "Nutrition Guidelines for Children Aged 2 to 6" under the "StartSmart@school.hk" Campaign at https://startsmart.gov.hk/files/pdf/nutritional_guide_en.pdf.

Example menu for Winter

Week One	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breakfast	Oat bread + Low-fat milk	Tuna and lettuce sandwich	Congee with minced meat, mushrooms and taro ❶	Oatmeal with banana in low-sugar, calcium-fortified soy milk ❷ ❹	Red rice congee with assorted mushrooms and tofu sheets ❶
Morning Snacks	Apple	Orange	Papaya	Green grapes	Dragon fruit
Lunch	Braised sliced pork and watercress in broth	Steamed eggs + Stir-fried cabbage	Stir-fried chicken fillets with onion and carrot ❶	Steamed fish fillets with chopped garlic + Blanched seasonal vegetables	Macaroni soup with tomato and beef
Afternoon Tea ❸	Cherry tomatoes ❸ + Apple and Pear Drink ❷	Boiled sweet potato ❸ + Low-sugar, calcium-fortified soymilk	Steamed Chinese bun + Low-fat milk	Boiled corn ❸	Peanut butter sandwich + Low-fat milk
Week Two	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breakfast	Oat bread with raisins + Low-sugar, calcium-fortified soymilk	Steamed scallion roll + Low-fat milk	Congee with choy sum and fish	Oatmeal with dried apricots in low-fat milk ❹	Peanut butter bun + Low-sugar, calcium-fortified soymilk
Morning Snacks	Banana	Kiwi fruit	Pomelo	Apple	Strawberries
Lunch	Stewed chicken with chestnuts + Blanched choy sum	Steamed ground pork with water chestnuts ❶ + Stir-fried Chinese kale	Steamed tofu with corn and creamy egg	Stewed diced beef with potato + Stir-fried baby cabbage	Alphabet pasta with carrot and fish ❶
Afternoon Tea ❸	Congee with hairy gourd and assorted mushrooms	Vermicelli soup with assorted vegetables	Boiled sweet potato ❸ + Low-sugar, calcium-fortified soymilk	Steamed homemade spinach dumplings	Cherry tomatoes ❸

Week Three	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breakfast	Piggy bun + Low-fat milk	Small bun + Low-sugar, calcium-fortified soymilk	Congee with dried vegetables and cowpeas	Oatmeal with raisins in low-sugar, calcium-fortified soymilk ^④	Congee with lettuce and lean beef
Morning Snacks	Dragon fruit	Orange	Papaya	Mandarin	Banana
Lunch	Stir-fried shredded lean beef with bell peppers ^①	Stir-fried chicken fillets with pineapple ^② + Blanched choy sum	Scrambled egg with spinach and tomato ^①	Steamed tofu with fish + Stir-fried Indian lettuce with chopped garlic ^①	Conchiglioni with pak choy and minced meat
Afternoon Tea ^⑥	Red rice congee with black fungus and minced meat ^①	Boiled corn ^⑤ + Chrysanthemum drink with wolfberries ^⑦	Oat bread + Low-fat milk	Cherry tomatoes ^③	Boiled sweet potato ^⑤ + Low-fat milk
Week Four	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breakfast	Wheat sandwich bread with peanut butter + Low-sugar, calcium-fortified soymilk	Vegetable and (lean) meat bun + Low-fat milk	Congee with green vegetables and lean meat	Oatmeal with red dates in low-fat milk ^④	Piggy bun + Low-sugar, calcium-fortified soymilk
Morning Snacks	Pear	Kiwi fruit	Mandarin	Strawberries	Red grapes
Lunch	Braised fish floss with white radish	Stir-fried shrimps with sweet peas	Scrambled egg with onion ^① + Blanched pak choy	Stir-fried shredded beef with hairy gourd and shiitake mushrooms ^①	Soba noodle soup with chicken fillets and Indian lettuce
Afternoon Tea ^⑥	Double-boiled papaya in low-fat milk ^⑤	Cherry tomatoes ^③	Steamed rice-flour rolls + Low-sugar, calcium-fortified soymilk	Tuna and cucumber sandwich	Boiled corn ^⑤

Remarks:

Half-day pre-primary institutions may refer to the snack recommendations of this example menu and give children one to two servings of grain foods, half serving of fruit or one serving of dairy products.

Nutritional tips on ‘Less salt and less sugar’:

1. Natural ingredients like onions, carrots, tomatoes, mushrooms, water chestnuts and bell peppers can be used for seasoning, thereby reducing the use of salt and sugar.
2. Cooking with fruits such as pineapples and bananas not only enhances the natural sweet flavour of the dish, but also reduces the use of ready-made condiments.
3. Fresh foods are healthy snack choices since they contain less salt and sugar than pre-packaged foods like biscuits and cakes.
4. Replacing evaporated milk or condensed milk with low-fat milk can decrease the fat content of the dish. You can also add a small amount of red dates, raisins or dried apricots to enhance the sweet flavour.
5. Desserts made with papayas and low-fat milk have a low fat and high dietary fibre content. You can use these natural sweet ingredients to make a warm dessert for children in winter.
6. Water should be the main beverage served during snack time. Avoid serving beverages that are high in sugar content, e.g. instant malted drinks and fruit juice with added sugar.
7. You can make sweet healthy drinks by using natural ingredients without adding sugar.