

# School lunches – How healthy are they?

## A Before you read

1. Do you go to a school where there is a cafeteria?  
Do you eat your lunch there? If there isn't a cafeteria, what do you eat at lunchtime when you have after-noon lessons? Can you go home for lunch?
2. Match these words that are used in the text to their German translations.



- |                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. dinner/lunch      | A Koch / Köchin          |
| 2. menu              | B Nachtisch              |
| 3. chef              | C Mittagessen            |
| 4. meal              | D Unterschriftensammlung |
| 5. pudding           | E Mahlzeit               |
| 6. nutritional value | F frittiert              |
| 7. deep-fried        | G Speisekarte            |
| 8. petition          | H Staat                  |
| 9. state             | I Nährwert               |

## B Reading

Since the beginning of the 20th century, students in the UK have had a hot meal between lessons at lunchtime made for them at school – school dinners. The lunch break is a fixed part of every school timetable in Great Britain.

In 1906 the Provision of Meals Act was made so that all children could have free school meals. If children had to go to school, then parents thought that the state should also give the children a hot meal, too. The meal was usually breakfast and in the early 20th century the children were given porridge, bread and margarine and a glass of milk. During the 1920's and 1930's things got better, and the children got a lunch of stew with treacle (*Sirup*) pudding for dessert.



At the end of World War II, local authorities, and not the state, had to provide the school dinners. Everyone wanted children to be happy and they thought that if they had full stomachs, they would be happy. During and after the war there wasn't much food, and the food that was available

## School lunches – How healthy are they?

was rationed. Each person had a book which allowed them to buy certain things in the shops but nothing extra. This influenced what the children ate at school, too. Meat often came out of tins and the potatoes for the mashed potatoes were grown locally, which made them cheap and easy to buy. At least there was a new favourite dessert, jam roly-poly. Local authorities soon realised that providing school dinners wasn't cheap, so parents had to start paying, and



families with lower incomes were given help to pay. Rationing eventually came to an end and more variation could be seen on school menus: fish and chips were often served on Fridays. Desserts changed again, and the schools often served spotted dick and rice pudding with jam.



When the next change came, companies were asked to cook the school dinners. These companies fought against each other to provide school dinners for the cheapest price. What would you do if you had less money to buy the food you needed? One way to save money is to make the food less healthy – cheaper food often isn't healthy. Schools saved money this way, and students got their first taste of sugary and salty treats. With the 1980's came the introduction of fast foods to school dinner menus. The students could have pizza, French fries and chicken nuggets as well as fizzy drinks that contained lots of sugar. Unfortunately, no one was checking what was in school dinners and the menu stayed the same for years. In a medical survey carried out in 1999, it was clear that children in the 1950's, living with rationing, had healthier diets than children in the 1990's.

This is where the very well-known and respected chef, Jamie Oliver, got involved. A four-part series on Channel 4, *Jamie's School Dinners*, looked at Britain's school dinners, working together with a school in Greenwich. The programme investigated the food being served in school cafeterias. They looked at its nutritional value and discovered that it was making children obese, and their school marks were suffering. The series also looked at the budget available for school dinners: just 37 pence (about 43 cents) per student. The series made it clear that the junk food on school dinner menus was bad for the students. Jamie Oliver told the government that it was time they took action. Thousands of parents (270,000) who watched the series signed a petition demanding better and more nutritional school meals. As a result, schools banned junk food, fizzy drinks and sweets and put healthier options on their menus.



Making this change wasn't as simple as it sounds. In theory the change was very good, but when other people cooked the school dinners, they had to listen to the complaints from the students. All the new ideas and menus meant more work for the dinner ladies preparing the school meals and many threatened to walk out. The meals often cost more money than the budget allowed.

## School lunches – How healthy are they?

In order to help the dinner ladies, Jamie Oliver needed help and who could best teach the dinner ladies how to cook quickly? The army. They were used to preparing large amounts of food fast, so they showed the dinner ladies how they could work more efficiently. As the campaign got more support, Jamie Oliver asked the government for more money for school dinners and also for the dinner ladies. Eventually the government realized something needed to be done and created the School Food Trust which also provided support and advice to make school meals better.

