

# Eat Better Start Better

## Voluntary Food and Drink Guidelines for Early Years Settings in England – A Practical Guide



**CHILDREN'S  
FOOD TRUST**  
Eat Better Do Better

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### Why is a healthy, balanced and nutritious diet essential for young children?

A healthy, balanced diet and regular physical activity are essential for children's health and well-being. Research confirms that healthy eating habits in the years before school are very important because they influence growth, development and academic achievement in later life.

A recent review of health inequalities by Marmot<sup>7</sup> identifies the early years as a crucial time to intervene to reduce health inequalities across the life course. Quality of early years experiences can have a fundamental impact on all aspects of human development, physically, emotionally and intellectually.

Encouraging breastfeeding and ensuring that children eat well in their early years are key to ensuring that they achieve their potential, and help prevent them becoming overweight and obese. This approach also helps to reduce the risk of serious diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, stroke and cancers in later life.

Good nutrition is important for children aged under five to:

- ensure that they get the right amount of energy (calories) and nutrients needed while they are growing rapidly
- ensure that they do not consume too much energy (calories), which may lead to children becoming overweight or obese
- encourage them to eat a wide variety of foods and develop good dietary habits to take with them into later childhood and beyond.

### What is the current health status of young children in England?

- Over a fifth of children are either overweight or obese by the time they join reception class in primary school (their final year in the EYFS).
- Type II diabetes, which usually appears in adulthood, is starting to be seen among some overweight children.
- Dental health is poor in many young children.
- Cases of rickets are appearing more frequently.
- More than one in four young children in the UK may be at risk of iron deficiency, which is linked to slower intellectual development and poor behaviour in the longer term.

In recent years, changes in children's diets have affected their nutrient intakes with some children eating foods that are low in energy, iron, zinc and vitamin A, and high in saturated fat, sugar and salt. In addition, many young children also eat fewer than the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables each day.

### What is a healthy, balanced, nutritious diet for children aged one to five years?

A healthy balanced diet for children aged one to five years is based on the four food groups listed below, which provide a range of essential nutrients that children need to grow and develop.

#### Starchy foods

#### Fruit and vegetables

#### Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein

#### Milk and dairy foods

One of the basic principles of healthy eating is variety, as eating a wider range of different foods provides a better balance of nutrients. Planning meals and snacks to include a variety of food and drinks from these four food groups each day will provide children with the good balance of nutrients they need.

### Foods and drinks high in fat, sugar (and/or salt)

Young children need fat in their diet to ensure they get enough energy. However, if they eat too much fat, they may consume more energy (calories) than they need, and may gain excess weight. The *type* of fat that children eat is also important, and the amount of saturated fat, found in foods such as meat and meat products, butter, cakes and biscuits, should be limited.

The wider the variety of food and drinks eaten, the better the balance of nutrients provided.

It is also important that children do not eat too much sugar and salt. Eating sugary food and drinks too often can lead to tooth decay and provide 'empty calories' which fill children up but do not provide other essential nutrients. Too much salt can give children a taste for salty foods, and eating a diet high in salt can cause serious health conditions in later life.

To establish good eating habits, make sure the food and drink you provide for children is not high in saturated fat, sugar and salt. Limiting or avoiding some foods, ingredients and cooking practices will help to ensure that an appropriate amount of fat, sugar and salt is provided for children, and will also help encourage diversity in children's diets. Foods, ingredients and cooking practices to limit or avoid are highlighted in the food and drink guidelines.

Children are unlikely to take in more energy than they need if they are offered a range of healthy meals and snacks that meet the food and drink guidelines. Conversely, foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt are unlikely to provide the balance of energy and nutrients that young children need and including them in the diets of very young children may contribute to them becoming overweight and having a poor nutrient intake.

## How does a healthy, balanced diet for children aged one to five years differ from that needed by older children and adults?

Healthy eating advice for children aged five and over and for adults is illustrated by the eatwell plate, which shows the types of food to eat, and in what proportions, for a well balanced and healthy diet.

Young children are growing quickly and have high energy and nutrient requirements for their size. They also eat smaller amounts than older children and adults, so it is important for them to eat regular meals and snacks that contain sufficient energy and nutrients for their needs. A low-fat, high fibre diet based on the proportions set out by the eatwell plate is therefore not appropriate for young children, particularly children aged under two years, as it may not provide enough energy, fat, iron or zinc, and is too high in fibre.

Between the ages of two and five years, children should gradually move towards the diet recommended for older children and adults, with less energy provided from fat, and more fibre.



Young children are growing quickly and have high energy and nutrient requirements for their size.

## What about food and drink for children from birth up to 12 months old?

In the first 12 months of life, babies' nutritional requirements differ from those of children aged over one year. Detailed guidance on how to provide food and drink for this age group is not included within this guide.

For more information on providing healthy food and drink to children from birth up to 12 months refer to the Department of Health's 'Birth to Five',<sup>18</sup> the resources developed by the Start4Life campaign,<sup>19</sup> or the Caroline Walker Trust practical guide 'Eating Well in the First Year of Life'.

