

living-things

Nutrition: value in everyday lunchbox foods

Lesson at a glance

Open with a quick hands-up about everyday lunchbox foods and whether they all do the same job. Teach the six food-group names, then groups sort the printed lunchbox cards under the header cards and record the sort plus one tricky item on the Investigation Journal page. Drive the lunchbox-builder interactive on the IWB so the class packs a mixed lunch and watches group meters and the energy bar, then every pupil designs their own balanced lunch on the same journal page and names where most of the fuel would come from.

Learning objectives

- Sort everyday Irish lunchbox foods into the main food groups
- Design a balanced lunch and explain where most of its energy comes from

Before the bell – prep

Print one full set of food sorting cards plus six header cards per group, and the dual-purpose Investigation Journal page (sort record and lunch-design space). Optionally gather a few clean sealed packs to hold up. Check class allergy notes before any real packaging is handled.

Materials

Item	Qty	Per	Source	Low-cost substitute
food sorting cards (apple, banana, carrot sticks, cherry tomatoes, wholemeal sandwich, brown soda bread roll, plain yogurt, cheese stick, boiled egg, ham slice, hummus pot, cereal bar, crisps, water, milk carton)	1	group	provided printable	write the same food names on sticky notes or scrap card
food-group header cards (Fruit & veg; Bread, cereal & potato; Milk, yogurt & cheese; Meat, fish, eggs, beans & nuts; Treats; Drinks)	1	group	provided printable	six labelled sheets of scrap paper as pile headers
clean sealed lunchbox packaging samples (optional real examples)	6	class	brought from home	use the printed food cards only
Investigation Journal page	1	pupil	provided printable	one sheet of plain paper for recording the sort and the lunch design



Safety watch-point

Cards only—no tasting. If sealed packs are shown, do not open food; wash hands after handling; prefer peanut-free hummus packaging. Check allergy notes before the lesson.

Teaching moves

- **Food groups that fuel us:** Put the six group names on the board before any sorting talk so the class shares one language. Model with the apple card: predict fruit and veg because it grew on a plant, then check the header. When you introduce the protein header, name hummus or tuna beside egg so the group is not only meat. Frame treats as sometimes foods and water as the everyday school drink.
- **Sort the lunchbox:** Give each group a full card set and clear desk space for six piles. Circulate asking ‘What job does this food do?’ and fold quiet pupils in with ‘Do you agree with that pile?’ If milk sparks debate, accept drinks when they can explain and note the dairy link; place hummus with meat, fish, eggs, beans and nuts.
- **Record your sort:** Now have pupils complete the sort-record area of the Investigation Journal page — draw or list foods under each heading and note one tricky card. Celebrate different reasoned choices (for example milk) and agree a class convention before the packing step. Keep the completed sort on the desk as evidence for the design.
- **Pack a balanced lunch:** Drive the lunchbox-builder interactive yourself; pupils call foods, you drag. Frame kcal as fuel for learning and play, not a score—the ~600 kcal mark is a talk guide only. Model one tight pack (sandwich, apple, yogurt, egg, water), then protect about 10 minutes so every pupil designs their own lunch on the journal page and names the main fuel food from the class comparison. Cut a second board build if time slips.
- **What makes a lunch balanced?:** Run a talk using the sorts, the interactive pack and journal designs as evidence. Prompt: which lunch covered more groups; if energy is similar, how else do we judge; why water still belongs when its energy is zero. Keep tone practical—small swaps, not guilt about home lunches.

What it should show

The sort should come out roughly like this: fruit & veg (apple, banana, carrot sticks, cherry tomatoes); bread/cereal/potato (wholemeal sandwich, brown soda bread roll); milk/yogurt/cheese (yogurt, cheese stick); meat/fish/eggs/beans/nuts (egg, ham, hummus); treats (cereal bar, crisps); drinks (water, milk). A successful balanced lunch covers several main groups with water and only a small treat; most energy usually sits in the sandwich or other bread item, not the fruit or water. Odd energy talk often means pupils treated the highest bar as ‘best’ rather than naming the main fuel food.



Misconceptions & interventions

- **‘All drinks are the same’ or milk only fits one place, so pupils dump every drink together without reasoning.** — Hold up the milk carton card beside water and ask what job each does. Accept drinks if they explain, and note milk also links to the dairy group against the interactive meters.
- **‘Treats are bad / forbidden’ or a healthy lunch means zero treats and the lowest energy.** — Point to the Treats header as a small sometimes group. Use the board pack to show balance is mix of groups plus enough fuel for afternoon lessons, not a calorie score or a ban.
- **‘Highest energy means the best lunch’—pupils chase the energy bar instead of group spread.** — Swap sandwich for crisps on the interactive and ask which groups light up and where the fuel sits. Re-voice: we compare where fuel comes from; group mix still matters for a school day.

Differentiation

Emerging	Developing	Proficient
• Start with fruit & veg versus treats headers only, then add the other four headers one at a time. • Sit at the teacher table with a partly sorted set and ask them to place two named cards with a reason.	• Require one spoken reason for each placement during the sort, and one ‘tricky card’ note on the journal. • On the lunch design, prompt: name the groups covered and which single food would give most of the energy.	• Justify every card in one sentence and lead the group’s milk or hummus debate with evidence. • Critique two journal lunches: same rough energy, which covers more groups, and suggest one swap without adding new foods off the shelf.

Cross-curricular hook

Link to SPHE healthy-living and the HSE Healthy Food for Life pyramid shelves pupils may already recognise.