



National Day Nurseries Association

★Brighter thinking  
for early years

# Factsheet

A young child with dark hair, wearing a blue and white checkered shirt, is sitting at a table and eating a piece of broccoli. The child is holding a green-handled fork in their right hand. In front of them is a plate with more broccoli. The background is a blurred indoor setting, likely a nursery or classroom.

## Healthy Eating England

# Healthy Eating (England only)

Eating well is an important part of keeping healthy. Children who eat a healthy balanced diet tend to be ill less often, and have more energy and a better attention span. Children who consume less sugary foods and drinks also have better dental health.

Young children are learning all the time from what they see as well as what they are told. Showing children where food comes from, serving regular healthy balanced and nutritious meals and snacks, sitting down with children at mealtimes, acting as good role models and cooking together are very important. This can be a great time for children to learn to enjoy good food as well as table manners and social skills.

Nursery practitioners are in an ideal position to have a positive influence – not only on the nutrition of young children, but also in developing positive attitudes towards food and healthy eating.

## Healthy eating in practice

Many early years settings have a long-established, proactive approach to ensuring that children not only have access to a wide and varied daily menu but that they nurture and develop an understanding of the origins of food, how to grow and harvest fruit and vegetables, celebrate food from around the world, and to appreciate that food is important to health.

It is important to recognise that we live in a diverse and multi-cultural society and early years providers have a fantastic opportunity to introduce new dishes for children to taste from a range of cultures.

## Role of the practitioner

Practitioners should be good role models for children by:

- Understanding the importance of a well-balanced and varied diet in a child's development
- Demonstrating a positive attitude to healthy eating and being a good role model by making healthy choices for themselves
- Sitting and eating with children at mealtimes and snacks
- Keeping mealtimes relaxed with no pressure to eat specific foods
- Providing activities and experiences to learn about where food comes from
- Exploring food groups and working closely with parents to learn about food habits at home
- Sharing menus and ideas with parents and families.

Management teams can support their own staff to develop healthy lifestyle choices by:

- Offering training opportunities about food, nutrition and healthy eating
- Arrange for staff to eat with the children at mealtimes so they experience a range of healthy foods
- Provide a bowl of fruit in the staff room
- Collate information and articles for the staff room/notice board to encourage a healthy eating lifestyle
- Encourage staff to share their favourite healthy recipes
- Provide a fridge for staff to store food and snacks
- Encourage a walk to work project (this could support fundraising for the setting)
- Hold evening exercise classes (yoga, Zumba etc.) in the setting for staff and parents.

## Menus

When creating or reviewing menus it is important to gather the views of the children eating the food, their parents and families to discover the types of meals children enjoy at home and the staff team, who can advise on which meals are eaten and which may not be popular with the children. Ask families to share their favourite healthy recipes and snacks from home. Offer taster sessions to parents when new menus are introduced and talk about the health benefits of the new meals they are sampling. Offer families copies of your recipes so they can re-create the meals in their own homes.

For example menus and guidance see: <https://bit.ly/3UEE6Cb>

Some children may bring packed lunches into the setting. Work with families and support them to make healthy choices wherever possible. For ideas and guidance on 'Healthy Packed Lunches for Early Years' share the following document with parents: <https://bit.ly/3Ej9CS>

## Activities and experiences to support healthy eating

- Provide daily menus with a range of varied, healthy, nutritious freshly cooked meals
- Provide a range of healthy snacks and drinks
- Provide utensils to support independence at mealtimes e.g. spoons, cups, water jugs
- Develop a weaning policy that can support staff to work with parents with children who are weaning
- Create healthy eating displays and information for children, families and staff

- Plan growing activities such as a vegetable garden, herb garden or planting in pots and containers. Use these in meals and when cooking with the children so they can observe the whole cycle from ground to plate
- Help children to notice the changes in food before and after cooking
- Provide a range of healthy pretend/real foods and eating utensils from different cultures in your home corner
- Liaise with parents and share information on a child's daily food intake
- Include regular cooking activities which reflect the child's interests, culture, age and stage of development
- Talk to children about foods that are nutritious and help us grow and provide us with energy to play
- Provide books with images or a range of vegetables, talk about which ones children have tasted, which ones they enjoy eating etc.

## Oral hygiene

Supporting children with oral hygiene is part of keeping healthy. There are a number of ways that nurseries can support children with their oral health, these include:

- Reduce or eliminate sugary food and provide only water or milk as drink options
- Talk to children about oral health and keeping their teeth and mouth clean and healthy, for example, brushing their teeth after meals
- Invite a local dentist/hygienist into your setting to talk to the children or take children on a visit to a local dental practice
- Provide books/stories about trips to the dentist and talk to children about their own experiences
- Provide toothbrushes and dolls as part of your continuous provision so children can include oral hygiene as part of their play
- Where possible, introduce a tooth brushing scheme into your setting and support children to brush their teeth after meals
- Share NHS guidance, with parents, on brushing children's teeth <https://bit.ly/3DWcdyG> and these short videos with the children which show the importance of eating well and regular teeth brushing: <https://bbc.in/3iBZl1u>

## Further information

Level 2 Food Safety and Hygiene – NDNA online course: <https://bit.ly/3EhQ0fR>

Healthy Eating (England only) V0.3 – 04 January 2024



National Day Nurseries Association

★Brighter thinking  
for early years

# Factsheet

Our factsheets are written by early years experts for the early years workforce. Most NDNA factsheets are free to our members.

NDNA is the national charity and membership association representing children's nurseries across the UK. We are a charity that believes in quality and sustainability, so we put our members' businesses at the very heart of ours.

We are the voice of the 21,000-strong nursery sector, an integral part of the lives of more than a million young children and their families. We provide information, training and advice to support nurseries and the 250,000 people who work in them to deliver world-class early learning and childcare.

See the full range of NDNA factsheets at [www.ndna.org.uk/factsheets](http://www.ndna.org.uk/factsheets)

*The information provided in this factsheet is for use by early years practitioners only. It has been written by early years experts but is not intended to be, and should not be relied upon, as a substitute for professional advice. NDNA has endeavoured to ensure the accuracy of the information presented in this factsheet. NDNA assumes no legal liability or responsibility for your interpretation or use of the information contained within it.*

## National Day Nurseries Association

National Early Years Enterprise Centre, Longbow Close, Huddersfield HD2 1GQ  
tel: 01484 407070 fax: 01484 407060 [info@ndna.org.uk](mailto:info@ndna.org.uk) [www.ndna.org.uk](http://www.ndna.org.uk)