## Breastfeeding

Encouraging breastfeeding is a priority.

Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for around the first six months of a baby's life and, after that, giving breast milk alongside solid food will help them to continue to grow and develop. Breastfeeding also has significant short and long term benefits for both mothers and their babies. It helps to protect children from gastroenteritis, ear and respiratory infections, eczema, asthma, diabetes and obesity in later life.

Mothers who return to work but wish to continue to breastfeed should be encouraged and enabled to do so. Expressed breast milk provided for babies in early years settings should be labelled, stored safely and used only for that child.

Advice on expressing and storing breast milk can be obtained from a health visitor or online from NHS choices or the Association of Breastfeeding Mothers.

## Healthy Start

As a precaution, the Department of Health recommends that from six months to five years of age, children should be given a vitamin supplement containing vitamins A, C and D unless they are drinking 500ml of infant formula a day or are eating a varied diet with a wide range of foods to provide an adequate intake of vitamins and minerals.

In 2006, the Healthy Start Scheme replaced the Welfare Food Scheme. Families receiving Healthy Start vouchers can use them to purchase plain cows' milk, fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables, or infant formula suitable from birth. The scheme also provides free Healthy Start vitamin supplements for pregnant women and women with a child aged under 12 months. Children receiving Healthy Start vouchers qualify for free children's vitamin drops containing vitamins A, C and D from aged six months until their fourth birthday.

The scheme aims to engage with parents from early pregnancy to ensure that they are provided with information on healthy eating and the appropriate use of vitamin supplements for children. It is the responsibility of parents to administer these supplements. Early years settings can, however, encourage parents who are eligible, to apply for vouchers to help pay for food provided at home.

## Nursery Milk Scheme

The Nursery Milk Scheme enables registered early years settings to claim reimbursement for the cost of a third of a pint (189 ml) or, where supplied in 200ml containers only, with 200ml of milk for each child aged under five years who attends for two or more hours a day. For more information, visit the Nursery Milk Scheme website.

## Physical activity

Regular physical activity during the early years provides immediate and long-term benefits for physical and psychological well-being. Physical activity has very low risks for most under fives, whereas the risk that childhood inactivity will lead to poor health in later life is high. All children aged under five years should minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary (being restrained or sitting) for extended periods (except time spent sleeping).

Physical activity includes all forms of activity, such as walking, active play and active games. Children are more likely to maintain a healthy weight if they are physically active for at least 180 minutes (three hours) each day, as recommended for children aged under five years in the UK.

All children under five should minimise time spent being sedentary.



# Summary of the four food groups and the nutrients they provide

The table below gives an overview of the four food groups.

Food groups	Examples of food included	Main nutrients provide	Recommended servings
<b>Starchy foods</b>	Bread, potatoes and sweet potatoes, starchy root vegetables, pasta, noodles, rice, other grains, breakfast cereal	Carbohydrate, fibre, B vitamins and iron	Four portions each day Provide a portion as part of each meal (breakfast, lunch and tea) and provide as part of at least one snack each day
<b>Fruit and vegetables</b>	Fresh, frozen, canned, dried and juiced fruit and vegetables, and pulses	Carotenes (a form of vitamin A), vitamin C, zinc, iron, and fibre	Five portions each day Provide a portion as part of each main meal (breakfast, lunch and tea) and with some snacks
<b>Meat, fish, eggs, beans and non-dairy sources of protei</b>	Meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, eggs, meat alternatives, pulses, nuts*	Protein, iron, zinc, omega 3 fatty acids, vitamins A and D	Two portions each day Provide a portion as part of lunch and tea (Two to three portions for vegetarian children)
<b>Milk and dairy foods</b>	Milk, cheese, yoghurt, fromage frais, custard, puddings made from milk	Protein, calcium, and vitamin A	Three portions each day provided as part of meals, snacks and drinks

\* Be allergy aware – information about food allergies and developing an allergy plan is available from [www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org)

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## At a glance: food and drink guidelines for each meal and snack

This section lists the food and drink guidelines included in section 3, for each meal and snack. The 'At a glance' information can be used to check the food and drink guidelines are met for breakfast, lunch, tea and snacks provided in your setting.

It is important that the food and drink provided for children is balanced across each day.

The food and drink guidelines divide energy and nutritional requirements across meals and snacks provided during full day care in the following proportions:

- breakfast 20%
- mid-morning snack 10%
- lunch 30%
- mid-afternoon snack 10%
- tea 20%.

This leaves 10% for an additional drink or drink and snack at home in evening.

### Balancing lunch and tea

Meals provided to children can vary between different early years settings, with some serving children a main meal at lunchtime and a light meal at teatime, and others providing a light meal at lunchtime and a main meal at teatime. The guidelines for main and light meals are the same, and the difference is the amount of energy provided; main meals provide about 30% of energy and light meals provide about 20% of energy. The amount of energy provided can be varied by the type and overall amounts of food provided at the meal.

