

What we eat then and now

Here are typical rations for a child in 1942. Keep a food diary for a week – write down everything you eat and drink. Compare it with a child's rations during WW2 using a table like the one below.

	WWII weekly rations	What I eat in a week
sugar	8oz (225g)/20 tablespoons	
jam/honey	1lb/two months (500g)	
meat & sausages	6p worth (about 1lb/500g) /3–4 servings	
bacon/ham	4oz (250g)/1–2 servings	
bread & cake	24oz (1kg) of bread (can take 8oz (225g) as flour)	
fat	6oz (150g)/15 pats of butter/margarine/lard/oil	
milk	3 pints	
cheese	2oz (50g)/2 slices	
eggs	1 if available or 1 packet dried egg/month	
tea	2oz (about 15 tea bags)	
sweets & chocolate/cocoa	12oz/month/1 candy bar	
vegetables	not rationed, only seasonal	
offal (stomach/ feet/liver)	not rationed if available	
fruit	3–4 pieces if available	
chicken	not rationed if available	
fish	not rationed if available	

Teacher's sheet

Based on pages 38 to 41 of Children in the Second World War

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Age range

- Years 3/4 (SP4/5).
- Years 5/6 (SP6/7).

Resources

Copies of the worksheet. Foods on the sheet, showing portion sizes. Workbook or paper for keeping a diary.

Using the worksheet

You may like to begin by bringing in a typical child's ration of food for one week. Students may be surprised to see how little 2oz of cheese is, for example. You may also like to bring in a few chocolate bars so that students can read the information on the package and see that just one of today's bars is about one month's ration.

Remind the students that rations changed depending on what was available, so this is only an example. Although foods like chicken and offal were not rationed, this did not mean that they were eaten every day. In fact, these foods were not often available. So, children could only expect to eat meat a couple of times each week. Vegetables were widely available but were only what could be grown at that time of year. So, for example, in winter, people would have only had potatoes, carrots, parsnips, cabbage, etc. Fruit was mostly reserved for children, although preserves were available and in summer people could pick things like blackberries and elderberries. Children also received a half-pint of full-fat milk a day, although this was often at school and was for drinking, not use in cooking.

It may not be possible for students to weigh out everything they eat, so they can instead count servings. Older students may want to assign estimated weights to each food. For example, a loaf of bread weighs about 1lb; a typical serving of meat is about 6oz/200g; a slice of luncheon meat for a sandwich weighs about 50g; a pat of butter on a slice of bread is about 10g; a slice of cheese is about 25g; a tablespoon of sugar is about 20g; a sausage is about 100g–200g of meat. Even though these are only estimates, students should be able to quickly see that they eat a lot more meat, sugar and cheese than a child ate during rationing.

Younger students

Let the students keep a food diary of everything they eat. You may like to assign a weight to typical foods, such as: each serving of meat could count as 150g. Students can then keep track of the number of servings and add up the number of servings of meat to see how much they ate in comparison to a child during rationing. Students could also see that they eat a lot of foods, such as fizzy drinks, crisps, bananas and pizza, that were not available at all during rationing.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Compare portion sizes of foods.
- Use basic maths to determine number of servings of foods eaten.
- Keep track of the foods they eat in a week.
- Compare foods eaten today with foods eaten during wartime.

Older students

If the students have scales at home they could measure out what they eat, otherwise they can estimate the weights of the foods they eat or use the number of servings, as above. Students should also be encouraged to think about what is in foods like pizza, for example. Two slices of pizza might use up the cheese and meat ration for the week.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Use basic maths to determine portion sizes and number of servings of foods eaten.
- Keep track of the foods they eat in a week.
- Understand how much more food of certain foods they eat today compared to during WWII.
- Compare foods eaten today with foods eaten during wartime.