FACT SHEET ON
DIET AND NUTRITION

[See linked sheets on obesity and physical activity]

KEY FACTS

- The School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme (SFVS) provides nearly two million four to six year old children in 16,000 local education authority (LEA) maintained infant, primary and special schools throughout England with a free piece of fruit or vegetable every school day.

- Eating at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables a day could lead to an estimated reduction of up to 20 per cent in overall deaths from chronic diseases, such as heart disease, stroke, and cancer.

- Breastfed infants are 5 times less likely to be admitted to hospital with infections, such as gastroenteritis or respiratory infections, during their first year of life and are less likely to become obese in later childhood. Mothers who breastfeed are less likely to develop pre-menopausal breast cancer and are more likely to return to their pre-pregnancy weight.

- The evidence suggests that television advertising of food and drink has a direct impact of about 2% on children’s food preferences and choices, and probably a much larger indirect impact.
Salt intakes in the UK are around 9.5g per person per day. This is considerably higher than the 6g recommended by the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition. High salt intake is associated with high blood pressure; and people with high blood pressure are three times more likely to develop heart disease and strokes and twice as likely to die from these diseases than those with normal levels.

Processed foods contribute around 75% of salt to the UK diet.

Saturated fat intakes exceed public health recommendations of 11% food energy (Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy). Excess intakes of saturated fat is associated with raised blood cholesterol levels and with coronary heart disease risk.
Inequalities exist

- There is evidence of higher fruit and vegetable consumption in more affluent social groups with 41% of AB’s claiming they had eaten at least five portions yesterday, compared to 30% of C1C2’s and only 24% of DE’s (FSA Consumer Attitudes Survey 2005).

- The interim Infant Feeding Survey results 2005 reported an increase in the incidence of breastfeeding in England and Wales from 71% in 2000 to 77% in 2005.

- Those who are least likely to choose to breastfeed, are young, less well educated women and women from disadvantaged groups.

- Breastfeeding rates for 2005 have increased since 2000 among women from all socio-economic groupings. The largest increase is reported among women who have never worked 54% to 67%, and routine and manual workers 60% to 65%. Higher socio-economic groupings also saw an increase with managerial and professional occupations from 86% to 89%, and intermediate occupations from 75% to 79%.

WHAT WE HAVE DONE SINCE CHOOSING HEALTH

- There has been an increased focus on food in schools with the publication of the new standards for school food, development of new training qualifications for catering staff and establishing the School Food Trust. The Government has committed approaching £500 million between 2005 and 2011 to support the transformation of school food across the school day.

- In January 2006 we launched our 5 A DAY Young Independents campaign targeting young people between the ages of 16 to 24 who have left home and young mums and mums of young independents. The campaign aimed to encourage young people to ‘just eat more’ of a variety of fruit and veg every day through the promotion of the Fuel for Living recipe guide.

- We are working with FSA and industry to reduce the levels of salt in processed foods. Significant progress has been made and further commitments have now been received from 70 organisations across all sectors of the industry. In March 2006 the FSA published voluntary salt reduction targets covering 85 categories of processed foods that will help in reaching the average intake target of 6g per day by 2010.

- In March 2006, following extensive consumer research and consultation with stakeholders, the Food Standards Agency recommended an approach for front of pack labelling that uses traffic light colours to show at a glance whether the level of fat, saturated fat, salt and sugar in foods are high, medium or low.

- Sainsbury’s, Waitrose and Co-op are already using the Agency’s recommended approach and ASDA has also announced that it intends to use multiple traffic lights. McCains and Covent Garden Soup are applying our approach to their product range from September.

- We have implemented and evaluated Phase 1 of Healthy Start, a scheme that provides vouchers for children in low-income families that can be exchanged for fruit and vegetables as well as milk or infant formula.

- Ofcom concluded a consultation in June 2006 on options for restricting television advertising of food and drink products to children. It is currently considering responses and will make recommendations for further action in the autumn.

- We have established the Food and Drink Advertising and Promotion Forum in July 2005 made up of representatives from the advertising, food manufacturing and retailing bodies, academics and health and consumer organisations. The Forum is looking at how to strengthen rules for advertising in non-broadcast media including magazines and comics, cinema advertising, internet pop-ups, billboards, in-store promotions, packaging of foods and sponsorship.
WHERE WE ARE HEADING

- We are considering how our universal programmes such as the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme and Healthy Start can support targeted interventions for children who are overweight or obese.

- The School Food Trust is rolling out a series of events to help school cooks understand and implement the new school food standards.

- We are planning to extend the criteria for the 5 A DAY logo to be to processed foods that contain a portion of fruit or vegetables to support consumers in reaching their 5 A DAY. Guidance on applying the logo to children’s foods will be published by mid 2007.

- The FSA is also leading on work with stakeholders, including the food industry, to identify ways to reduce the levels of saturated fat in the diet and address the current energy imbalance through product reformulation and consideration of portion sizes.

- The FSA will continue to encourage as many retailers and manufacturers as possible to follow its signpost labelling recommendations.

- Ofcom will announce the outcome of its consultation in the autumn, with new scheduling rules coming into effect in January 2007. New Committee on Advertising Practice (CAP) rules on content will follow shortly afterwards and will mirror, where possible, Ofcom’s proposals.

- We are monitoring any change in the nature and balance of food advertising and promotion to children and will review the position in 2007. If we do not see significant progress as a result of voluntary action by 2007, then we will consider whether or not we need to take further action using new or existing legislation.

WE WILL HAVE DELIVERED IF

- We can establish good eating habits early in childhood as the evidence suggest this will have long-term impact on future diet, behaviour, health and wellbeing.

- We can translate public awareness of the 5 A DAY message into action. In 2005, only 30% of those questioned reported eating 5 portions a day, compared to 67% who were aware of 5 A DAY message (The FSA Consumer Attitudes Survey 2005). Simplifying messages on portion sizes and extending the 5 A DAY criteria to processed foods will assist in this process.

- All sectors within the food industry continue to work together with government to help consumers choose a healthy, balanced diet through:
  - increased availability of products with reduced levels of saturated fat, improved energy values (such as through improved total fat and/or sugars contents), and sensible portion sizes
  - more emphasis on the availability of fresh, healthier foods rather than processed foods relatively high in salt, fat and sugar, and
  - the use of front of pack nutritional signpost labelling which is shown to help consumers to make healthier choices at a glance in the shopping environment

- Breastfeeding rates increase by 2% a year and an increase in initiation of breastfeeding rates among women from lower socio-economic groups.

- We see a marked shift in the nature and balance of food and drink advertising and promotion to children across both broadcast and non-broadcast media that better reflects a healthy, balanced diet.