

# Nutrition matters for the early years



**Guidance for feeding under fives in the  
childcare setting**





# Introduction



**What we eat can play a critical role in determining our health, whatever our age. The eating patterns established in the first few years of life influence our health during childhood and adulthood. Encouraging good nutrition during the early years of life is therefore an investment in the health of our population for years to come.**

With more parents working, increasing numbers of children are spending long periods of time in childcare outside their own homes. This has implications for their dietary intake, as a large proportion of meals and snacks is now eaten away from home. Childminders and the staff in nurseries and playgroups therefore have a crucial role to play in promoting healthy nutrition among young children.

This publication outlines straightforward practical advice and information on a range of nutritional issues relating to children up to the age of five, based on current government guidelines. Information about the importance of encouraging physical activity and ensuring the safe handling and storage of food is also included.

*Nutrition matters for the early years* is a valuable resource for all staff within day nurseries, playgroups and crèches and for childminders providing childcare within the home setting.





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# Why good nutrition is important

Good nutrition is essential during childhood, as it is a time of rapid growth, development and activity. This is also a vital time for healthy tooth development and prevention of decay. General eating habits and patterns are formed in the first few years of life. Poor nutrition during these years is associated with an increased risk of obesity, hypertension, diabetes and coronary heart disease. Childcare providers therefore have a key role to play in introducing children to a wide variety of foods and establishing a pattern of regular meals and healthy snacks.

The arrangements for children's meals and snacks will of course vary considerably between different childcare providers. Some nurseries and childminders may provide all meals, snacks and drinks. This document offers them straightforward guidelines on how to ensure they are giving the children in their care a healthy diet. In other cases, where parents provide drinks and snacks, or all foods and drinks for their child, childcare providers can use the document to help in any discussions they may have with parents about the food that they are providing.





When providing food for young children, consideration must be given to the following points:

- Children's appetites may vary, not only from day to day, but also from one meal to the next.
- Young children are very active and have high energy (calorie) and nutrient needs in proportion to their small body size.
- Children have smaller stomachs than adults so it is important to consider portion size when plating food.
- Every day, children need three meals plus snacks. Use the ideas given in this document to provide nutritious meals and snacks.
- Children should be encouraged to drink adequate amounts of fluids. Milk and water are the best choices.
- A frequent intake of sugar and sugary foods and drinks between meals causes tooth decay. Snacks and drinks taken between meals should be sugar-free.
- Foods and drinks containing sugar should only be given occasionally and should be limited to mealtimes. Sugar may also appear on labels as sucrose, glucose, syrup, fructose or dextrose.
- Puddings should be nutritious and based on milk and/or fruit (fresh, stewed or tinned).
- Avoid low fat or diet products, as young children need the extra calories and vitamins from fat to grow and develop properly. You can gradually introduce lower-fat dairy options (such as cheese and unsweetened yoghurt and fromage frais) for children older than 2 years. The exception is milk, where either pasteurised whole or semi-skimmed milk can be given as the main drink from 1 year, as can goats' and sheep's milk. From two years old, children should move to eating the same food as the rest of the family in the proportions shown in the Eatwell Guide. You can download the leaflet from the publications section of our website [www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications)
- A diet high in fibre is not suitable for young children. It can fill them up without providing all the nutrients they require. Foods of varying fibre content should be offered, eg both white and wholemeal breads and pasta; a variety of breakfast cereals, eg Corn Flakes, Rice Krispies, Weetabix, porridge, etc. Children between the ages of two and five should gradually be encouraged to increase their intake of higher fibre foods.
- Dry, unprocessed bran should never be used as it can reduce the absorption of important nutrients and can cause bloating, wind and loss of appetite.
- Do not add salt to food either in cooking or at the table, as babies' kidneys are not fully developed. Too much salt is linked with high blood pressure later in life and may encourage a preference for salty food, which is difficult to change. Salty snacks such as crisps should be avoided for babies and young children, and given only very occasionally for older children.
- Whole nuts are unsuitable for children under the age of five years because of the risk of choking. It is recommended that peanuts and products containing them, eg peanut butter, are not provided within the childcare setting. This is to protect children who may be at risk of nut allergy.
- It is recommended that small foods such as grapes and cherry tomatoes are sliced or halved lengthways or prevent choking.

# A guide to weaning

All the nourishment a baby needs during the first six months comes from either breastmilk or infant formula milk. Based on current research, health experts recommend that babies should begin to take solid foods from six months in addition to breastmilk (or the baby's usual formula milk) to allow them to grow and develop.<sup>†</sup> This process is called weaning (sometimes referred to as complementary feeding). Solid foods should be offered initially 2–3 times a day, increasing to 3–4 times daily between 9–11 months.

Weaning before six months is not recommended as babies' digestive systems and kidneys are still developing.

The tables on the following pages outline the current recommendations for weaning.

- **Salt.** Do not add any salt to foods for babies as their kidneys are not fully developed. You should also avoid foods that contain a lot of salt, eg packet soups, stock cubes, crisps, bacon, smoked meats.
- **Sugar.** Do not add sugar to the foods or drinks you give a baby. Sugar could encourage a sweet tooth and lead to tooth decay when the first teeth start to come through. Artificial sweeteners are not recommended for infants and young children.
- **Honey.** Don't give honey to a child under the age of one year, as it can contain a kind of bacteria which can produce toxins in the baby's intestines and can cause a very serious illness (infant botulism).
- **Nuts.** It is recommended that peanuts and products containing them are not provided within the childcare setting. This is to protect children who may be at risk of peanut allergy. Whole nuts should never be given to children under the age of five because of the risk of choking.

## Foods to avoid giving to babies

<sup>†</sup>Kramer MS, Kakuma R. Optimal duration of exclusive breastfeeding. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2002, Issue 1. (Updated in 2009)







Weaning before six months is not recommended; however, childcare providers will obviously have to follow the parents' wishes about introducing complementary feeds. If the parents of a baby in your care are determined to wean before six months, there are a number of extra foods that should be avoided **in addition to** the list above. These are:

- Foods which contain gluten, eg wheat flour, bread, breakfast cereals made from wheat, rusks, spaghetti or other pastas (eg tinned pasta in tomato sauce).
- Nuts and seeds, unless otherwise advised by GP, health visitor or medical allergy specialist.
- Eggs.
- Cows', sheep's or goats' milk, either as a drink or mixed with food.
- Fish and shellfish.
- Citrus fruits, including citrus fruit juices, eg orange juice.
- Soft and unpasteurised cheeses.
- Tofu, Quorn, soya protein.

More detailed guidance on weaning can be found in the Public Health Agency's leaflet *Weaning made easy: moving from milk to family meals*. This leaflet is aimed at parents but childcare providers working with young babies will also find the information useful.

You can download the leaflet from the publications section of our website [www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications) or ask for a copy from your community midwife or health visitor.

### Baby led weaning

Baby led weaning is becoming an increasingly popular way of introducing foods to children. It does not use the conventional weaning methods of purees and mashed foods; instead the child is offered bite sized pieces of food to suck, chew and explore. There are pros and cons to this style of weaning. If you would like more information please visit: [www.rapleyweaning.com](http://www.rapleyweaning.com)





### Texture

First foods should be smooth or well mashed.