The above proportions are based on the assumption that lunch is a main meal and tea is a light meal. Where settings provide tea as a main meal and lunch as a light meal, these proportions should be reversed.



## Breakfast at a glance

<b>Menu planning advice</b>	Breakfast is an important meal for young children. Settings should liaise with parents to make sure that children always eat breakfast, whether at home or when they arrive at the setting.
<b>Food Group</b>	<b>Food and drink guidelines</b>
<b>Starchy foods</b>	<p>Provide a portion of starchy food as part of breakfast each day.</p> <p>Provide at least three different varieties of starchy food across breakfasts each week.</p> <p>Provide a variety of wholegrain and white starchy foods as part of breakfast each week.</p> <p>It is good practice to provide wholegrain starchy foods for at least one breakfast each week.</p> <p>Choose breakfast cereals with low or medium sugar content. Avoid cereals high in sugar such as sugar-coated or chocolate-flavoured cereals.</p> <p>Choose bread and bread products with a low salt content where possible.</p>
<b>Fruit and vegetables</b>	<p>Provide a portion of fruit or vegetables at breakfast each day.</p> <p>If you offer fruit juice at breakfast, this should be unsweetened and diluted (half juice and half water).</p>
<b>Meat, fish, eggs, beans and non-dairy sources of protein</b>	Food from this group provides a useful source of iron and zinc and can be provided as part of breakfast.
<b>Milk and dairy foods</b>	Children should have three portions of milk and dairy foods each day (including those provided at home); one of these can be provided as part of breakfast.
<b>Drinks</b>	<p>Children must have access to fresh drinking water.</p> <p>If you offer fruit juice at breakfast, this should be unsweetened and diluted (half juice and half water).</p>

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**Examples of breakfasts meeting the food and drink guidelines using average portion sizes for children aged one to five years**



Cornflakes (25g) with whole milk (100ml) and raisins (25g) with half a toasted crumpet (20g) and spread (4g) and a cup of water (100ml).



A slice of malt loaf (35g) and spread (4g) and a plain full-fat yoghurt (60g) with a cup of diluted apple juice (100ml).



Wheat biscuits (25g) and whole milk (100ml) with half a toasted teacake (35g) and spread (4g) and mixed berries (40g) with a cup of water (100ml).



A hardboiled egg (50g) and wholemeal bread (25g) with spread (4g) with quarter of a pear (40g) and a cup of whole milk (100ml).



Rice crispies (25g) with whole milk (100ml) and dried apricots (25g) and half a banana (40g) with a cup of water (100ml).

## Mid-morning and mid-afternoon snacks at a glance

<b>Menu planning advice</b>	<p>Plan menus for snacks to ensure that they are varied across the week and that the food provision across the day is balanced.</p> <p>Avoid sweet foods such as cakes, biscuits and confectionery between meals.</p>
<b>Food Group</b>	<b>Food and drink guidelines</b>
<b>Starchy foods</b>	<p>Provide a starchy food as part of at least one snack each day.</p> <p>Provide at least three different varieties of starchy food across snacks each week.</p> <p>Choose bread and bread products with a low salt content where possible.</p>
<b>Fruit and vegetable</b>	<p>Provide fruit or vegetables as part of some snacks.</p> <p>Provide a variety of fruit and vegetables across the day, and each week.</p> <p>Dried fruit should not be provided as part of snacks.</p>
<b>Meat, fish, eggs, beans and non-dairy sources of protein</b>	<p>Foods from this group provide a useful source of iron and zinc and can be provided as part of snacks once or twice each week.</p>
<b>Milk and dairy foods</b>	<p>Children should have three portions of milk and dairy foods each day (including those provided at home); a portion of milk or dairy food can be provided at snack time.</p>
<b>Drinks</b>	<p>Children must have access to fresh drinking water.</p> <p>Water and milk are the only drinks that should be provided between meals and as part of snacks.</p>

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**Examples of snacks meeting the food and drink guidelines using average portion sizes for children aged one to five years**



Sugar snap peas (40g) and houmous (40g) with a cup of water (100ml).



Peach (40g) and full fat fromage frais (60g) with 2 rice cakes (16g) and a cup of water (100ml).



Tomato (40g) and full fat mozzarella cheese (17g) with low salt breadsticks (7g) and a cup of whole milk (100ml).



Melon (40g) and half a toasted muffin (30g) with spread (4g) and a cup of water (100ml).



Banana (40g) and rice cakes (16g) with a cup of water (100ml).

## Lunch at a glance

For guidance about food and drinks brought in from home and packed lunches, see pages 52–53.

