



National Day Nurseries Association

★Brighter thinking
for early years

Factsheet



Healthy Eating

England

Healthy Eating (England only)

Eating well is an important part of keeping healthy. Children who eat a nutritionally balanced diet tend to be ill less often, have more energy and a better attention span. Children who don't consume sugary foods and drinks have better dental health.

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.

Young children are learning all the time from what they observe and experience. Showing children where food comes from, serving regular nutritionally balanced meals and snacks, sitting and eating with children at mealtimes and cooking together all provide excellent opportunities for children to develop an appreciation of a range of food, learn table manners and enhance social skills.

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 crucial 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 nutritious food by making healthy choices for themselves
- Sitting and eating with children at mealtimes and snacks
- Keeping mealtimes relaxed with no pressure to eat
- 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.

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. Consult 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 nutritious recipes from home. Offer taster sessions to parents when new menus are introduced and talk about the health benefits of the meals they are sampling. Offer families copies of your recipes so they can re-create the meals in their own homes.

For guidance see: <https://bit.ly/4npfXhO>

Some children may bring packed lunches into the setting. Work with families and support them to make nutritious choices wherever possible. For healthy lunch box recipes and ideas visit: <https://bit.ly/3UDvJcn>

Activities and experiences to support healthy eating

- Provide daily menus with a range of varied, nutritious freshly cooked meals
- Provide a range of nutritious 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 of children who are weaning
- Create healthy eating displays containing 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
- Encourage children to observe how food changes 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 explain how they help us grow and provide us with energy to play
- Provide books with images of a range of fruits and 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:

- Eliminate food with added sugar 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>
- PANCo training and Start Life Well award - <https://ndna.org.uk/panco/>
- Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition Guidance - <https://bit.ly/4npfXhO>

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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

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.

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