### Suitable first foods are:

- plain baby rice mixed with baby's usual milk;
- smooth or well-mashed cooked potato, carrot, parsnip, turnip, cauliflower;
- smooth or well-mashed banana, stewed fruits, eg apple, pear, apricots;
- unsweetened custard (made using custard powder);
- unsweetened natural yogurt.

### As babies get used to spoon feeds

After a couple of weeks begin to add different foods and different tastes:

- mashed or minced meat, chicken, fish (with bones removed), lentils, hard boiled egg (serve these with well-mashed potatoes, rice or pasta and veg);
- foods made from wheat, eg bread, pasta, semolina;
- breakfast cereals such as plain Ready Brek, Weetabix, porridge.

At this stage the food doesn't need to be quite so runny – you can start to leave a few soft lumps.

### Notes

- Slowly introduce foods containing allergens (such as peanuts, eggs, gluten, fish) one at a time at six months of age. For more on allergies, see page 33.
- Cook vegetables or fruit (without added salt or sugar) until they are soft, then mash well.
- Breastmilk or infant formula milk can be used to mix with cereals, potatoes etc to give a smooth consistency. Pasteurised whole cows' milk can be used to mix into foods, such as mashed potato and breakfast cereal, but should not be given as a main drink until after 1 year.
- At this stage the baby will continue to receive the usual amount of breastmilk (this may need to be expressed for use within the childcare setting) or infant formula milk each day. This should be provided in accordance with the parent's guidance.
- Cooled boiled water can be offered between feeds if the baby seems thirsty.
- Use a cup for drinks of infant formula or water.
- Introduce finger foods.

### Finger foods

Finger foods encourage babies to feed themselves. Try:

- soft fresh fruit, eg banana, melon, peeled pear;
- pieces of cooked vegetables, eg green beans, cauliflower, carrot;
- fingers of toast (with unsalted butter),

unsalted breadsticks, pitta bread;

- fingers of hard cheese;
- hard boiled egg;
- low-sugar rusks (these should only be used occasionally, as even low-sugar varieties still contain a lot of sugar).

### Vitamin D

Vitamin D is an essential vitamin for bone development. Our body creates most of our vitamin D from moderate exposure to the sun in the summer months; however, most of the UK population have low levels of vitamin D, especially in the winter months (between October and March) when the sunlight is not strong enough to make vitamin D. Vitamin D supplements are therefore recommended for most of the UK population during the winter months. All children between the ages of 6 months and five years should be given vitamin drops or tablets

which contain vitamins A, C and D, unless they are consuming 500ml (a pint) or more of infant formula a day at any time during this age range. Ordinary cows' milk does not contain sufficient vitamin D. More detailed guidance on Vitamin D can be found in the Public Health Agency's leaflet *Vitamin D and you* which can be downloaded from the publications section of our **website [www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications)** The UK Chief Medical Officers' advice on Vitamin D supplementation can be accessed at **[www.gov.uk/government/publications/vitamin-d-advice-on-supplements-for-at-risk-groups](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vitamin-d-advice-on-supplements-for-at-risk-groups)**

## Weaning: from about 7 months

### Texture

From about 7 months just mash food with a fork. This will encourage the baby to learn how to chew.

### Suitable foods

All family foods can be offered at this stage – remember not to add salt while cooking or at the table.

### Notes

- By this age the baby should be having three meals a day and eating more at each spoon feed.
- The amount of milk can be gradually reduced as the baby eats more solid food. The baby should continue to have breastmilk (this may need to be expressed for use in the childcare setting), or at least 500–600mls (16–20fl oz) of infant formula each day.
- Encourage babies to hold spoons.

### Menu ideas

#### Main meal ideas:

- mashed baked beans with fingers of toast;
- tuna and pasta bake with broccoli;
- macaroni cheese with peas;
- shepherd's pie with carrots;
- minced chicken with mashed potato and Brussels sprouts;
- corned beef hash with sliced green beans;
- meat or lentil stew with mashed potato;
- fish pie with peas.

#### Dessert ideas:

- pieces of fresh soft fruit, eg pear, banana, melon;
- unsweetened stewed fruit, eg apples, apricots, prunes (with stones removed);
- tinned soft fruit in its own juice, eg strawberries, peaches, pears;
- milk pudding, unsweetened natural yogurt or fromage frais (do not use 'diet' varieties).



**"Pieces of fresh soft fruit,  
eg pear, banana or melon"**

### Texture

During this stage babies will move on from mashed to chopped foods.

### Suitable foods

Continue to offer all family foods at this stage.

### Notes

- Continue to give three meals a day plus 1–2 snacks.
- At this stage babies will continue to receive 3–4 breastfeeds each day (this may need

to be expressed for use in the childcare setting) or about 500–600mls (16–20fl oz) of infant formula) each day.

- Water or very diluted pure fruit juice (one part juice to 10 parts water) can be given as a drink at mealtimes. By now, most drinks (including the baby's usual milk) should be given from a cup. From 12 months, the use of a bottle should be discouraged.
- Encourage babies to eat a wide variety of foods.
- For suitable drinks refer to page 14.

### Menu ideas

#### Some meal ideas to try

##### Breakfast:

- unsweetened breakfast cereal with whole cows' milk;
- toast with well-cooked egg, either scrambled, poached or boiled.

##### Lunch:

- baked beans with fingers of toast;
- sandwiches filled with, for example, tuna, chicken, egg, hummus;
- soup, for example vegetable or lentil, with a sandwich;
- pasta with tomato sauce and grated cheese.

##### Dinner:

- minced or chopped meat, mashed potatoes and carrots;
- fish fingers, peas and mashed potatoes;
- chicken casserole and rice;
- lasagne with broccoli;
- vegetable risotto with grated cheese;
- beef or lentil burgers, courgettes, sliced tomato and boiled potatoes;
- cauliflower cheese, boiled potatoes and green beans.

### Snack ideas

#### Healthy snacks to use between meals include:

- chopped fruit and vegetables, eg peeled apple, pear, peach, banana, orange, carrot, cucumber;
- bread, toast, crumpets, potato bread, soda bread;
- unsweetened natural yogurt or fromage frais – add your own fruit for extra flavour;
- cheese.

**Foods that contain quite a lot of sugar are safest for teeth if taken at mealtimes and should not be given as snacks.**

#### These include:

- flavoured yogurt, flavoured fromage frais;
- low-sugar rusks;
- plain biscuits, eg Rich Tea, Marie, Digestives.



## Drinks for babies up to 12 months old

### Breastmilk or infant formula milk

Breastmilk or infant formula milk should be the main drink during the first year.

If a mother wishes to express breastmilk for her child to drink while in childcare, it should be stored in the fridge and brought up to room temperature in a jug of hot water before it is given to the baby.

It is now recommended that powdered infant formula is freshly prepared for each feed. Use bottles that have been sterilised and always reconstitute the formula in water which has been boiled and is still hot (above 70°C). Cool this rapidly to room temperature, then use immediately. Always discard any formula left over after the feed.

If formula cannot be made up by childcare providers, parents could supply cartons of ready-to-feed liquid formula. If parents choose to make up formula at home, feeds should be made up and cooled in the fridge for at least one hour before transporting to the childcare facility. The feeds should be labelled and transported in a cool bag with an ice pack and on arrival transferred immediately to the fridge. They can then be used for up to 24 hours.

