



## Early Years Nutrition:

### Summary

Good nutrition is the cornerstone of healthy development for children. Children's nutritional needs vary significantly by age group, but generally children should be given wholesome foods full of energy-giving nutrients instead of foods full of sugar, salt and saturated fat.

This topic covers the basics of effective child nutrition and looks at the nutritional guidelines that apply to early years. It also covers food problems, such as obesity and food allergies, and staff training.

### Our Duties

At Little Hearts Preschool Cranleigh we:

- We ensure that staff have a good understanding about childhood nutrition and the importance of diet in child development
- We ensure that any meals, snacks or drinks provided are healthy, balanced and nutritious, we also understand that sometimes a treat is harmless and we monitor how many times a week the children are exposed to treat foods.
- We ensure that fresh drinking water is available at all times
- We obtain, records and act on information from parents about a child's dietary needs
- We ensure that staff understand the importance of differences in cultural and ethical values in relation to food

Early years staff who are responsible for food handling or preparation will:

- Ensure they follow safe food preparation procedures
- ensure that the needs of children with specific cultural requirements are respected.

### The Importance of Child Nutrition

Diet and nutrition are vitally important in the lives of young children. A varied, nutritious diet is fundamental for proper growth and development and is essential for concentration, growth and to support learning. A good diet in childhood can also help children resist infections and can reduce the risk of ill health later in life.

A poor diet, on the other hand, is associated with a range of health and behavioural problems. Poor energy intake can stunt growth or cause obesity. Poor iron intake can lead to the development of iron-deficiency anaemia, which in turn is associated with frequent infections, poor weight gain, developmental delay and behavioural disorders.

The early years are a crucial time in shaping the food habits of children and provide an opportunity to intervene to reduce health inequalities across communities. Research confirms that healthy eating habits in the years before school influence growth, development and academic achievement in later life.

There is evidence that the infant years are particularly important. Studies show 90% of the total growth of the brain takes place during the first three years of life, and there is a critical period of development in the first six months of infancy.

If ensuring good nutrition in the early years is important, so too are the messages that we give children about food and how they learn to relate to it. Messages about healthy food and eating.

## Promoting Healthy Eating

The promotion of healthy eating for young children is a key role of early years services. Eating a healthy diet, maintaining a healthy weight and being physically active during the first few years of life is vital in the development of children. Early years services are well placed to support parents in establishing good eating habits in their children. Nurseries and childminders play a big part in helping parents become more confident about how to best feed and nourish their children as well as accessing ways of keeping themselves fit and healthy.

An adequate diet and nutrition for the young ensures that they get the best start in life and it can have a powerful impact on a child's future development, ensuring that they develop healthy food choices and eating habits. Not all children receive sufficient support from home in this respect and in some cases, the early years provider is well placed to play an important part in developing healthy eating behaviours.

## Food and Drink Guidelines

All nutritional guidelines stress the need for a healthy and balanced diet for under 5s which includes:

- starchy foods
- fruit and vegetables
- meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein
- milk and dairy foods.

The guidelines state that one of the basic principles of healthy eating is achieving variety in the diet, as eating a wide range of different foods provides the best chance of getting a healthy balance of nutrients. The guidance therefore recommends that meals and snacks offered by early years providers should include a variety of food and drinks from these four food groups each day.

The table below is included in the guidelines to provide an overview of the four food groups.

<b>Food groups</b>	<b>Examples of food included</b>	<b>Main nutrients provided</b>	<b>Recommended servings</b>
Starchy foods	Bread, potatoes and sweet potatoes, starchy root vegetables, pasta, noodles, rice, other grains, breakfast cereals	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
Fruit and vegetables	Fresh, frozen, canned, dried and juiced fruit and vegetables, and pulses	Carotenes (a form of vitamin A), vitamin	Five portions each day. Provide a portion as part of each main

		C, zinc, iron, and fibre	meal (breakfast, lunch and tea) and with some snacks
Meat, fish, eggs, beans and non-dairy sources of protein	Meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, eggs, 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)
Milk and dairy foods	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

## Starchy foods

Starchy foods, such as potatoes, rice, pasta, bread, breakfast cereals and oats, should be included as a portion in all meals along with fruit and vegetables. They provide energy and fibre and, because they are bulky foods, they also tend to be filling. Most starchy foods are also rich in B vitamins, which are important for helping the body release energy from food. People often think that starchy foods are fattening but most starchy foods are actually naturally low in fat.