<b>Menu planning advice</b>	Each lunch should include a main course and a dessert.
<b>Food Group</b>	<b>Food and drink guidelines</b>
<b>Starchy foods</b>	<p>Provide a portion of starchy food as part of each lunch. Provide at least three different starchy foods as part of lunches each week.</p> <p>Provide a variety of wholegrain and white starchy foods each week.</p> <p>It is good practice to provide wholegrain starchy foods for at least one lunch each week.</p> <p>Limit starchy foods which have been fried to once a week at lunch.</p> <p>Limit canned pasta in sauce.</p> <p>Avoid flavoured dried rice, pasta and noodle products.</p>
<b>Fruit and vegetables</b>	<p>Provide a portion of fruit and/or vegetables as part of lunch every day.</p> <p>Provide a variety of fruit and vegetables across the week at lunchtime.</p> <p>Check product labels to choose canned vegetables and pulses without added salt and sugar, fruit canned in juice not syrup, and reduced salt and sugar baked beans. Baked beans can count as a vegetable only once during each week.</p> <p>If you offer fruit juice at lunch, this should be unsweetened and diluted (half juice and half water).</p>
<b>Meat, fish, eggs, beans and non-dairy sources of protein</b>	<p>Provide a portion of meat, fish, meat alternative, eggs or pulses as part of lunch each day.</p> <p>Provide a variety of foods from this group as part of lunch across the week.</p> <p>It is good practice to provide a portion each of red meat, poultry, fish and meat alternatives or pulses each week as part of lunch.</p> <p>It is good practice to provide vegetarian or vegan children with a variety of meat alternatives, pulses and nuts* each week as part of lunch.</p> <p>Provide one lunch for all children each week which uses a meat alternative or pulses as the protein source.</p> <p>Provide a portion of oily fish at least once every three weeks; this can be provided as part of lunch or tea.</p> <p>Limit the provision of meat products, fish products and products made from meat alternatives to once a week for each of the three types.</p>
<b>Milk and dairy <sup>food</sup></b>	Children should have three portions of milk and dairy food each day (including those provided at home); one portion of milk or a dairy food and/or a milk-based pudding can be provided as part of lunch.
<b>Drinks</b>	<p>Children must have access to fresh drinking water.</p> <p>If fruit juice is provided as part of lunch, this should be unsweetened and diluted (half juice and half water).</p>

\* Be allergy aware – information about food allergies and developing an allergy plan is available from [www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org)

**Example of lunches meeting the food and drink guidelines using average portion sizes for children aged one to five years**



**Main course:** Beef bolognaise (110g) with white spaghetti (90g).  
**Drink:** Glass of water (100ml).



**Dessert:** Carrot cake (50g).  
**Drink:** Glass of water (100ml).



**Main course:** Chickpea and vegetable curry (120g) with brown rice (90g).  
**Drink:** Glass of water (100ml).



**Dessert:** Raspberry purée (40g) and fromage frais (60g).  
**Drink:** Glass of water (100ml).



**Main course:** Salmon and broccoli pasta (200g) with sweetcorn (40g).  
**Drink:** Glass of diluted orange juice (100ml, half juice and half water).



**Dessert:** Eve's pudding and custard (60g).  
**Drink:** Glass of diluted orange juice (100ml, half juice and half water).

For more examples of lunches meeting the food and drink guidelines, see the example menus and recipes on the Children's Food Trust website.<sup>36</sup>

## Tea at a glance

For guidance about food and drinks brought in from home and packed lunches, see pages 52–53.

<b>Menu planning advice</b>	Each tea should include a main course and a dessert.
<b>Food Group</b>	<b>Food and drink guidelines</b>
<b>Starchy foods</b>	<p>Provide a portion of starchy food as part of teas each week. Provide at least three different starchy foods as part of teas each week.</p> <p>Provide a variety of wholegrain and white starchy foods each week.</p> <p>It is good practice to provide wholegrain starchy foods for at least one tea each week.</p> <p>Limit starchy foods which have been fried to once a week at tea.</p> <p>Limit canned pasta in sauce.</p> <p>Avoid flavoured dried rice, pasta and noodle products.</p>
<b>Fruit and vegetables</b>	<p>Provide a portion of fruit and/or vegetables as part of tea every day.</p> <p>Provide a variety of fruit and vegetables across the week at teatime.</p> <p>Check product labels to choose canned vegetables and pulses without added salt and sugar, fruit canned in juice not syrup, and reduced salt and sugar baked beans. Baked beans can count as a vegetable only once during each week.</p> <p>If you offer fruit juice at tea, this should be unsweetened and diluted (half juice and half water).</p>
<b>Meat, fish, eggs, beans and non-dairy sources of protein</b>	<p>Provide a portion of meat, fish, meat alternative, eggs or pulses as part of tea each day.</p> <p>Provide a variety of foods from this group as part of tea across the week.</p> <p>It is good practice to provide a portion each of red meat, poultry, fish and meat alternatives or pulses each week as part of tea.</p> <p>It is good practice to provide vegetarian or vegan children with a variety of meat alternatives, pulses and nuts* each week as part of tea.</p> <p>Provide one tea for all children each week which uses a meat alternative or pulses as the protein source.</p> <p>Provide a portion of oily fish at least once every three weeks; this can be provided as part of lunch or tea.</p> <p>Limit the provision of meat products, fish products and products made from meat alternatives to once a week for each of the three types.</p>
<b>Milk and dairy <sup>food</sup></b>	Children should have three portions of milk and dairy food each day (including those provided at home); one portion of milk or a dairy food and/or a milk-based pudding can be provided as part of tea.
<b>Drinks</b>	<p>Children must have access to fresh drinking water.</p> <p>If fruit juice is provided as part of tea, this should be unsweetened and diluted (half juice and half water).</p>