**Note:** If the feeds are not cooled in the fridge or are transported without an icepack they must be used within two hours.

### Follow-on formula

Follow on formulas, 'growing up' milks or other toddler milks are not necessary for children aged over 1 year.

### Milks

Pasteurised whole and semi-skimmed cows', sheep's or goats' milk can be given as the main drink from one year. Do not give skimmed milk to under fives.

### Other drinks

A little cooled boiled tap water can be given if a baby seems very thirsty (after six months, water straight from the mains tap is suitable). Babies under 12 months do not need fruit juice or smoothies. If you choose to give these to your baby, dilute the juices and smoothies (one part juice to 10 parts water) and limit them to mealtimes.

Giving fruit juice and smoothies at mealtimes (rather than between meals) helps reduce the risk of tooth decay.

### Drinks that are not recommended

#### Baby juices, herbal drinks and sugary diluting juices

These contain sugar and can damage developing

teeth if they are used frequently or given from a bottle. Squashes should be very well diluted (one part squash to ten parts water). All of these drinks should be given from a cup at main meals.

### Drinks that should not be given

Colas, lemonades and fizzy drinks including 'diet' drinks and sugar-free squashes.

These are acidic and can cause damage to teeth. 'Diet' drinks are also high in artificial sweeteners which are unsuitable for babies and young children.

### Dairy alternatives

Dairy alternatives, for example soya drinks and nut based milks, which are not formula, should

not be given to children under the age of 1 year. After this, choose unsweetened, fortified dairy alternatives to ensure an adequate vitamin and mineral intake.

### Tea and coffee

These may reduce the absorption of iron.

### Bottled mineral waters, still and sparkling

These may contain high levels of minerals which make them unsuitable for babies under one year.

# A varied balanced diet for children aged one to five

Growing children need plenty of energy (calories) and nutrients, eg protein, fat, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals. These needs can be met by including a variety of foods from each of the food groups below:

- Fruits and vegetables;
- Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates;
- Dairy and alternatives;
- Beans, pulses, fish, eggs and other proteins.

The following tables outline the recommended number of servings, per child, from each of the four main food groups for a whole day. The actual number of servings provided will depend on the length of time the child is in childcare.

From the age of two children can follow general healthy eating guidelines as shown in the Eatwell Guide. You can download the leaflet from the publications section of our website [www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications)









## Food group: Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates

### What's included

This group includes:

- all types of bread, eg wholemeal, wheaten, granary, multigrain, white, brown, soda bread, potato bread, rolls, baps, chapattis;
- crispbreads, savoury crackers, crumpets, pancakes;
- breakfast cereals without added sugar, honey or chocolate, eg Weetabix, Ready Brek, porridge oats, Corn Flakes, Rice Krispies;
- boiled, mashed or baked potatoes (chips should be limited to once a week);
- pasta, noodles, rice and couscous.

### Recommended servings

Offer a minimum of one portion per child with each meal. Examples of one portion are:

- 1 slice of bread;
- 1 small potato;
- 8 oven chips;
- 3 tablespoons cooked pasta or 2 heaped tablespoons cooked rice (80g);
- 2 tablespoons breakfast cereal.

Portion sizes should be increased according to appetite.

### Key nutrients

The main nutrients provided are:

- energy (calories);
- B vitamins (needed for growth and activity);
- fibre (needed for healthy bowels).

Some breakfast cereals are fortified with iron (needed for healthy blood).

### Notes

These foods should also be offered as snacks.







## Food group: Fruit and vegetables

### What's included

This group includes:

- all types of fresh, frozen and canned vegetables, eg broccoli\*, Brussels sprouts\*, cabbage\*, carrots, cauliflower\*, mushrooms, parsnips, frozen peas, peppers\*, swede, sweetcorn, turnip;
- all types of salad vegetables, eg lettuce, cucumber, tomato;
- all types of fresh fruit, eg apples, bananas, grapes, kiwi fruit\*, oranges\*, strawberries\* blueberries;
- all types of tinned fruit in juice, eg peaches, pears, pineapple, prunes;
- stewed fruit;
- dried fruit.

*\* All these are good sources of vitamin C.*

### Recommended servings

Five child-sized portions should be offered each day.

Examples of one child-sized portion are:

- ½ apple, ½ pear, ½ banana or ½ orange;
- 1 tablespoon fruit salad, tinned (in juice) or unsweetened stewed fruit;
- ½ cup of strawberries or grapes;
- 1 tablespoon cooked vegetables;
- 1 tablespoon chopped or raw salad vegetables.

To reduce the risk of choking, halve small fruits and vegetables like grapes and cherry tomatoes, remove any stones and pips and cut large fruits into smaller pieces.

### Key nutrients

The main nutrients provided are:

- vitamins, especially vitamin C (needed for general good health and to help absorb iron);
- fibre;
- iron (from dark green vegetables, eg broccoli and spinach).

### Notes

- Fruits and vegetables make good snacks and are ideal as finger foods.
- Dried fruits such as raisins or dates can be included in main meals but are not recommended as snacks between meals because they are concentrated sources of sugar, which may cause tooth decay.
- Frozen vegetables are high in vitamins.
- Vegetables can be added to soups, casseroles and stews.
- Do not overcook fruit and vegetables, as this will reduce the vitamin content.
- Stewed fruit should be unsweetened.







## Food group: Dairy and alternatives

### What's included

This group includes:

- milk;
- cheese;
- yogurt.

### Recommended servings

Each day allow 350–600mls ( $\frac{1}{2}$ –1 pint) of milk from one year of age onwards

**or**

2–3 servings of foods from this group should be provided, for example:

- 25g (1oz) of hard cheese;
- 125g carton of yogurt – choose unsweetened natural yogurt and avoid diet varieties;
- a bowl of milk pudding.

Each of these provides equivalent amounts of calcium.

### Key nutrients

The main nutrients provided are:

- calcium (needed to build strong bones and for nerve and muscle function);
- protein (for growth);
- fat (for calories);
- vitamin A (needed for growth, healthy skin and eyes, a healthy respiratory system (lungs and breathing tubes) and a healthy digestive tract (including mouth, stomach and bowel);
- vitamin D (needed to help absorb calcium and to build strong bones).

### Notes

- Pasteurised whole and semi-skimmed cows', sheep's and goats' milk can be given as a drink from 1 year.
- Skimmed milk should not be given to children under five years.
- Milk can be used in drinks, on breakfast cereals, in milk puddings or sauces.
- Cheese can be added to jacket potatoes, spaghetti or toast. Grated cheese, cottage cheese, cheese portions or spreads can be used as sandwich fillers or on toast.
- The length of time the child is cared for will determine how much of the daily requirements should be provided within the childcare setting.
- Dairy alternatives are not suitable for children under 1 year. Any dairy alternatives used for special diet provision should be unsweetened and fortified with calcium.
- Avoid yogurts and fromage frais that have a high sugar content (often those with added 'bits' or mousse-style). If the sugar content on a yogurt or fromage frais label says it has more than 15g of sugar per 100g, it is a high-sugar option. It is preferable to add fresh fruit to unsweetened natural yogurt or fromage frais.







