

# Too few school lunch boxes meet nutritional standards

September 6 2016, by Sophie Freeman

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Credit: University of Leeds

Only a tiny proportion of children's packed lunches are meeting nutritional standards, despite high-profile awareness campaigns, a University of Leeds study has found.

Researchers in the School of Food Science and Nutrition found that just 1.6 per cent of primary [children's](#) packed lunches met the nutritional standards set for their classmates eating in the school canteen.

Less than a fifth (17 per cent) contained any vegetables or salad, while more than half (52 per cent) contained too many sweet snacks.

Lead researcher Dr Charlotte Evans, a nutritional epidemiologist in the University's School of Food and Nutrition, said: "I hope the results of the study are an eye-opener, highlighting that more stringent policies need to be introduced if we want to see real change in the nutritional value of children's packed lunches.

"New policies for schools, [food](#) manufacturers and retailers are needed, which will require strong support from Government and stakeholders if progress is to be made."

The research was commissioned by food brand Flora as a follow up to a 2006 study by the University, which found that only 1.1 per cent of children's packed lunches met national standards for [school food](#) in England.

Today's report illustrates that packed lunches have only improved by 0.5 per cent in 10 years.

Few of the packed lunches met the standards for vitamin A (17 per cent), iron (26 per cent) or zinc (16 per cent), most likely due to the lack of fresh salad and vegetables and un-processed meat or fish.

However, on a more positive note, there has been a considerable reduction in the consumption of sweetened drinks (46 per cent in 2016 vs. 61 per cent in 2006), and 93 per cent now meet [standards](#) for protein.

Sharon Hodgson MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for School Food, said: "The research highlights the need for more action to be taken on food put in children's packed lunches, something which the School Food APPG has recently called for.

"Despite positive moves with regards to the food provided as part of a school meal, food brought in by children in their packed lunches is lagging behind. Therefore we need more action to be taken if we want to see positive changes occur."

Provided by University of Leeds

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