

# Extra Ingredients Needed To Get The Recipe Right For Free Lunches In Schools.

The Government has announced it will roll out a trial school lunch program in 120 schools in early 2020 providing healthy lunches to schoolchildren.

They must be applauded for this initiative and it's long overdue.

Many countries have well proven healthy school lunch programs.

Growing up "in care" and orphanages in the UK we went to school on a breakfast of porridge and a tablespoon of cod liver oil. This was the real unrefined oil and the aftertaste so strong that cats would follow us. At School we had a cooked lunch of meat and three veg and fruit and semolina for desert.

Thankfully over the past fifty years School lunch standards have improved worldwide and incorporated into law.

**The Government has claimed that it will provide healthy school lunches for New Zealand kids but the "healthy" part of the equation will not happen without the adoption of appropriate standards and monitoring of those standards.**

**It is naïve to believe that implementation of an unregulated school lunch program will solve the problem of kids going to school hungry and our appalling child obesity levels.**

- **Sir Ray Avery.**

Currently New Zealand has no regulations regarding the minimum nutritional requirements for the provision of school lunches and when asked exactly how the school lunch programs would be rolled out the Prime Minister suggested that some schools may want to set up their own kitchens and some schools may like to partner with the local bakery to roll out their school lunch program.

Bakeries don't sell the fruit and vegetables required to round out a balanced healthy diet. The healthiest thing I can get from my bakery is a ham and cheese roll which is full of nitrates, sodium and saturated fat and doesn't contain all the vitamins and minerals for healthy physiological and mental development.

Governmental research has shown that up to 25% of children and adults in New Zealand are suffering from Zinc micronutrient malnutrition which is an essential neurotransmitter precursor producing happy hormones serotonin and dopamine. Recent research has linked Zinc deficiency to ADHD in schoolchildren.

So providing healthy school lunches is not just a case of popping down to the local bakery for a few bread rolls or for schools to set up their own catering kitchens which are massive investments and have a whole raft of food safety issues and have to operate as a licenced food premise.

World Health Organisations have long understood the importance of providing *healthy* nutrition to schoolchildren so they can develop healthy bodies and minds.

We know that around twenty percent of New Zealand school children go to school hungry without breakfast and there are numerous clinical trials that have shown that well fed kids are emotionally well adjusted, less disruptive in the classroom, and learn better and faster.

There is significant scientific evidence that *unhealthy* school lunches contribute to micronutrient malnutrition and obesity in both the short term and long term.

In many cases, unhealthy adult eating patterns can be traced back to the provision of *unhealthy* school lunches, because children learn eating habits from social settings such as school.

**A new study on global obesity rates showed that New Zealand Kids had the second highest rate of child obesity in the OECD.**

Nearly 40% of our kids are overweight or obese and many blame this on the consumption of sugary drinks and confectionary items.

It would be a convenient truth if this were the only cause but it is our kids overall fast food and highly processed food diets, lack of knowledge around good nutrition choices and lack of exercise that underpins our appalling child obesity figures.

In contrast providing *healthy* lunch food options and promoting healthy eating habits in schools has been shown to reduce adolescent obesity by as much as 25 percent.

**So the key message here is that our kids deserve safe, healthy and nutritious school lunches which is why Japan, the UK and USA and many other countries have legal regulatory standards regarding nutritional requirements for school lunches.**

**These are quite prescriptive. For example, limiting the amount of saturated fat and sodium in government-funded school lunches and ensuring these lunches provide one-third of the recommended daily allowances of calories, [protein](#), vitamin A, vitamin C, iron and calcium.**

A holistic view is what would work to ensure the best outcomes for providing school lunches. It would be a good idea for the Government to engage with those who are successfully providing free breakfast and lunch options to schools and asking for their input. Charitable organisations like KidsCan and social enterprises like Eat My Lunch also companies such as Fonterra and Sanitarium.

There has been no “industry” consultation regarding “lessons learnt” and the potential for governmental partnerships.

For the past few months I have been visiting schools handing out five stars rated healthy amigo bars which are a supplemented food regulated by MPI based on the Australian and New Zealand Food Standards which ensures kids get the correct levels of protein and vitamins and minerals.

**What I have learnt is that lunch is just too late for some kids. One school nurse said, “it’s routine for some kids to pass out before lunch because the last time they ate was 4 p.m the previous day.”**

I would urge the government to convene a gathering of all interested parties to come up with a holistic nutrition and exercise program for New Zealand school children and set mandatory standards for school lunches.

The greatest investment we can make for the future of New Zealand is to grow healthy happy kids.

As they say, it takes a whole village to raise a child, and we all need to take ownership of looking after our kids.

**“Without appropriate school lunch standards and ongoing monitoring of standards the well-meaning government and the local bakery may make our children the most obese and malnourished children in the world.”**

- **Sir Ray Avery**

## Some International Examples / Experiences Of School Food Programmes

Many developed countries have had school lunch programs in place for over a hundred years.

In 1906, the British parliament passed an act allowing Local Education Authorities to provide free meals to schoolchildren funded out of local rates.

In 1946 President Harry Truman enacted the United States Nation School Lunch Act into law and in 1966 this became the Child Nutrition act administered by the United States Department of agriculture.

A study done in 2010 of 1,003 middle-school students in [Michigan](#) found that those who ate school lunches were significantly more likely to be obese than those who did not.

The USA 2004 Child Nutrition Act has gotten parents, students and school communities involved in programs to promote healthy eating and physical activities on school campuses. Japan who have a healthy fresh food school lunch program governed by law have the lowest incidence of obesity in the OECD, so the implementation of school lunch standards are a mandatory requirement if we want to provide safe healthy nutritious lunches to our kids.

Government's recognise that they need to be able to stand behind the quality of the school lunches they fund and have set legal standards and processes to make sure this happens. In France, [school lunches are part of the school day](#), not a break from it. Children are served a four-course meal while sitting at a group table with a supervisor who teaches them about nutrition, healthy eating and table manners.

In Italy, [school meals are locally sourced and certified organic](#), with special meals provided for children with food allergies, intolerances and religious restrictions.

School lunch menus are sent home on a weekly basis to help parents avoid overlap of home cooked meals.

In [Brazil, school food is part of a national and comprehensive food strategy](#) that integrates education, agriculture, health and food security while supporting family farming.

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