\* Be allergy aware – information about food allergies and developing an allergy plan is available from [www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org)

**Example of teas meeting the food and drink guidelines using average portion sizes for children aged one to five years**



**Main course:** Chicken and vegetable couscous salad (150g).

**Drink:** Glass of water (100ml).



**Dessert:** Rice pudding (75g) with sultanas (25g).

**Drink:** Glass of water (100ml).



**Main course:** Savoury omelette (70g) with potato salad (90g) and cucumber sticks (40g).

**Drink:** Glass of water (100ml).



**Dessert:** Crunchy summer crumble (60g) with yoghurt (60g).

**Drink:** Glass of water (100ml).



**Main course:** Tuna and sweetcorn wholemeal pasta (150g) with red pepper sticks (40g).

**Drink:** Glass of water (100ml).



**Dessert:** Blueberry muffin (50g).

**Drink:** Glass of water (100ml).

For more examples of teas meeting the food and drink guidelines, see the example menus and recipes on the Children's Food Trust website.<sup>36</sup>

in discussions around the food you provide. Here are some examples of how you can do this:

- provide information for parents and carers

# Guidelines for drinks



Children must have access to drinking water throughout the day and be encouraged to help themselves to water.

Water and milk are the only drinks that should be provided between meals and with snacks as they do not damage teeth or increase children's risk of dental decay.

## Why and how to provide drinks

- ✚ Children must have access to drinking water throughout the day and be encouraged to help themselves to water.
- ✚ Children need six to eight drinks (each of 100–150 ml) each day to make sure they get enough fluid.
- ✚ Children may need more drinks in hot weather or after extra physical activity as they can dehydrate quite quickly.
- ✚ Offer children their drinks in open cups. If using a lidded cup, it should be a free-flow cup without a valve, to encourage children to sip rather than suck, as this is better for their teeth.

## Guidelines for drink provision

- ✚ Water and milk are the only drinks that should be provided between meals and with snacks as they do not damage teeth or increase children's risk of dental decay.
- ✚ Fruit juice (including fruit juice from concentrate) provides nutrients such as vitamin C, but it also contains large amounts of fruit sugar (fructose), and is acidic. Fruit sugar and acid can cause tooth decay in children. Fruit juice should be provided only at meal times (not with snacks) and should be diluted (half juice and half water).
- ✚ Avoid fruit juice drinks – these are not the same as fruit juice. Products labelled as fruit juice drinks generally contain only a small proportion of fruit juice with water and added sugar, and provide little nutritional value. Check the ingredient list on product labels and avoid products containing added sugar.
- ✚ Avoid all soft drinks such as squash, fizzy drinks, energy drinks and flavoured water, even if they are labelled 'sugar-free', 'no-added-sugar' or 'reduced sugar'. These drinks can contribute to tooth decay and provide little nutritional value.
- ✚ Avoid tea, coffee, cola and other drinks or foods with added caffeine or other stimulants. These are not recommended for young children, as caffeine is a stimulant which can disturb children's sleep, behaviour and concentration. Tea and coffee also contain tannins which can interfere with a child's ability to absorb iron.
- ✚ Alcohol should never be given to children under five years old. It is illegal in the UK to give an alcoholic drink to a child under five.

### REMEMBER

- Ensure children have access to drinking water throughout the day.
- Offer only water or milk as drinks between meals.
- Offer fruit juice at meal times only, and dilute it (half juice and half water).
- Avoid fruit juice drinks, squash, fizzy drinks, flavoured water and drinks containing added caffeine or other stimulants.

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# Encouraging fussy eaters to eat well

Young children can be fussy about what they eat, or how they eat. Fussy eating and fear of new foods (food neophobia) are part of development and affect between 10% and 20% of children under five.<sup>41</sup> Fear of new foods in children typically starts between 18 months and two years old and it is thought to be a natural behaviour. A child who appears to be fussy about their food but is growing well is probably eating a sufficient balance of foods and getting enough energy and nutrients. Severe selective eating is rare and generally starts from early feeding difficulties or significant health problems.

Ashby Nursery uses small taster portions of different foods at snack time to encourage children to try new foods.

## Simple strategies to manage fussy eating

Fussy eating and fear of new foods can both be helped using similar techniques. If a family is worried about their child's food intake, acknowledge their concerns and make a plan with them to encourage their child to eat well. It is important that the approach is consistent and essential that all those involved at mealtimes agree and follow the same strategies.