Wholegrain starchy foods include wholemeal bread and bread products, wholewheat pasta, brown rice, oats and wholegrain breakfast cereals. It is good practice to provide wholegrain starchy foods for at least one breakfast, lunch and tea each week. Young children can have some wholegrain starchy foods but should not eat only wholegrain options, as this may fill them up before they have taken in the energy they need.

## Fruit and vegetables

This group includes fresh fruit and vegetables, frozen and tinned fruit, dried fruit such as sultanas and raisins and fruit juices. Fruit and vegetables are high in fibre, low in calories and fat, and are a good source of vitamins and minerals. Nutritional experts believe that children should aim to eat five portions each day.

When cooking fresh vegetables it is important not to overcook them. Some nutrients are destroyed by heat and others leach into the water. If vegetables are boiled, cover them with as little water as possible. Alternatively, steam or microwave them. When buying fruit juices avoid brands with added sugar, glucose syrup or dextrose.

Some canned fruit and vegetables contain added salt and sugar. Low salt and sugar versions should be preferred. Fruit juice can count as only one portion of fruit each day however often it is provided.

## Meat and fish

Animal products are generally rich in protein, which is essential for the growth and repair of cells. Meat and fish is also a good source of iron and zinc, important elements in a healthy diet. Iron is used by the body in the formation of red blood cells to transport oxygen around the body and a deficiency of dietary iron can lead to anaemia. Oily fish provides omega 3 fatty acids, vitamin A and vitamin D.

Protein foods should be eaten in moderation as many also contain high levels of fat and salt. The fat content and proportion of saturated fat to overall fat content of meat and meat products varies depending on the type of animal, the cut of meat and whether or not it is processed.

## **Milk and dairy products**

Milk and dairy foods are also rich in protein and provide more than half of the calcium in the typical UK diet — and in one of the easiest forms to be absorbed into the body.

Calcium is important in blood clotting, controlling blood pressure, helping muscles to contract and relax and for healthy bones and teeth.

In children aged 1-3 there is rapid development of the teeth and bones. Calcium, vitamin D, phosphorus, protein and other minerals are essential for this stage of development and are particularly well absorbed from milk and milk products.

- Children over the age of two can have semi-skimmed milk if they are growing well and eating a healthy, balanced diet.
- Providers should avoid skimmed milk and skimmed milk products, as these are low in fat and do not provide enough energy for children under five.
- Unsweetened calcium fortified soya milk can be used as a non-dairy alternative to cows milk for children aged over one year, and can be given as a main drink from two years.

## **Fatty and sugary foods**

This group includes butter and margarine, cooking fats and oils, cakes and biscuits, puddings, ice cream, chocolate and sugary drinks. Fats are actually essential to the body's wellbeing and are necessary for energy and warmth. However, high intakes of the wrong forms of fat can lead to weight gain and risk factors associated with coronary heart disease.

There are two main types of fat: saturated and unsaturated. Saturated fats are mainly from animal sources such as butter, lard, meat and dairy products. Unsaturated fats can be monounsaturated or polyunsaturated. Monounsaturated fats are found in olive oil and rapeseed oil while polyunsaturated fats are found in vegetable oils such as sunflower oil and in oily fish such as herring, mackerel, salmon and sardines. They are also found in margarines labelled as high in polyunsaturates.

Young children need fat in their diet to ensure they get enough energy. However, if they eat too much fat they 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.

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" that 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.

