

Guidance for food and drink provision in early years settings (March 2010)

This document supports early years settings in meeting the food and drink requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework (2008). It summarises existing food and nutrition guidance to offer a clear and consistent point of reference for early years providers, practitioners and parents.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) food and drink requirements

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework sets out a requirement which states:

'Where children are provided with meals, snacks and drinks, these must be healthy, balanced and nutritious.'

'Fresh drinking water must be available at all times.'

In addition to the requirements of the EYFS framework, maintained nursery schools and nursery classes within maintained primary schools are required to meet the current mandatory food standards for school lunches outlined in Schedule 5 of the Statutory Instrument (2007) No. 2359 Education Regulations 2007 (Nutritional Standards and Requirements for School Food) (England)¹ (amended 2008 Statutory Instrument No. 1800)². The food regulations state:

'One item from each of the four food groups (fruit and vegetables, starchy foods, meat, fish and alternatives and milk and dairy foods) should be provided for each pupil at lunchtime each day.'

The food regulations will help maintained nursery schools to meet the current requirements of the EYFS framework. These regulations do not apply to settings other than maintained nurseries or to food provided at times other than lunch.

Why is healthy food and drink essential for children in early years?

Healthy eating habits in the years before school are important because they impact on growth, development and achievement in later life^{3,4,5}.

¹ Statutory Instrument 2007 No. 2359. The Education (Nutritional Standards and Requirements for School Food) (England) Regulations 2007. London: TSO

² Statutory Instrument 2008 No. 1800. The Education (Nutritional Standards and Requirements for School Food) (England)(Amendment) Regulations 2008. London: TSO.

³ Feinsein, L., Sabates, R., Sorhaindo, A., Rogers, I., Herrick, D., Northstone, K., Emmett, P. (2008). Dietary patterns related to attainment in school: the importance of early eating patterns. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. **62**. 734–9.

⁴ Gardner, D. S., Hosking, J., Metcalf, B. S., Jeffery, A. N., Voss, L. D., Wilkin, T. J. (2009). Contribution of early weight gain to childhood overweight and metabolic health: a longitudinal study (EarlyBird 36). *Pediatrics*. **123**. (1). 67–73

⁵ Wiles, N. J., Northstone, K., Emmett, P., Lewis, G. (2009). 'Junk food' diet and childhood behavioural problems: results from the ALSPAC cohort. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. **63**. 491–8.

Research confirms that eating patterns are established early in life⁶⁷⁸ therefore intervening in the early years is key to preventing obesity. Interventions to promote the initiation and duration of breastfeeding and good nutrition in early years should also reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and some cancers in later life. A healthy, varied, balanced diet and regular physical activity are identified as fundamental determinants of general health and well-being. Involving children and their parents in all aspects of provision is a central principle of the EYFS. Children can help staff prepare for snacks and meals by, for instance, helping to prepare the fruit or bake the bread and by laying the table. Meal and snack times should be occasions when children can exercise choice and learn about turn taking as well as the social and community aspects of eating and drinking with others. Talking with children and parents about the different healthy food and drink options provided helps to reinforce good life-long eating habits. It also helps practitioners to become aware of cultural, religious or medical factors that might affect a particular child's dietary requirements.

Food and drink for children up to 12 months

Advice about feeding children between birth and 12 months of age differs from that which applies to children aged one up to five years old. For more information on providing healthy food and drink to children from birth to 12 months, please refer to the Department of Health's document Birth to Five: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_107303

The Food Standards Agency:

<http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/agesandstages/children/yrtoddler/>

Or resources developed by the Start4Life campaign: www.nhs.uk/start4life

Healthy food and drink for children aged one year up to five years old

Young children aged between one and five years old are developing rapidly and are usually very active, so it is important to ensure that they are getting a balanced and varied diet which provides all the energy and nutrients their bodies need.

Children in this age group eat smaller meals than adults so it is important to provide them with regular meals and snacks rich in nutrients and containing sufficient energy (calories) to meet their needs for physical activity and growth.

⁶ Northstone, K., Emmett, P., ALSPAC Study Team, (2005). Multivariate analysis of diet in children at four and seven years of age and associations with socio-demographic characteristics. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. **59**. 751–60.

⁷ Northstone, K. and Emmett, P. M. (2008). Are dietary patterns stable throughout early and mid-childhood? A birth cohort. *British Journal of Nutrition*. **100**. 1069–76.

⁸ Skinner, J. D., Carruth, B. R., Bounds, W., Ziegler, P., Reidy, K. (2002). Do food related experiences in the first 2 years of life predict dietary variety in school-aged children? *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behaviour*. **34**. 310–315

Children should be encouraged to eat healthily, consuming a varied balanced diet and enjoying different foods. To achieve this they should be provided with foods from each of the four foods groups every day:

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

The information presented in the following tables summarises existing guidance for food and drink provided throughout the day by food group. Although the length of time that children are in childcare may vary, it is important to take this guidance into consideration when providing even only a part of a child's daily food intake.