## Food group: Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins

### What's included

This group includes:

- baked beans, mushy peas, butter beans, kidney beans, chickpeas;
- bean curd, Quorn;
- white fish, oily fish (eg tuna and sardines), fish cakes, fish fingers;
- eggs including boiled, scrambled, poached, omelette;
- all types of meat including beef, lamb, pork, bacon, ham, liver, chicken and turkey;
- processed meats/meat products, eg chicken nuggets, sausages, sausage rolls and burgers;
- meat alternatives, eg soya mince, textured vegetable protein (TVP).

### Recommended servings

Two servings of these foods should be taken every day, ie at lunch and evening meal.

Examples of one serving include:

- 60g (1½–2oz) beef, pork, lamb, chicken or fish;
- 2 fish fingers;
- 1 egg;
- 2–3 tablespoons baked beans (30g).

Processed meat products should be given **no more than once a week** in the childcare setting.

Examples of one serving are:

- 4 chicken nuggets;
- 4 fish bites;
- 2 sausages;
- 1 junior (50g/2oz) burger.

### Key nutrients

The main nutrients provided are:

- protein;
- iron (to prevent anaemia);
- vitamins, especially B vitamins.
- Omega 3 fatty acids in oily fish.

### Notes

- Whole nuts are unsuitable for children under the age of five years because of risk of choking.
- It is recommended that peanuts and products containing them, eg peanut butter, are not provided within the childcare setting. This is to protect children who may be at risk of peanut allergy.
- Ensure that all meat and fish dishes are free from bones to prevent choking. Be aware that chicken nuggets can sometimes contain small bones.
- Red meat should be included as it is a good source of iron. Mince is acceptable as a red meat. Minced meat may be used for shepherd's pie, meatballs and spaghetti bolognese. Where possible use leaner cuts of meat and trim off visible fat. Processed meat products contain less protein and iron.
- Eggs should be eaten with foods rich in vitamin C (eg tomatoes or orange juice) to help the body absorb the iron in eggs.
- Vegetarian choices could include omelette, cheese quiche, bean and pasta bake, macaroni cheese, vegetable lasagne.
- It is important to include good sources of iron regularly, eg beef, lamb, pork, eggs, sardines, baked beans, mushy peas. Soya mince is a good source of iron for those who want to avoid meat.







## Food group: Oils and spreads

### Oils and spreads

#### This group includes

- spreading fats, such as butter, margarine and spreads;
- cooking fats, such as olive, rapeseed, sunflower, corn oils.

#### Key nutrients

- Energy (calories) provided by the fat in these foods.
- Fat soluble vitamins (provided by the foods rich in fat):
  - Vitamin A (needed for growth, healthy eyes, a healthy respiratory tract (lungs and breathing tubes), and digestive tract and maintenance of skin);
  - Vitamin D (needed to help absorb calcium and to build strong bones);
  - Vitamin E (to protect body cells from damage and reduce the risk of some cancers);
  - Vitamin K (for healthy blood).
- Essential fatty acids – necessary for brain development, retinal (eye) development and heart health in later life.

## Foods high in fat, salt and sugars

### Foods high in fat, salt and sugars (eat less often and in small amounts)

#### This group includes

- cream, sour cream and crème fraîche;
- cakes, biscuits, pastries;
- crisps, corn snacks, roasted nuts;
- chocolate, sweets, cereal bars;
- puddings, jelly, ice cream;
- sugar, jam, honey;
- sugary squash and fizzy drinks, ice lollies.

#### Key nutrients

- Energy (calories) – foods and drinks high in fat and sugar contain lots of energy but are not nutrient rich.
- These foods are not needed in the diet so don't offer these foods too often and especially not between meals as this is when they are most damaging to teeth.
- These foods will also fill up little tummies so there is no room left at mealtimes.

## Notes

Many of the foods in this group are high in fat, eg cooking and spreading fats, biscuits, cakes, fried foods etc. Some fat is essential for everyone, but it is important to remember that too much fat (for example by eating foods such as biscuits, cakes, fried food and chips frequently or in high amounts), can lead to unwanted weight gain and increases the risk of health problems such as obesity and diabetes.

Young children under five years have high energy (calorie) needs in proportion to their small body size. This means they need small meals and snacks throughout the day.

Children under two years should be given the full-fat versions of foods such as spreads and butter (from this food group) and full fat milk products such as whole milk and yogurts (from the food group: *dairy and alternatives*).

From two years onwards, children should follow the healthy eating guidelines set out for adults.



# Planning meals and snacks for children

The following points will be helpful when planning meals for children.

- Children need to eat regularly and it is recommended that they are offered something to eat at least every three hours.
- All children need a breakfast – either at home or provided in childcare.
- Children cared for all day will receive most of their food whilst in childcare. The number of meals and snacks provided will vary depending on the length of time the child is cared for. In general it is recommended that children being cared for over a normal working day receive at least one main meal and two snacks. In some instances childcare providers may also need to offer breakfast and/or an evening meal.
- A variety of foods from the four main food groups should be provided daily.
- A main meal must include a portion of food from the following food groups:
  - potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates;
  - fruit and vegetables
  - beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins (see information on food groups, pages 15–25)
- It is important to include 2–3 portions of foods from the dairy and alternatives food group, which can be given at either main meals, snack times or a mixture of the two.
- Wherever possible healthier cooking methods should be used, eg baking, boiling, steaming, grilling, microwaving, etc.
- It is recommended that parents/guardians are given the opportunity to discuss their child's food preferences and are kept informed about meals and snacks offered.
- Choose combinations of colours to make food look attractive. Three or four defined areas of colour look good on a plate.
- A combination of different textures increases appeal. Children will appreciate crispy, crunchy, chewy, smooth and soft foods.
- Taste should be varied but meals containing too many new flavours may not be acceptable to children.
- Providing finger foods, as well as foods that require cutlery, allows variation at mealtimes. This is also a good way to encourage children less than two years of age to eat independently and to try new foods.
- Child-sized cutlery and crockery, and being able to sit comfortably and safely at mealtimes may make it easier for children to serve themselves and learn to eat independently.
- Encourage children to try all the foods offered but never force a child to eat.
- Meals are social occasions, so try to sit with children when they are eating and talk with them. If possible, eat with them. This can be used to help encourage good table manners and if you are eating healthily it sets a good example to the children.
- Some children eat slowly. It is important to ensure that they are given enough time to eat.
- Avoid distractions such as television during meals and snacks.
- Encourage children to try foods from other cultures to promote a respect for other cultures and traditions.

## Meal and snack suggestions

Children need to eat a variety of foods every day to ensure that they get all the nutrients they need for healthy growth and development. This section outlines a number of ideas for meals including hot main meals, lighter meals, vegetarian choices and desserts. Suggestions for between-meal snacks and drinks are also included.