### Modelling

- Seat fussy eaters with good eaters at mealtimes – this is very powerful and it has been shown that children will adopt the food preferences of their peers if they eat together regularly.
- Encourage staff to eat with children where possible, and talk enthusiastically about the taste and texture of the food both at meal times and at other opportunities.

### Exposure

- Give children regular and repeated chances to taste new foods, as this increases their liking for and eating of new foods. The child must actually taste the food to change their preferences, and it can take as many as 10 to 15 tastings before they accept it.<sup>42</sup>
- If children are resistant to trying new foods, offer them small tastes and make sure the child maintains control of the situation. For example, you should give them the opportunity to spit out the food into a tissue if they really do not like it.

### Rewards

- Praise children for trying new foods.
- Favourite foods should not be used as a reward to encourage children to eat foods they do not like. Foods used in this way simply become even more valued, and it is generally recommended that food should never be used as a reward or punishment. However, small stickers or other non-food items as rewards for trying food may increase a child's liking and consumption of food they say they do not like.

### 'Pressure to eat'

- Never force children to finish everything on their plate. Children who are made to eat everything they are served learn to dislike the foods they are pressured to eat, and these aversions may last into adulthood.
- Give children small servings at first, with the opportunity to have second helpings if they finish the first serving, as they may find larger portions off-putting.



## Food brought in from home

Include guidance on food brought in from home within your food policy to help parents choose appropriate food and drinks for their children.

In your setting, children may be required to bring their own meals and/or snacks to eat. Alternatively, you may have some families who want to supply their own meals and snacks for their children.

Include guidance on food brought in from home within your food policy to help parents choose appropriate food and drinks for their children. This ensures that the food is safe for all children who may come into contact with it (including children with food allergies). Ensure that food and drink brought into your setting is appropriately labelled with the child's details, is safely stored until it is needed, and is reheated safely if appropriate. For more information about safe

storage and preparation of food, refer to the Food Standards Agency's 'Safer food, better business'.<sup>43</sup>

If you also provide food and drink, encourage families to provide the same or similar healthy food choices as you will be offering, so that children have consistent messages about healthy eating and do not miss out on the benefits of sharing food and eating together.

If parents and carers ask for advice on lunches and snacks to provide for their children, recommend that the food provided is in line with the food and drink guidelines.

If parents and carers ask for advice on lunches and snacks to provide for their children, recommend that the food provided is in line with the food and drink guidelines.

### Examples of food and drink to include by settings or parents as part of a packed lunch or tea:

Foods to provide	Examples of foods that could be provided
<b>A portion of starchy food</b> (provide a variety of different starchy foods each week, including a wholegrain variety for lunch and tea once a week)	White or wholegrain bread, rolls, pitta bread or wraps. Chapattis. Plain naan bread. Bagels. Cooked pasta, rice, noodles, couscous or potato.
<b>At least one portion of fruit and/or vegetables</b> (provide a variety of different fruit and vegetables each week)	Carrot, cucumber, pepper or celery sticks. Lentils included in daal. Grated carrot in sandwiches or wraps. Fresh fruit such as sliced apple <sup>***</sup> , banana, grapes, mixed chopped fruit or strawberries. Dried fruit such as raisins or apricots. Fruit juice (diluted half juice, half water).
<b>A portion of meat, fish, eggs, beans or other non-dairy sources of protein</b> (provide a variety of different foods each week)	Sliced meat, poultry or fish in sandwiches, rolls or wraps, or by itself. Sliced egg in sandwiches, rolls or wraps. Meat alternatives such as tofu in salads. Pulses such as kidney beans, chickpeas, lentils, as part of bean salads. Nut butter in sandwiches <sup>*</sup> .
<b>A portion of milk or dairy food</b> (Can be included as part of lunch and/or tea)	A pot of yoghurt or fromage frais. Cheese in sandwiches or wraps. Whole milk (for children aged one to two) or semi-skimmed (for children two and over) to drink.
<b>Desserts, cakes, biscuits and crisps</b>	Desserts, cakes and biscuits made with cereals, milk or fruit. Avoid salty snacks such as crisps. Limit confectionery such as chocolate chips or hundreds and thousands, and use only as part of cakes or desserts.
<b>A drink</b>	Fruit juice (diluted half juice, half water). Whole milk (for children aged one to two) or semi-skimmed (for children aged two and over). Water.

## Examples of food and drink to provide for snacks by settings or parents:

Foods to provide	Examples of foods that could be provided
<b>Starchy food</b> (provide a starchy food as part of at least one snack each day)	Breadsticks, crackers, oatcakes, rice cakes, small pitta, bread or bread roll.
<b>Fruit and vegetables</b> (provide as part of some snacks)	Fresh sliced fruit – apples, bananas, grapes. Vegetable sticks – carrot, cucumber.
<b>Milk or dairy food</b> (can be provided as part of snacks)	Cubes of cheese. Plain yoghurt or fromage frais. Whole milk (for children aged one to two) or semi-skimmed (for children aged two and over).
<b>Cakes, biscuits, sweet foods and crisps</b>	Sweet foods like cakes, biscuits, sweets and dried fruit should not be given as snacks as these can cause tooth decay. Instead provide starchy foods and fruit or vegetables. Avoid salty snacks such as crisps.
<b>Drink</b>	Provide milk or water to drink between meals. Do not provide squash, fruit juice or fizzy drinks, as these can lead to tooth decay.