Existing guidance on food groups for children aged one to five years (March 2009)					
Food group	Why is this food group important?	How frequent and how much to provide per day	Existing practice	Foods or practices to avoid or limit	References and where to find more information
Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods	Foods from this group provide energy, carbohydrates, fibre and B vitamins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starchy foods should be offered at every meal and are useful foods to offer as part of snacks Wholegrain varieties are good sources of fibre and can be gradually introduced into the diets of children from the age of two years However wholegrain varieties can be filling and too many may limit the amount of food children eat, resulting in insufficient energy and nutrient consumption 	<p>Bread – all types of bread: white, wholemeal, granary, brown, wheatgerm, multigrain, soda bread, potato bread, chapatis, naan bread, rotis, rolls, bagels, pitta bread, wraps, tortilla</p> <p>Potatoes or sweet potatoes – boiled, mashed, baked or wedges</p> <p>Yam, plantain, cocoyam, cassava and other starchy root vegetables</p> <p>Pasta and noodles – white and wholemeal</p> <p>Breakfast cereals – low-sugar, low-salt, cereals such as porridge, puffed wheat, wheat bisks, crisped rice or flaked wheat. Fortified cereals can be a good source of iron</p> <p>Rice – white and brown rice</p> <p>Other grains such as couscous, bulgur wheat, maize (polenta) and cornmeal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look for bread with a lower salt content. If it contains more than 1.5g salt per 100g (or 0.6g sodium) it is classed as high in salt/less than 0.3g salt per 100g (or 0.1g sodium) it is classed as low in salt Avoid processed potato products with added fat, e.g. chips, potato wedges and potato smiles Avoid dried or tinned ready-prepared pasta in sauces as these can be high in salt Avoid fried rice or flavoured dried rice in packets as these can be high in salt <p>Avoid sugary breakfast cereals, e.g. sugar coated flakes and chocolate flavoured cereals. If a manufactured product contains more than 15g of sugar per 100g, it is considered a high sugar food/less than 5g of sugar per 100g it is considered low in sugar</p>	<p>Caroline Walker Trust (2006) Eating well for under-5s in childcare http://www.cwt.org.uk/publications.html#under5</p> <p>Department of Health (2009). Birth to Five. Available at: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_107303</p> <p>Food Standards Agency (FSA) (2009) Feeding your Toddler: http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/agesandstages/children/yrtdodder/</p>

Existing guidance on food groups for children aged one to five years					
Food group	Why is this food group important?	How frequent and how much to provide per day	Existing practice	Foods or practices to avoid or limit	References and where to find more information
Fruit and vegetables	Fruit and vegetables are important sources of many vitamins including vitamin A and C, minerals, mainly zinc and iron and also fibre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children should be provided with at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day (a portion is about the size of a child's handful) Ensure fruit and vegetables are offered at every meal and with snacks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vegetables – fresh, frozen and tinned, whether as a salad, cooked vegetables, or as part of a dish (for example in casseroles and soups) Pulses are included but not potatoes (classified as a starchy food) Fruit – fresh fruit, fruit tinned in juice, fruit salad (fresh/tinned in juice), dried fruit or 100% fruit juice Fresh fruit such as apples, bananas, pears, grapes, kiwi fruit, oranges, plums, berries or melon Tinned fruit in natural juice such as peaches, pears, pineapple, mandarin oranges, prunes, guava or lychees Stewed fruit such as stewed apple, stewed dried fruit, stewed plums, stewed currants or stewed rhubarb Dried fruit such as raisins, dried apricots, dates, dried figs, prunes Fruit juice – 100% unsweetened fruit juice diluted (1:10 with water) at mealtimes only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> overcook fresh vegetables cut them up a long time before cooking and leave them in water cook them early and re-heat before serving these practices all reduce the vitamin content Provide tinned vegetables and pulses with no added salt and sugar Fruits such as plums, berries and grapes may contain stones/pips which are a choking hazard to children. Ensure stones and pips are removed before offering to children and cut grapes in half Avoid tinned fruit in syrup Provide dried fruit at mealtimes only and not as snacks. Avoid dried fruit with added sugar and vegetable oil 	<p>Caroline Walker Trust (2006) Eating well for under-5s in childcare http://www.cwt.org.uk/publications.html#under5</p> <p>Department of Health (2009). Birth to Five. Available at: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_107303</p> <p>Food Standards Agency (FSA) (2009) Feeding your Toddler: http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/agesandstages/children/yrtdodder/</p>