### Main meal ideas include:

- Chickpea and vegetable casserole with pasta.
- Vegetable lasagne with salad or vegetable sticks.
- Vegetable risotto (add onions, peas, mushrooms, tinned tomatoes) topped with grated cheese.
- Vegetable curry with rice/naan bread.
- Tuna, sweetcorn and pasta bake with sliced or cherry tomatoes.
- Grilled fish fingers with baked beans and boiled potatoes.
- Fish in white sauce or oven-baked fish in breadcrumbs with mashed potato and mixed frozen vegetables.
- Fish pie (potato topping) with peas.
- Oily fish (eg salmon) with champ and broccoli or spinach.
- Kedgeree.
- Baked breaded fish with oven chips and mushy peas.
- Quiche with tomato and baked potato.
- Chicken casserole with leeks, carrots and mashed potatoes.
- Chicken kebab with salad vegetables and pitta bread.
- Chicken curry with rice/naan bread.
- Chicken and broccoli bake.
- Chicken fried rice (use a mixture of white and brown rice).
- Chicken fajitas.
- Roast chicken with carrots/parsnips and roast potatoes.
- Savoury mince\* with mashed potatoes, frozen peas and sweetcorn.
- Homemade beef burgers\* (grilled or oven baked) with a wholemeal or white bap, lettuce and tomato.
- Beef casserole with carrots and turnip, plus boiled potatoes.
- Spaghetti bolognese\* (add extra vegetables into the bolognese sauce, eg mushrooms, tomatoes, peppers, onions etc).
- Shepherd's pie\* (add lentils, onions and carrots to the pie) served with cauliflower, broccoli or green beans.
- Mince lasagne\* with salad vegetables (add grated vegetables eg onion, carrot, courgette to the sauce).
- Beef stir-fry with noodles.
- Potato topped steak pie and turnip.
- Irish stew.
- Lamb casserole with baked potatoes and peas or sweetcorn.
- Pork, pineapple and pepper casserole served with boiled rice.
- Boiled ham with cabbage and boiled potatoes.
- Roast pork or oven-baked pork steaks with roast potatoes, broad beans or peas plus gravy.
- Sausages, mashed potatoes, peas and onion gravy.
- Pizza with extra vegetable topping (eg peppers, mushrooms, sweetcorn, onion).

*\*Soya mince or textured vegetable protein (TVP) may be used to replace minced meat in these dishes.*



### Lighter meal ideas include:

- Sandwiches, paninis or tortilla wraps with a variety of fillings, (for example egg and onion, cheese and tomato, cold chicken, beef or pork with salad vegetables, tuna and sweetcorn) served with vegetable sticks and/or slices of fruit.
- Baked potatoes with baked beans.
- Scrambled eggs on toast with tomatoes.
- Macaroni cheese with chopped fresh tomato.
- Omelette with added mixed vegetables served with white, wholemeal bread or wheaten bread.
- Homemade vegetable or lentil soup with bread or rolls.
- Hummus on toast with sliced tomatoes and cucumber and carrot sticks.
- Slice of tortilla (Spanish omelette) made with egg, potato, mixed vegetables and chopped ham, served with salad vegetables.
- Mini-pizza using a soda farl sliced in half and topped with chopped tomato and cheese.
- Tuna melt made with tuna, chopped pepper, sweetcorn and grated cheese.
- Couscous with roasted vegetables.

**Note:** These, or similar ideas, can be used as substantial afternoon snacks if a child is not picked up until late in the evening and their evening meal is delayed.





### Dessert ideas include:

- Chopped fresh or tinned fruit on its own or with unsweetened natural yogurt or fromage frais.
- Baked apple with custard.
- Fruit crumble with custard.
- Fruit salad.
- Rice pudding and tinned peaches.
- Milk-based instant dessert with banana.
- Kiwi fruit served in an egg cup.
- Sponge pudding topped with tinned fruit and fromage frais.
- Bread and butter pudding.

Fruit and unsweetened natural yogurt should be available daily. A variety of fruit and milk based desserts (for example apple crumble) or dairy-based desserts (such as rice pudding) should be offered at least three times a week.

### Snacks

Young children need snacks between meals, as they are not usually able to eat enough at mealtimes to meet their needs for energy (calories). The best snacks are those which are sugar-free or low in added sugar and packed with nutrients. However, it is important to ensure that children are not allowed to snack freely throughout the day as this can reduce the amount that they eat at mealtimes and also increase the risk of tooth decay. A variety of snacks should be offered, for example:

- Toast or bread: offer wheaten, wholemeal, white, granary, potato bread, soda bread, crumpets or bread muffins with a little butter or spread. Avoid using sugary spreads, such as jam, honey or chocolate spread.
- Sandwiches: suitable fillings include sliced banana, spreading cheese, egg, tomato, tuna and lean meat such as ham, chicken or turkey.





- Pieces of fresh fruit: try sliced or chopped apples, bananas, pears, kiwi fruit, grapes, tomato and other seasonal fruits. Dried fruit is not recommended as a snack between meals as it contains concentrated sugar and may cause tooth decay. However, it can be included in main meals.
- Raw vegetables: carrot, cucumber, peppers, celery can all be sliced up or cut into sticks.
- Chopped fruit (eg banana, apple or mandarin orange) can be added to unsweetened natural yogurt or fromage frais. Fruit tinned in its own juice rather than syrup can also be used.
- Cereal and milk: offer unsweetened varieties, eg Weetabix, Cornflakes, Ready Brek, Puffed Wheat.
- Sweetened juices, squashes and minerals/ fizzy drinks are not recommended. If used, they should be confined to main meals and squashes and juices should be well diluted. Sugar-free drinks contain artificial sweeteners, which are not recommended for young children.

**Note:** It is recommended that these snacks and drinks should also be provided to any older children who are cared for after school.

For guidance on suitable snacks and drinks for infants up to 12 months refer to pages 13 and 14.

Foods and drinks which are high in sugar, eg sweets, biscuits, flavoured yogurts and desserts, are most damaging to teeth when they are taken between meals. This doesn't mean that they should never be taken, but they are less damaging to teeth if they are taken at the end of meals.

## Drinks

- Children should be introduced to a cup from six months to protect their developing teeth. From one year, all drinks should be from a cup and the use of a feeding bottle should be discontinued.
- Milk or water is the recommended drink for young children. Pasteurised whole and semi-skimmed cows', sheep's and goats' milk can be given as a drink from 1 year.
- Pure unsweetened fruit juice, well diluted (one part juice to ten parts water) can be given at main meals.