## **Dietary fibre**

Insoluble fibre from wholegrain breakfast cereals, wholemeal bread and wholemeal rice and pasta helps to prevent constipation and maintain a regular bowel. Preventing constipation also means that waste products pass through the body more quickly and this is thought to help protect against bowel cancer.

## Vitamins and minerals

Vitamins and minerals are necessary for the maintenance of skin, bones, teeth, muscles, blood cells, the immune system and eyesight. A wide variety of foods contain them but overcooking and preparing fruit and vegetables in advance, or leaving them in water, is thought to destroy them.

## Fluids

Fluids are an essential and often overlooked part of the diet. The best fluid is plain water although others, such as juices, can contain vitamins. Water should be available at all times and should be served at mealtimes and at intervals during the day.

Nutritional and dental experts are united in agreeing that sugary and/or fizzy drinks should not feature as part of pre-school children's diet as they are associated with tooth decay and can contribute to poor nutritional health and excessive weight gain. Such drinks should be strongly discouraged.

We do not offer fruit squash and discourage parents from bringing it in. Pure unsweetened fruit juice can be a good source of vitamin C but should be distinguished from fruit drinks which contain very little or no fruit juice and are often high in added sugars and acids.

*Voluntary Food and Drink Guidelines for Early Years Settings in England* state that children need six to eight drinks (each of 100–150ml) each day to make sure they get enough fluid. The guidelines also state that children may need more drinks in hot weather or after extra physical activity as they can dehydrate quite quickly.

## Nutritional Guidelines for Children Aged One to Five

Between the age of 12 months and 2 years, a child gains about 10 pounds in weight. They are growing quickly and have high energy and nutrient requirements for their size. However, 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.

Nutritional experts advise that a low-fat, high-fibre diet is generally not appropriate for young children aged under two years as it may not provide enough energy, fat, iron or zinc, and may be too high in fibre. Between the ages of two and five years, the guidance points out, children should gradually move towards the diet recommended for older children and adults, with less energy provided from fat, and more fibre.

The nutrition of toddlers has as much to do with learning good eating habits as it has to do with what foods are being eaten. The idea is to encourage positive eating habits that will support continued normal weight as the child grows. This means that food should be introduced in a variety of nutritious and inviting ways.

## Food Allergies

It is very important that any food allergies are identified during the registration of a new child. Information on food preferences and medical or food allergies should always be asked for if the parents do not volunteer it and a note entered into the child's records.

Food allergies are estimated to affect 1–2% of the adult population and are more prevalent in infants and children.

An allergic reaction can be produced by a tiny amount of a food ingredient that a person is sensitive to. Symptoms of an allergic reaction can range from mild itching around the mouth to symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhoea, wheezing and on occasion anaphylactic shock.

Allergies to certain foods, such as peanuts and peanut products, other nuts, seeds and their derivatives, and shellfish, can be particularly acute. Those suffering from a severe food allergy need to know the exact ingredients in their food, because even a tiny amount of the allergenic food could kill them.

### **EU Food Information for Consumers Regulation 1169/2011**

The EU Food Information for Consumers Regulation 1169/2011 requires food businesses to provide allergy information on “unpackaged” or “loose” food sold or served.

The regulations apply to a wide range of businesses, including early years services.

For food businesses that provide non-pre-packed food, such as early years provisions, the Regulation introduced a requirement to provide information on allergenic ingredients, specifically the 14 allergens identified in Annex II of the legislation:

- celery
- cereals containing gluten
- crustaceans
- egg and egg products
- fish and fish products
- lupin
- molluscs
- mustard
- sesame seeds
- soya
- sulphur dioxide
- peanuts
- nuts
- milk.

Existing regulations already covered those who produce pre-packed foods, but these too have been updated to improve the labelling of allergenic ingredients and to cover the 14 specified allergens.

When handling and preparing foods, we consider the risk of allergen cross-contamination between foods.

We ensure that we know which children suffer from an allergy and to which foods and that staff know what to do if a child suffers an allergic reaction.