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Food group	Why is this food group important?	How frequent and how much to provide per day	Existing practice	Foods or practices to avoid or limit	References and where to find more information
Milk and dairy foods	Foods from this group are a good source of energy, calcium, vitamin A and fat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Milk or dairy foods should be provided at two to three meals and snacks each day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Milk can be offered at mealtimes or with snacks but water should always be available to quench thirst Children up to the age of two should be provided with whole milk and full-fat dairy products as children under two need the extra fat and vitamins in full-fat dairy products Between the ages of two and five years old semi-skimmed milk can be introduced, providing the child is growing well and eating a healthy balanced diet If only one type of milk is available this should be whole milk Cheese Yoghurt and fromage frais – full-fat varieties should be provided to children up to the age of two years old 	<p>Avoid unpasteurised milk and milk drinks with added sugar</p> <p>Avoid soft and unpasteurised cheeses</p> <p>Avoid yoghurts and fromage frais that have high sugar content (often those with added bits or mousse style). If it has more than 15g of sugar per 100g, it is a high sugar option. It is preferable to add fresh fruit to natural yoghurt or fromage frais</p>	<p>Caroline Walker Trust (2006) Eating well for under-5s in childcare http://www.cwt.org.uk/publications.html#under5</p> <p>Department of Health (2009). Birth to Five. Available at: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/PublicationsandStatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_107303</p> <p>Food Standards Agency (FSA) (2009) Feeding your Toddler: http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/agesandstages/children/yr toddler/</p>

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Meat and fish	<p>Foods from this group provide protein, iron and zinc</p> <p>Oily fish provides omega 3 fatty acids, vitamin D and A</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children aged one to five years require one or two items from this food group per day, these should be provided at main meals It is also important to provide oily fish once or twice a week to children in this age group, e.g. salmon, mackerel or sardines. Existing guidance states that girls should eat a little less oily fish than boys (no more than two rather than four portions per week). It is useful to consider this when planning your menus 	<p>Foods from this group include meat, fish, eggs, nuts, pulses (like beans, lentils and peas) and foods made from pulses (like tofu, hummus and soya mince)</p> <p>Meat includes all types including beef, lamb, pork, chicken and turkey</p> <p>White fish are those such as cod, haddock, coley and white fish varieties from sustainable fish stocks such as pollack and blue whiting</p> <p>Oily fish such as herring and mackerel, salmon, trout, sardines, sprats or pilchards. Tinned tuna does not count as an oil-rich fish but is a good source of nutrients. Examples of dishes that may appeal are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mashed canned sardines on fingers of toast Pitta pockets filled with canned salmon and salad 	<p>Meat products: avoid processed meat products, e.g. sausages, burgers, nuggets and other coated meat and pies as these can be high in fat and salt. If processed meat products are provided it should be no more than once a week and choose good quality versions⁹</p> <p>Avoid shark, swordfish or marlin because the levels of mercury in these fish can affect a child's developing nervous system</p> <p>Avoid raw shellfish to reduce the risk of food poisoning</p> <p>Serve processed fish products such as fish fingers or fish bites no more than once a week</p> <p>Make sure fish dishes are free of bones</p>	<p>Caroline Walker Trust (2006) Eating well for under-5s in childcare http://www.cwt.org.uk/publications.html#under5</p> <p>Department of Health (2009). Birth to Five. Available at: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_107303</p> <p>Food Standards Agency (FSA) (2009) Feeding your Toddler: http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/agesandstages/children/yr toddler/</p>

⁹ Good quality versions are those that adhere to the legal minimum meat content levels set out in the Meat Products (England) Regulations 2003
www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20032075.htm

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Eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein	Foods from this group provide protein, iron and zinc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If children in your care do not eat meat it is important they receive two or three portions per day of an alternative source of protein such as eggs, pulses or meat alternatives 	<p>Eggs: including boiled, scrambled or poached, or in an omelette</p> <p>Pulses include all sort of beans, and peas such as butter beans, kidney beans, chick peas, lentils, processed peas or baked beans</p> <p>Meat alternatives: such as soya, mince, textured vegetable protein, quorn or tofu</p>	<p>All eggs should be well cooked. Don't give raw eggs, or food that contains raw or partly cooked eggs. If you give eggs to your toddler, make sure the eggs are cooked until both the white and the yolk are solid</p> <p>Tinned pulses: look for tinned pulses with no added salt and sugar. Choose lower-salt and low-sugar baked beans. Dahl and other dishes made from pulses should be made without adding a lot of oil and salt</p> <p>Nuts: do not give whole peanuts or any type of whole nuts to children under five years old because they could cause choking. Nuts, especially peanuts, (and other foods) can cause severe allergic reactions in some children. Childcare settings should have an allergy plan to deal with these situations.</p> <p>Processed products made from meat alternatives (e.g. vegetarian sausages/burgers/pies) can be high in fat or salt and should not be served more than once a week</p>	<p>Caroline Walker Trust (2006) Eating well for under-5s in childcare http://www.cwt.org.uk/publications.html#under5</p> <p>Department of Health (2009). Birth to Five. Available at: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_107303</p> <p>Food Standards Agency (FSA) (2009) Feeding your Toddler: http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/agesandstages/children/yrtoddler/</p> <p>For more information on dealing with allergies visit: www.allergyinschools.org.uk</p>