## Sample menu for a full day

The sample menu below shows an example of how a child's daily nutritional requirements could be met.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<b>Breakfast</b>	Porridge with sultanas and milk  Glass of pure orange juice, well diluted	Weetabix with sliced banana and milk  Glass of pure orange juice, well diluted	Rice Krispies with milk  Slices of apple  Glass of pure apple juice well diluted	Ready Brek with chopped apricots and milk  Glass of pure orange juice, well diluted	Corn Flakes with milk  Mandarin orange  Glass of pure orange juice, well diluted
<b>Mid morning snack, eg at 10.00am</b>	Milk  Wholemeal toast  Banana	Milk  Tinned fruit (in its own juice)  Unsweetened natural yogurt	Milk  Unsweetened natural yogurt  Kiwi fruit	Milk  Finger food selection eg slices of grapes, celery, red pepper, tomatoes	Milk  Potato bread  Apple slices
<b>Lunch, eg at 12 noon – 1.00pm</b>  <b>Water and milk available to drink</b>	Fish pie  Peas  Rice pudding  Apple purée	Roast chicken  Mashed potatoes  Cabbage  Fruit crumble and custard	Irish stew  Mixed vegetables  Milk-based instant dessert with banana	Vegetable curry  Sweetcorn  Naan bread/rice  Fruit salad	Lasagne  Salad vegetables  Stewed fruit and custard
<b>Mid-afternoon snack, eg at 3.00pm</b>	Milk  Vegetable sticks	Milk  Plain popcorn  Sliced pear	Milk  bread muffin toasted  Banana	Milk  Breadsticks  Cheese sticks	Milk  Fruit  Unsweetened natural yogurt
<b>Tea, eg at 5.00pm</b>  <b>Water and milk available to drink</b>	Sandwiches, eg egg, onion and tomato  Small piece of fruit chopped up	Tuna and sweetcorn pasta  Vegetable sticks  Grapes chopped in half	Spanish omlette (onions, tomatoes and potatoes)  Sweetcorn  Unsweetened natural yogurt with tinned fruit (in juice)	Baked beans  Toast  Cheddar cheese  Semolina and tinned pears (in their own juice)	Couscous salad (salad vegetables, mixed beans)  Sliced hardboiled egg  Seasonal fruit kebabs



# Children with individual dietary needs

Childcare providers may care for children with a variety of dietary requirements. The most common are outlined below. You should discuss each child's particular needs with the parents. More detailed information and advice is available from either the child's health visitor or local registered dietitian. The Early Years Team or the child's health visitor can put you in contact with a registered dietitian.

## Children following a vegetarian diet

People who follow vegetarian diets may eat or exclude a variety of different types of food. If you are caring for a child who is following a vegetarian diet it is essential to discuss with a parent what foods the child can eat. For example, some children may avoid only red meat, but eat chicken, fish, eggs, milk and dairy products such as cheese or yogurt, whereas strict vegans exclude all foods of animal origin.

A vegetarian diet is a healthy diet providing that a wide variety of foods from all main food groups are eaten. When meat and animal products are excluded from meals it is important that the nutrients they provide are obtained from other foods. Vegetarian sources of protein should be provided at each meal. For more information and meal suggestions, refer to the notes on pages 22 (beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins) and 27 (main meal ideas).

To ensure that all nutrients are provided by vegetarian choices, a vegetable source of protein (eg pulses such as dried peas, beans and lentils) should always be eaten with a grain/cereal food (eg bread, rice, pasta), for example, chickpea casserole with pasta, lentil stew with rice or beans on wholemeal toast.

**Note:** Nuts are also a vegetable source of protein. However whole nuts should not be given to under fives because of the risk of choking. It is also advised that peanuts and products containing them are not used within the childcare setting – refer to the section on peanut allergy on page 33.

## Children from ethnic communities following a traditional diet

When planning menus, childcare providers must accommodate the traditions and customs of ethnic communities. Childcare providers should take parental guidance on special dietary requirements as some families follow these traditions more strictly than others. Details of the foods traditionally avoided by particular groups are shown below:

- Hindus do not eat beef and most are vegetarian. Periods of fasting are common.
- Sikhs do not eat beef and many are vegetarian. Meat must come from other animals killed by 'one blow to the head'.
- Muslims do not eat pork, pork products or shellfish. Meat from other animals must be halal (killed in accordance with Islamic law). Uncertainty about the content of other foods would mean their exclusion from the diet, eg pastries and puddings which may contain pig fat. Many savoury baby products contain meat which is not halal, and these products are unacceptable to Muslims. Muslims observe regular periods of fasting, including the month of Ramadan.
- Jews do not eat pork. All other meat must be kosher (ie slaughtered according to Jewish law). Meat and dairy foods must not be consumed together. Only fish with scales and fins are eaten. Products from animals that have not been prepared by the kosher method are also avoided, eg gelatine, animal fats. Jewish children should not be offered cheese that contains rennet or biscuits that contain animal fat.
- Rastafarians do not consume any animal products except milk. No canned or processed foods may be eaten and no salt may be added to food. Food should be organic.
- Chinese people generally exclude dairy produce. The Chinese community also believes that good health depends on a balance of two opposite elements in the body: yin (referred to as 'cold') and yang (referred to as 'hot'). Infant formula milk is regarded as 'very hot'. Where a mother has chosen to bottlefeed her baby, she may want to give her baby 'cooling' drinks such as cooled boiled water.

## Children with special dietary needs

### Providing special diets

Special diets for children with coeliac disease (a gluten-free diet), diabetes or those who need to avoid milk or nuts and all products made from them can be quite complex. Parents should be able to provide a diet sheet about their child's specific dietary needs which has been prepared by a registered dietitian.

### Food allergy

Many parents believe that their child is sensitive to certain foods. However the true incidence of food allergy is likely to be much lower than reported. Parents requesting special diets for their children because of food allergy should be encouraged to seek medical advice. It is unwise to restrict food choice among young children without professional help and advice.



## Peanut allergy

Peanut allergy is usually severe – sensitive individuals may even react to peanut dust. All nuts and nut products must be avoided, including peanut butter. Care should also be taken to prevent accidental consumption of food containing nuts or nut products or food that has come into contact with them.

**As a precautionary measure, it is recommended that childcare providers should not provide peanuts or foods containing them, eg peanut butter, to any child in their care.**

Children with peanut allergy are advised to carry identification and may require a pre-filled syringe of adrenaline (eg epipen) which can be administered if they have a reaction.

The latest advice states that if there is a history of allergy in your child's immediate family (if parents or brothers or sisters have an allergy such as asthma, eczema, hay fever or other types of allergy), speak to your GP, health visitor or medical allergy specialist. Seek advice early, before the age of six months, the stage for introducing solid foods.<sup>†</sup>

## Fussy eaters

It is quite normal for an infant or child to refuse a food occasionally. However, if a child continually refuses food, the parent or guardian should be informed. If a child refuses a snack or meal, gently encourage them to eat. If they refuse to eat even after gentle encouragement, the following suggestions may be helpful.

- Remove the food without making a fuss or passing judgement and offer food at the next meal or snack time.
- Keeping your attitude friendly and relaxed will help children to feel that eating is a pleasurable way to satisfy hunger rather than a battleground.
- Small helpings may be better accepted. Second helpings can then be offered if appropriate.
- Do not try to bribe children to eat food they do not want with the reward of a pudding or sweet snack.
- It may be useful to adopt the approach that a food refused is 'not liked today'. If a food is refused, try it again a few days later; changing the form a food is given in may make it more acceptable (eg offering tinned tomato in bolognese sauce instead of tomato sauce on a pizza).
- Consider possible reasons for the food refusal, such as drinking continually throughout the day, or frequent large snacks between meals, as both of these can reduce the appetite for main meals.
- **Never force a child to eat.**

<sup>†</sup> Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition, 2018. *Feeding in the first year of life*. Available at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b48c28aed915d481c04f1e2/SACN\\_report\\_on\\_Feeding\\_in\\_the\\_First\\_Year\\_of\\_Life.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b48c28aed915d481c04f1e2/SACN_report_on_Feeding_in_the_First_Year_of_Life.pdf) Accessed 10 March 2025.