You probably think that now everyone was happy. Unfortunately, not only weren't the dinner ladies happy, but the students weren't either. They didn't like Jamie Oliver's new meals and wanted their old ones back. Jamie Oliver decided to show the students why the changes were necessary. He asked them to work in the school kitchens, showed them exactly how much fat, salt and sugar went into their fast-food favourites and got them talking about vegetables and healthy options. They started to understand why too much fast food is bad and why vegetables and a balanced diet is better for their health and fitness and also their brains.

Even a decade after the Channel 4 series, many school meals were still full of too much sugar, salt and too many calories. Many schools had banned junk food, but not all schools had made enough positive changes. A new regulation in 2015 for all schools said that every meal had to include at least one portion of vegetables or salad, and a wide variety of fruit and vegetables had to be available for the students. It limited the amount of deep-fried food that was served (not more than twice a week) and also the amount of fruit juice that was served to students.

Nowadays, school dinners are more nutritious than they were 30 years ago. Some old school dinner favourites are missed, though. *Turkey Twizzlers* (a spiral of turkey meat coated in bread-crumbs and deep-fried) were taken off school dinner menus after the Channel 4 series showed how unhealthy they were. A petition with over 27,000 signatures persuaded supermarkets to sell them, but they were not served at school any more.

In 2020 the Manchester United footballer Marcus Rashford asked the British government to promise that all school students from low-income families were guaranteed a meal every day. Schools were closed during the coronavirus lockdowns which meant that children weren't at school, so they weren't having school dinners. At home they weren't getting any dinner either because there was often not enough money to buy food. Rashford was successful and now children from low-income families are provided with meals and activities during school holidays as well as free school meals when they have regular school.



# School lunches – How healthy are they?

## C The right order

Put the events from the history of British school dinners in the right order.

- A Lunch was provided instead of breakfast.
- B Channel 4 and Jamie Oliver worked together.
- C More help was given to children from low-income families.
- D Children had to go to school and a hot meal was provided.
- E School dinners got healthier and junk food was banned.
- F More variation and different desserts were offered.
- G Regulations made for healthy school dinners.
- H Fast food appeared on school dinner menus.
- I Food rationing began.

## D Looking at language

1. Find the nouns in the text to go with these verbs.

Verb	Noun
1. to ration	
2. to vary	
3. to provide	
4. to introduce	
5. to change	
6. to complain	
7. to support	
8. to sign	

2. Find the opposites of these words in the text.

1. hard	
2. expensive	
3. sad	
4. underweight	
5. put on	
6. to buy	

## School lunches – How healthy are they?

---

### E Writing

Choose one of these topics to write about.

#### 1. “Famous people make things happen.”

What do you think of this statement? Do things only improve when someone famous puts their name to a cause? Write an article for your school magazine about where someone famous has helped to improve a situation. Explain the things the person did that a ‘normal’ person wouldn’t have managed. Write about 150 words.

#### 2. “Healthy meals are more expensive.”

Is this statement true? In a group write a menu for a school dinner. Remember you have a very limited budget, but you have to provide something nutritious that your friends will like. Which group can design the best menu for the lowest price?

### A Before you read

1. Students discuss what it is like at their school

2.

1. C, 2. G, 3. A, 4. E, 5. B, 6. I, 7. F, 8. D, 9. H

### C The right order

- |   |   |                                                           |
|---|---|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | D | Children had to go to school and a hot meal was provided. |
| 2 | A | Lunch was provided instead of breakfast.                  |
| 3 | I | Food rationing began.                                     |
| 4 | F | More variation and different desserts were offered.       |
| 5 | H | Fast food appeared on school dinner menus.                |
| 6 | B | Channel 4 and Jamie Oliver worked together.               |
| 7 | E | School dinners got healthier and junk food was banned.    |
| 8 | G | Regulations made for healthy school dinners.              |
| 9 | C | More help was given to children from low-income families. |

### D Looking at language

1.

1. to ration - rationing; 2. to vary - variation; 3. to provide - provision;  
4. to introduce - introduction; 5. to change - change; 6. to complain - complaint;  
7. to support - supporter; 8. to sign - signature

2.

1. hard - simple; 2. expensive - cheap; 3. sad - happy; 4. underweight - obese;  
5. put on- taken off; 6. to buy - to sell

### E Writing

1. The texts the students write will depend on current causes and challenges.

2. Students can look online for menu ideas and check out the price of things in supermarkets.

Buying single items is more expensive than buying in bulk, but it will give them idea of prices.