## Learning about and through food

Learning about food should be integrated into your educational programme. The examples given below illustrate how learning about and through food can be linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum.<sup>44</sup>

- Personal, social and emotional development.** Meal times offer children experiences to taste different foods, overcome dislikes and learn how to share. Cooking activities offer opportunities for learning through working with others and increasing self-esteem.
- Physical development.** Fine and gross motor skills can be developed through activities such as gardening, using knives and forks, preparing food, and washing up. Mealtimes can be used to help children to make healthy food choices.
- Literacy.** Many stories involve food. Use these to teach about ingredients, where food comes from and about food for special occasions and from different cultures. Language can be developed and senses explored through discussing and describing the taste, texture, size, look and smell of food.
- Mathematics.** Activities such as counting out spoons and pieces of fruit when setting the table or at snack time can be used to support numeracy skills. Sorting and matching foods into different types can help promote organisational skills and reasoning.
- Communication and language.** Sitting around a table eating food together is a good way to teach conversation and social skills such as looking after neighbours.
- Understanding the world.**
  - food tasting activities teach children about ingredients, the seasons and where food comes from including food from different cultures
  - growing fruit and vegetables teaches children about where food comes from, about life cycles, about gardening and how to look after plants. It is also a good form of physical activity. If there is limited growing space, many vegetables and herbs can be grown on window sills and in pots or bags. For more information, see Growing Schools<sup>45</sup> and the Royal Horticultural Society.<sup>46</sup>
- Expressive arts and design.** Art activities can engage children with food and alert them to colours and shapes.

Childminder Sue Smith extends children's experience of food by visits to the local dairy farm, allotments, supermarkets and cafés.

Childminder Sheri Akambi involves children in her garden - if they help to grow and pick the fruit and vegetables, they are much more likely to try them.

# Seven steps for planning healthy meals, snacks and drinks

It is important that the food and drink provided for children is balanced across each day, and that children eat regularly, with breakfast, lunch, tea, and two or three snacks provided daily (either within an early years setting or at home). Using these food and drink guidelines to plan meals and snacks for children will help to make sure that all children eat a healthy, balanced diet, whether they attend full-day care in one setting, or attend several settings throughout the week.



## Step 1. Plan menus for all the meals and snacks you provide for children.

This will help you to check that food and drink provisions across the day is balanced and includes variety, and also helps planning for shopping and food preparation.



## Step 2. Plan menus lasting at least one week.

In practice, a menu that covers between one and four weeks will give children lots of variety. Try to make sure that children who attend your setting on the same day each week are not always provided with the same meal.



## Step 3. Plan each meal and snack menu to meet the food and drink guidelines in this guide.

This means that children attending your setting for sessional care or who move between different settings will still meet their nutritional requirements overall.



## Step 6. Introduce new menu cycles at least twice a year.

This will incorporate seasonality and give children the chance to try different foods.



## Step 7. Share menus for meals and snacks with parents

This can help parents to balance meals and snacks with the food they provide at home. For example, if children are having a light meal at teatime and you expect them to eat again at home, make sure the parents are aware of this.

The Children's House Nursery uses a 12 day menu cycle, which means that children attending on one or two days a week receive a wide variety of different meals.

## Step 4. Plan menus to include a variety of foods, tastes, textures and colours.

This will give children opportunity to try a wide range of foods and make meals and snacks colourful and tasty.



## Step 5. Make sure you cater for the cultural and dietary needs of all the children in your care.

You can also plan your menus to enable children to experience food from different cultures. You will find more information about this on page 49.



Childminder Sandra Cook found that introducing a rolling three week menu instead of planning menus each week saves her time.

### Food customs of different religious and cultural groups

Food	Jewish	Hindu*	Sikh*	Muslim	Buddhist	Rastafarian**
Eggs	No blood spot	It varies	It varies	Yes	It varies	It varies
Milk/yoghurt	Not with meat	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	It varies
Cheese	Not with meat	It varies	It varies	It varies	Yes	It varies
Chicken	Kosher only	It varies	It varies	Halal only	No	It varies
Mutton/lamb	Kosher only	It varies	It varies	Halal only	No	It varies
Beef/ beef products	Kosher only	No	No	Halal only	No	It varies
Pork/ pork products	No	No	Rarely	No	No	No
Fish	Fish with fins and scales only	Fish with fins and scales only	It varies	It varies	It varies	Yes
Shellfish	No	It varies	It varies	It varies	No	No
Butter/ghee	Kosher only	It varies	It varies	It varies	No	It varies
Lard	No	No	No	No	No	No
Cereal foods	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nuts/pulses	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fruit and vegetables	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

'It varies' means that some people within a religious group would find these foods acceptable \* Strict Hindus and Sikhs will not eat eggs, meat, fish, and some fats.