# Food safety

Food safety is an important issue when caring for the under fives. The areas where food is stored, prepared and served should be safe, clean and hygienic. Extra care is needed for babies and young children as they may have a lower resistance to food poisoning.

**Listed below are some general points on food safety:**

- Always wash hands (yours and the children's) with soap and warm water before and after handling food and always after touching the dustbin, pets, changing nappies or going to the toilet.
- Keep your kitchen clean and dry.
- Don't use the same knife or chopping boards for raw meat, cooked food and fresh vegetables without washing them between times. Ideally, keep a separate chopping board for raw meat.
- When shopping, take chilled or frozen food home as quickly as possible.
- Keep your fridge/freezer at the correct temperature – get a fridge thermometer. Fridges should be kept at 5°C or below and freezers at –18°C or below.
- If parents are supplying food for their children, make sure anything perishable is stored in the fridge straight away.
- Cook food thoroughly.
- Store raw and cooked food separately.
- Check use-by dates and always use food within the recommended time.
- Reheat food thoroughly and do not reheat it more than once.
- Keep pets and their feeding bowls out of the kitchen.



**Note:** More detailed information and advice on food hygiene is available from the environmental health department of your local district council.

See page 14 for information on breast and formula milk. Further advice and information on bottle feeding including preparing feeds safely, sterilising equipment and practical tips can be obtained from either the child's health visitor, the Early Years Team or the Public Health Agency's leaflet, *Bottlefeeding* which can be accessed at: [www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/bottlefeeding](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/bottlefeeding)



# Rewards and celebrations

Rewards for good behaviour and the celebration of special occasions, such as birthdays, often involve sugary foods and drinks. The frequent consumption of sugary foods and drinks can adversely affect dental and general health; therefore they should be limited.

## Encouraging good behaviour

Children should be given encouragement for good behaviour. This can be in the form of smiles or praise, or simply giving the child attention. This form of positive encouragement is preferable to the practice of giving items such as sweets, chocolates, small toys etc.

## Parties and special occasions

Depending on how frequently these are celebrated you may want to try some of the following:

- Discuss with parents what foods and drinks are appropriate for them to provide – encourage healthier choices.
- Offer some ideas for healthier party food, for example:
  - sandwiches cut into fancy shapes;
  - finger sized pieces of pizza and quiche;
  - cocktail sausages (oven-bake on a rack to allow fat to drain away and cut into small pieces for small children to avoid the risk of choking).
  - plain, unsalted popcorn;
  - fruit punch (diluted pure fruit juice – 1 part juice to 10 parts water – with chopped fruit added);
  - fruit and raw vegetables cut into fingers or fancy shapes.
- Focus on the sense of occasion rather than simply the supply of party food.
- Hold a theme party and encourage children to dress up. Theme days can also be used to encourage children to try foods from other cultures, and to promote a respect for other cultures and traditions, eg St Patrick's Day, American Independence Day (4th July) , Pancake Tuesday, Indian festival of lights (Diwali), Chinese New Year etc.
- Encourage children to play active party games, eg musical statues; blind man's bluff; musical chairs; have a mini disco.



# Physical activity for children

There is good scientific evidence that being physically active is good for our health. For children and young people, being active has a wide range of benefits, for example it:


- helps to develop physical skills such as agility, balance and coordination;
- builds up muscle strength and overall fitness;
- helps them develop social skills;
- helps them to avoid becoming overweight or obese;
- improves concentration in school;
- contributes to a healthy appetite;
- helps to reduce the risk of ill health in later life.

New UK-wide Chief Medical Officer guidelines were published in 2011 and updated in 2019, which set out recommendations for physical activity for all age groups. These recommend that:

- children should be encouraged to be active from birth, particularly through floor-based play and water-based activities in a safe environment;
- the amount of time that young children are inactive, either restrained (eg in a high chair or car seat) or sitting (except time spent sleeping) should be kept to a minimum;
- all children of pre-school age, who are able to walk without help, should be active for at least 180 minutes each day, spread throughout the day;
- children and young people aged 5-18 should engage in moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity for an average of at least 60 minutes a day across the week.







It has been shown that children who develop an active lifestyle when they are young are more likely to maintain a healthy active lifestyle as they get older. They should be encouraged to be active all year round and not just in the summer months. Visits to parks and play areas, going for walks and playing games both outdoors and indoors should all be encouraged.

Outdoor play provides great opportunities for learning, for example children can learn about the environment around them. Playing with other children can develop their social skills and help build their confidence. **Childcare providers should ensure that children have access to outdoor play every day.**

Exposure to summer sunlight in outdoor play helps to ensure an adequate supply of vitamin D, which is essential for healthy bone development. Childcare providers should agree guidelines with parents on how long children can remain outdoors and on the use of sunscreens and protective clothing such as sun hats. Babies under one year should be kept out of the sun. Older children should be kept in the shade during the hottest part of the day, between 11.00am and 3.00pm.

# Preparing a nutrition policy

Developing a nutrition policy is an excellent way to demonstrate your commitment to the children in your care. It also provides an opportunity to ensure that the recommendations and advice about healthy eating are agreed between you and the children's parents or guardians.

Writing a nutrition policy is not as difficult as it may sound. Most childcare providers will have a number of unwritten 'rules' about eating and drinking. Developing a policy is just a way of recording these 'rules' and provides an opportunity for you to discuss healthy eating with parents and how it will apply to their child/children.

A policy may also be useful in cases where parents are providing their own food. It could, for example, be used to agree suitable alternatives should a child refuse the food the parent has provided. A policy should not be seen as fixed, but open to regular review.

Some suggestions about the type of information that could be included in such a policy are outlined below.

## **Introductory statement**

I aim to offer a high quality service to the children I care for and their parents.

I recognise the need to encourage healthy eating habits from an early age to help children to reach their full potential in terms of growth and development.

## **Meals**

- Well-balanced and nutritious meals are provided for the children.
- All puddings provided are based on fruit and/or milk.
- Fresh fruit is always available.
- Processed meat products such as sausages, chicken nuggets, burgers and fish bites, if provided, are limited to once a week.
- Healthier cooking methods are used, eg boiling, grilling, steaming, microwaving, stewing, rather than frying.
- Special diets are respected. Parents will be asked to provide a copy of the diet sheet from a registered dietitian or specific guidance in agreement with the child's doctor.
- Cultural dietary habits are respected. Parents should provide details of these.
- Mealtimes are used as an opportunity to encourage good table manners. For example, whenever possible children and adults eat together.





## Snacks and drinks

- Snacks provided are healthy and nutritious.
- Sweets and fizzy drinks are not offered.
- Snacks should be sugar-free to avoid causing damage to teeth.
- Fresh fruit is regularly offered as a healthy snack.
- Whole or semi-skimmed milks, including goats' and sheep's milks, or water is provided for children as a drink between meals.
- If juices and squashes are given, these are well-diluted and only given at mealtimes to avoid causing damage to teeth.

For more ideas of what could be included see sections on *Snacks and drinks* on pages 13–14 and 29–30.

## Rewards and special occasions

- Praise and attention are used to help develop children's self-esteem and to act as a positive reward for good behaviour.
- If other forms of reward are used, they do not conflict with the healthy eating principles that are in everyday use. For example, sweets and sugary drinks are not given as rewards.
- On special occasions the focus will be on the occasion rather than providing fatty or sugary foods or drinks.