## Obesity

Obesity, particularly childhood obesity, is considered by the World Health Organization (WHO) to be a major challenge in modern society. Some estimates indicate that one in five children in the UK are already overweight or obese by the time they reach school age.

Obesity is generally defined as being overweight to a degree that a child's health is affected. It is generally caused by a combination of an unhealthy diet — including too much food with a high fat or sugar content — and not enough exercise.

Obesity can cause a range of health problems. These include problems with the joints and bones, hypoventilation, high blood pressure, high levels of blood fats and an increased risk of diabetes which is normally a disease seen in adults in later life. As well as physical health problems, being overweight can also cause emotional problems and can affect a child's confidence and self-esteem.

The eating patterns established in the first few years of life influence health during childhood and into adulthood. Early years providers can therefore do a great deal to promote healthy eating by ensuring that the diet provided is a well-balanced and varied one. High fat or sugary foods should be avoided, including fizzy drinks, and vegetables and fruit should be encouraged.

Children should never be put on a weight loss diet without medical advice and supervision.

We ensure that the children receive ample opportunities to exercise and be aware of healthy exercise is good for us.

The number of children under five who are overweight or obese worldwide has risen to 41 million, from 31 million in 1990, according to a report by an independent panel commissioned by WHO.

## List of Relevant Legislation

- Breastfeeding etc. (Scotland) Act 2005
- Food Safety Act 1990
- Health and Safety at Work, etc Act 1974
- Food Information Regulations 2014
- Requirements for School Food Regulations 2014
- Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013
- Microbiological Criteria for Foodstuffs Regulations 2005
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) 2002
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Food Labelling Regulations 1996 (as amended)
- Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992

## Further Information

### Publications

#### Government Publications

- *Childhood Obesity: A Plan for Action* (2016), HM Government
- *Example Menus for Early Years Settings in England* (2017), Public Health England
- *Food and Nutrition for Childcare Settings* (2018), Welsh Government
- *Fun First Foods: An Easy Guide to Introducing Solid Foods* (2013), available on the [NHS Scotland website](#)
- *Health and Social Care Standards: My Support, My Life* (2018)
- *Health Matters: Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life* (2016), Public Health England
- *National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for Children up to the Age of 12 Years* (April 2016), available on the [Welsh Government website](#)
- *Physical Activity Guidelines for Early Years (Under 5s) — For Children Who are Capable of Walking* (Factsheet 2) (2011), Chief Medical Officer
- *Setting the Table — Nutritional Guidance and Food Standards for Early Years Childcare Providers in Scotland* (updated 2018), NHS Health Scotland
- *Start Active, Stay Active: A Report on Physical Activity from the Four Home Countries' Chief Medical Officers* (2011), Department of Health and Social Care
- *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (2017), Department for Education
- *Sugar Reduction: The Evidence for Action* (2015), Public Health England

#### First Steps Nutrition Trust Publications

The following are available from the [First Steps Nutrition Trust website](#).

- *Eating Well for New Mums — Including Information for Breastfeeding Mothers* (2017)
- *Eating Well: Packed Lunches for 1–4 Year Olds* (2015)
- *Eating Well: Snacks for 1–4 Year Olds* (2018)
- *Eating Well Sustainably: A Guide for Early Years Settings* (updated 2018)
- *Eating Well: The First Year: A Guide to Introducing Solids and Eating Well up to Baby's First Birthday* (2015)
- *Eating Well: Vegan Infants and Under-5s* (2014)
- *Good Food Choices and Portion Sizes for 1–4 Year Olds* (2018)
- *Poster — Eating Well for 1–4 Year Olds — The Three Golden Rules*

#### Food Standards Agency Publications

The following publications are available on the [FSA website](#).