\*\* Some Rastafarians are vegan.

Source: Caroline Walker Trust (2006) Eating well for under 5s in child care.

# Example one week autumn/winter menu meeting the food and drink guidelines

This autumn/winter one week menu meets the food and drink guidelines and the average energy and nutrient requirements for children aged one to five. Full recipes, photos and portion size information for this menu are available from the Children's Food Trust website.<sup>36</sup>

Meal	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<b>Breakfast</b> Planned to provide about 20% of a child's daily energy and nutritional requirements	Wheat biscuits (25g) with yoghurt (60g) and dried apricots (25g) Diluted apple juice (100ml)	Porridge (100g) with raisins (25g) Wholemeal toast (25g) and spread (4g) Water (100ml)	Malt wheats (25g) with whole milk (100ml) and chopped plum (40g) Toasted bagel (50g) and spread (4g) Water (100ml)	Toasted muffin (30g) and spread (4g) with scrambled egg (50g), tomato (20g) and mushrooms (20g) Whole milk (100ml)	Rice crispies (25g) with whole milk (100ml) Toasted teacake (35g) and spread (4g) Diluted orange juice (100ml)
<b>Mid-morning snack</b> Planned to provide about 10% of a child's daily energy and nutritional requirements	Toasted English muffin (30g) and spread (4g) with a Clementine (40g) Water (100ml)	Wholemeal pitta bread (35g) with tuna dip (30g), celery (20g) and red pepper sticks (20g) Whole milk (100ml)	Plain pancake (25g) with yoghurt (60g) and pear (40g) Water (100ml)	Rice cakes (16g) with cottage cheese (20g), apple (20g) and beetroot (20g) Water (100ml)	Wholemeal toast (25g) and spread (4g) with carrot sticks (40g) Whole milk (100ml)
<b>Lunch</b> Planned to provide about 30% of a child's daily energy and nutritional requirements	Fish pie with sweet potato topping (170g) or vegetable and bean pie (v) (170g) with swede and cauliflower (40g) Apple and rhubarb crumble (60g) with custard (60g) Water (100ml)	Beef lasagne (150g) or tomato and lentil lasagne (v) (150g) with garlic bread (25g), carrots and peas (40g) Yoghurt (60g) with dates (25g) Diluted apple juice (100ml)	Roast chicken (35g) and gravy (20g) or roast Quorn™ (35g) and tomato and basil sauce (v) (40g) with roast potatoes (90g), red cabbage and parsnips (40g) Semolina with blackberry compote (125g) Water (100ml)	Mixed bean and root vegetable stew (v) (120g) with apricot and herb cous cous (90g) Cocoa and beetroot cake (50g) with cocoa custard (60g) Diluted orange juice (100ml)	Lamb curry (100g) or chickpea curry (v) (100g) with brown rice (90g), naan bread (20g) and tomato and coriander salad (40g) Warm winter fruit salad (40g) with vanilla sauce (60g) Water (100ml)
<b>Mid-afternoon snack</b> Planned to provide about 10% of a child's daily energy and nutritional requirements	Breadsticks (7g) with hard boiled egg (50g) and cherry tomatoes (40g) Whole milk (100ml)	Oatcake (15g) and satsuma (40g) Water (100ml)	Apple (40g) with crackers (14g) and spread (4g) Whole milk (100ml)	Banana (40g) with plain yoghurt (60g) Water (100ml)	Celery and cucumber sticks (40g) with toasted bagel (50g) and spread (4g) Water (100ml)
<b>Tea</b> Planned to provide about 20% of a child's daily energy and nutritional requirements	Chicken risotto (170g) or Tofu risotto (v) (170g) Seasonal fruit salad (40g) Water (100ml)	Scrambled egg on toast with mushrooms and tomatoes (130g) Banana and raisin flapjack (50g) Water (100ml)	Herby pilchard pasta (210g) or herby tomato and bean pasta (v) (210g) Apple crumble tart (60g) Diluted orange juice (100ml)	Leek, potato and butterbean soup (v) (150g) with wholemeal bread roll (25g) and spread (4g) Stewed seasonal fruit (40g) with plain yoghurt (60g) Water (100ml)	Homemade tuna fishcakes (130g) or potato and lentil cakes (v) (130g) with tomato relish (40g) Banana and cinnamon rice pudding (120g) Water (100ml)

Note: The autumn/winter menu has been developed using the estimated average requirement (EAR) for energy, and the nutrient-based standards for fat, saturated fat, carbohydrate and non-milk extrinsic sugars based on this EAR, as specified by COMA<sup>19</sup> not the 2011 Dietary Recommendations for Energy published by SACN.<sup>34</sup>

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