For more ideas of what could be included see *Rewards and celebrations*, page 36.

## Activities

A healthy lifestyle is promoted through a variety of activities including active play, outings, cookery, stories, music, etc.

# Nutrition checklist

This checklist has been provided to help childcare providers see at a glance that they are providing a healthy diet for the children in their care. As there is a great variation in the number of meals and snacks that children receive while in childcare, the checklist covers meals and snacks provided over a full day – select the ones which are relevant to you.

This can also be used on its own or with a nutrition policy, to show parents what food/meals are provided, or as an agreement for an individual child which could include likes and dislikes or any other relevant information about the child's eating habits. It is important to vary the meals and snacks served over the week, and between weeks, to ensure that children get the opportunity to try a variety of foods.

	Yes	No	Comments
<b>Breakfast</b>			
Bread or toast is always available.			
Cereals are always available (unsweetened breakfast cereals are preferred, eg porridge, Weetabix, Cornflakes, Rice Krispies).			
Suitable choices are provided for babies and infants.			
<b>Midday meal</b>			
One portion of food from the <i>Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins</i> group is provided.			
At least one portion from the <i>Fruit and vegetables</i> group is provided.			
At least one portion is provided from the <i>Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates</i> group.			
Desserts are based on fruit and milk.			
(See pages 43 and 44 for details of food groups)			



	Yes	No	Comments
<b>Evening meal (if provided)</b>			
One portion of food from the <i>Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins</i> group is provided.			
At least one portion from the <i>fruit and vegetables</i> group is provided.			
At least one portion is provided from the <i>Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates</i> group.			
Desserts are based on fruit and milk.			
(See pages 43 and 44 for details of food groups)			
<b>Snacks between meals</b>			
Morning and afternoon snacks are served at regular times.			
<p>Recommended snacks include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- bread*, toast*, crumpet*, bread muffin* or unsalted crackers;</li> <li>- sandwiches (eg meat, cheese, egg, fish);</li> <li>- fresh fruit;</li> <li>- raw vegetables;</li> <li>- cheese;</li> <li>- unsweetened natural yogurt, unsweetened fromage frais;</li> <li>- low-sugar cereal and milk.</li> </ul> <p>(*all served without jam, honey, marmalade, chocolate spread).</p>			
Children are not encouraged to snack freely.			
Suitable snacks are served for infants.			
<b>Drinks</b>			
These are sugar free.			
Water and milk are the most suitable drinks at all times.			
Unsweetened pure fruit juices and squashes, if used, are well diluted (1 part juice to 10 parts water) and only given at mealtimes.			

	Yes	No	Comments
<b>Milk and dairy foods</b>			
300–600ml (½–1 pt) of milk per day is provided for each child			
<b>or</b> 2–3 portions of milk-based foods are provided each day. One portion is 25g (1 oz) of hard cheese or 125g carton of yogurt or a bowl of milk pudding.			
Breastmilk or infant formula is provided as the main drink for infants under 12 months.			
<b>Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein</b>			
One portion of food from the <i>Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins</i> group is provided at each main meal, eg: beef, lamb, pork, liver, kidney, ham, poultry, fish, fish fingers, egg*, cheese*, beans*, lentils*, Quorn*, Tofu*, TVP* (*suitable for vegetarians).			
Red meat should be included at least twice a week as it is a good source of iron.			
Mince is acceptable as red meat.			
Processed meat products, eg sausages, burgers, sausage rolls, fish/chicken nuggets are served no more than once each week.			
Cultural and religious preferences are catered for where appropriate.			
<b>Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates</b>			
A variety of these foods is offered, eg bread, pasta, rice and potatoes.			
At least one portion is included at each meal. Extra servings are available if the child is hungry.			
Mashed potatoes are made with fresh potatoes and milk rather than instant potato.			
Chips or roast potatoes are served a maximum of once a week.			



	Yes	No	Comments
<b>Fruit and vegetables</b>			
A total of five child-sized portions should be provided over the day, three of which should be provided in childcare.			
A child's portion is smaller than an adult's, eg ½ piece of fresh fruit, 1 tablespoon cooked vegetables.			
A variety of types is included.			
A vitamin C rich fruit is included daily, eg orange, kiwi fruit or strawberries.			
<b>Desserts</b>			
Fruit			
Milk pudding is provided at least three days per week, eg custard, semolina, rice pudding, instant whipped dessert, yogurt. <i>'Ready to eat' custard or rice are suitable choices.</i>			
Fruit based desserts including crumbles, sponges or pastries should contain a minimum of 40% fruit and should be offered a maximum of twice a week.			
A variety of desserts is included over the menu cycle.			
<b>Spreads</b>			
Low fat spreads are not used.			
<b>Salt</b>			
No salt is added at the table.			
The minimum possible amount of salt is used in cooking. If stock cubes are used, salt is not added in cooking.			

# Contacts for more information

Enquiries should, in the first instance, be directed to the Early Years Team in your local area. They can put you in touch with other health professionals such as community dietitians and dental staff. Health visitors can be contacted directly with the parent's permission. The Northern Ireland Childminding Association is another source of information, training and support for childminders.

## **Belfast Health and Social Care Trust**

Early Years Team  
Everton Complex  
585-587 Crumlin Road  
Belfast  
BT14 7GB  
Tel: 028 9504 2811

## **Northern Health and Social Care Trust**

Northern Early Years Team  
Route House  
8e Coleraine Road  
Ballymoney  
BT53 6BP  
028 2766 1340

Northern Early Years Team  
Ballymena North Business Centre  
120 Cushendall Road  
Ballymena  
BT43 6HB  
Tel: 028 2563 5111

Northern Early Years Team  
Ellis Street  
Carrickfergus  
BT38 8AZ  
Tel: 028 9331 5112

## **Southern Health and Social Care Trust**

Early Years Team  
Lisanally House  
87 Lisanally Lane  
Armagh  
BT61 7HW  
Tel: 028 3756 4020

Early Years Team  
Banbridge Health and Care Centre  
10 Old Hospital Road  
Banbridge  
BT32 3GN  
Tel: 028 4062 1600



## South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Early Years Team  
Grove House  
Antrim Road  
Ballynahinch  
BT24 8BT  
Tel: 028 4451 3807

## Western Health and Social Care Trust

Early Years Services  
Clooney Hall Centre  
36 Clooney Terrace  
Londonderry  
BT47 6AR  
Tel: 028 7132 0950

Early Years Team  
Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital  
Omagh  
BT79 ONS  
Tel: 028 8283 5108

Children's Social Care Services  
Early Years  
Ward 10  
Level 1  
South West Acute Hospital  
124 Irvinestown Road  
Enniskillen  
BT74 6DR  
Tel: 028 6632 7734

## Northern Ireland Childminding Association

(NICMA)  
16–18 Mill Street  
Newtownards  
BT23 4LU  
Tel: 028 9181 1015  
[www.nicma.org](http://www.nicma.org)

## Early Years – the organisation for young children

6c Wildflower Way  
Boucher Road  
Belfast  
BT12 6TA  
Tel: 028 9066 2825  
[www.early-years.org](http://www.early-years.org)