- *Allergen Information for Loose Foods: Advice on the New Food Information Regulations for Small and Medium Food Businesses* (2014), Food Standards Agency, available on the [FSA website](#)
- *Food Allergen Labelling and Information Requirements under the EU Food Information for Consumers Regulation No. 1169/2011: Technical Guidance* (2014)
- *Safer Food, Better Business for Childminders* (updated January 2018)

## Other Publications

- *Early Life Nutrition and Lifelong Health* (2009), British Medical Association Board of Science
- *Eat Better, Start Better — Guide to the Voluntary Food and Drink Guidelines for Early Years Settings in England* (updated 2017), Action for Children
- *Eat Better, Start Better — Promoting and Supporting Healthy Eating in Early Years Settings* (October 2017), Action for Children
- *Eating Well for 1–4 Year Olds: Practical Guide* (updated 2014), Caroline Walker Trust
- *Laying the Table. Recommendations for National Food and Nutrition Guidance for Early Years Settings in England* (November 2010), Advisory Panel on Food and Nutrition in Early Years
- *Nutritional Guidance for the Under Fives — Feeding Young Imaginations* (2009), Pre-school Learning Alliance
- *Paediatric Basic Life Support Guidelines* (2015), Resuscitation Council (UK)
- *The Early Years Nutrition Partnership: A Collection of Views from Partners* (May 2016), Early Years Nutrition Partnership
- *The Essential Early Years Cookbook* (2009), Pre-school Learning Alliance.

## Organisations

- **Action for Children (AFC)**
  - <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk>
  - In September 2017, AFC took over from the Children's Food Trust to lead on the Eat Better, Start Better programme designed to help improve children's food in early years settings. The charity took over support for the *Voluntary Food and Drink Guidelines for Early Years Settings in England*.
- **Allergy UK**
  - <http://www.allergyuk.org>
  - Allergy UK is a national charity dedicated to supporting the estimated 21 million allergy sufferers in the UK.
- **Association of Breastfeeding Mothers**
  - <http://abm.me.uk>
  - The association's aim is to "promote the physical and psychological health of mothers and children through education in the techniques of breastfeeding and to advance the education of the public, especially those persons concerned with the care of children on the health benefits of breastfeeding, both immediate and long term".
- **British Dietetic Association (BDA)**
  - <http://www.bda.uk.com>
  - The BDA is the UK professional body for anyone working in dietetics, in nutrition, or who has an interest in diet or food. In September 2017, the BDA took over support for the Let's Get Cooking network of school and community-based clubs set up by the Children's Food Trust. The BDA will also take on the Trust's Learning Network e-learning platform.
- **British Nutrition Foundation (BNF)**
  - <http://www.nutrition.org.uk>

- The BNF was established over 40 years ago and exists to deliver authoritative, evidence-based information on food and nutrition in the context of health and lifestyle.
- **Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH)**
- <http://www.cieh.org>
- The CIEH protects the public, supports professionals and influences policy on environmental health matters and provides work-based occupational health, safety and hygiene training.
- **Council for Awards in Care, Health and Education (CACHE)**
- <http://www.cache.org.uk>
- CACHE is one of the UK's leading sector specialist providers of high-quality qualifications in care and education.
- **Early Years Nutrition (EYN) Partnership**
- <http://www.eynpartnership.org>
- The Early Years Nutrition (EYN) Partnership is an independent social enterprise that has been launched in collaboration with the Pre-school Learning Alliance and the British Nutrition Foundation. The partnership sets standards for nutrition practice in early years provisions, providing hands-on help, delivered by a network of registered nutritionists and dieticians with experience of early years provisions.
- **First Steps Nutrition Trust**
- <http://www.firststepsnutrition.org>
- First Steps Nutrition Trust is an independent public health nutrition charity that provides information and resources to support eating well from pre-conception to five years. Resources include a range of Eating Well guides.
- **Institute of Food Science and Technology (IFST)**
- <http://www.ifst.org/>
- The IFST is an independent qualifying body for food scientists and technologists. It deals with the issues of food safety and nutrition.
- **Pre-school Learning Alliance**
- <http://www.pre-school.org.uk>
- The Pre-school Learning Alliance is an educational charity specialising in early years.
- **Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH)**
- <http://www.rsph.org.uk>
- The RSPH accredits a range of courses covering subjects such as food hygiene, health and safety, nutrition and health improvements.