

Nursery Food – Policy for Packed Lunches (brought in from home)

Introduction:

To grow and stay healthy, children need to eat a nutritionally well-balanced diet. According to Public Health England Guidance, it is clear that early years settings contribute significantly to improving the health and well-being of children. Good nutrition in childhood can help to prevent a variety of health problems, both in the short term and later in life. There is increasing concern that many children are consuming too much fat, sugar and salt and too little fiber, fruit and vegetables. Packed lunches can contribute to almost a third of a child's weekly food intake and therefore, need to be balanced and nutritious. Packed lunches need to adhere to our no nut in settings policy as some children could have severe allergies to nuts and other foods.

Aim:

To ensure that packed lunches (brought in from home) reflect the new standards for healthy meals in early years.

Rationale:

- Settings are required to positively promote the health and wellbeing of children.
- Work around healthy eating is a high priority of the Every Child Matters agenda.
- The content of lunchboxes needs to reflect the requirement of our setting to meet minimum food and nutrition standards for nursery meals.
- The contents of some lunchboxes can be extremely unhealthy, our recent audits of lunchboxes have shown that in the main they contain foods with high levels of fat, sugar and salt, and very few fruit and vegetables.
- To encourage healthy eating habits from an early age and improve the overall nutrition of children.



- The short-term effects of unhealthy packed lunches and food intake can include poor growth, tooth decay, obesity, anemia, constipation, poor concentration and behavioral problems which may have an impact on a child's learning.
- The longer-term effects of a poor diet in childhood can be an increased risk of stroke, cancer, heart disease and type 2 diabetes in adulthood.

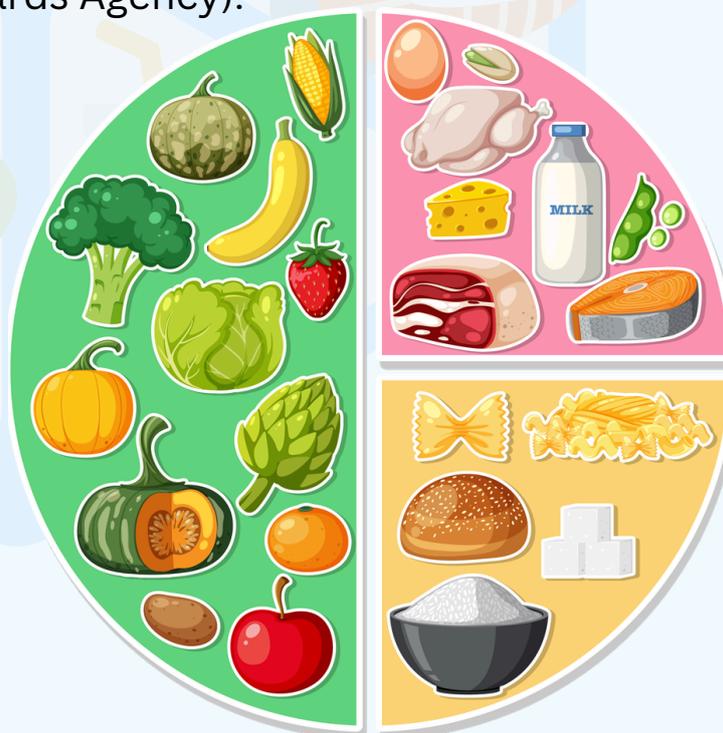
Objectives:

To improve the nutritional quality of packed lunches in the nursery and the eating habits of children at lunchtimes.

- To develop an awareness in children, parents, staff and the wider community that the nursery takes a proactive approach to promoting healthy eating.
- To encourage healthy eating habits in childhood that can influence health and well-being in later life.
- To ensure that food brought into the nursery (packed lunches) reflects and meets food standards for nurseries.

Implementation:

This packed lunch policy fits within a wider context of promoting a whole setting approach to food and healthy eating. Children's packed lunches should be based on the 'Eatwell Guide' model which shows items from the 5 main food groups: (Food Standards Agency).



Food Labels:

When purchasing food items for the nursery (for example, yoghurt and snacks), please ensure they comply with our traffic light food guidelines. We do not permit foods with a red label. Foods with an amber label should be kept to a minimum, and products should predominantly carry green labels

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|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Energy 1046kJ 250kcal | Fat 3.0g LOW | Saturates 1.3g LOW | Sugars 34g HIGH | Salt 0.9g MED |
| 13% | 4% | 7% | 38% | 15% |

| Category | What This Means | Examples Of Suitable Foods |
|---|---|---|
| Green (Best Choice encouraged daily) | Healthy options, low in sugar, salt and saturated fat. These should make up most of our menu and snack options. | Fresh fruit and vegetables, plain yoghurt (no added sugar), milk, wholemeal bread, wholegrain crackers, porridge, rice, pasta, lean meats, beans, lentils, cheese in small portions, hummus |
| Amber (Occasional – limit these) | Moderate levels of sugar, salt or fat. These should be offered less frequently and in smaller portions. | Flavoured yoghurt with reduced sugar, low-sugar cereals, processed meats (e.g., ham), shop-bought muffins (low sugar), cereal bars |
| Red (Not permitted) | High in sugar, salt and/or saturated fat. These foods are not allowed in the nursery. | Sweets, chocolate, crisps, fizzy drinks, cakes, biscuits, sugary desserts, squash, ice cream, high-sugar cereals, fried fast food |



Implementation:

This packed lunch policy fits within a wider context of promoting a whole setting approach to food and healthy eating.

Children's packed lunches should be based on the 'Eatwell Guide' model which shows items from the 5 main food groups: (Food Standards Agency).

Bread, Rice, Potatoes, Pasta:

These starchy foods are a healthy source of energy. Packed lunches should include 2 or more portions.

Examples of these could be:

- Sandwiches made with sliced wholemeal bread, pitta bread, wraps, chapattis or bread rolls
- A scone or currant bun
- A bagel
- Pasta, couscous or rice

Fruit and Vegetables:

These foods provide vitamins, minerals and fibre. Packed lunches should include at least 1 portion of fruit and 1 portion of vegetables/salad, or more.

Examples of these could be:

- Carrot/cucumber sticks, celery, sliced peppers, etc.
- A piece of fruit: apple, orange, banana, pear, kiwi, plum, etc.
- Fruit salad

Please note that some fruits, including grapes, raisins, blueberries, and pineapple chunks, present a choking hazard and are therefore not permitted in fruit bowls.



Milk and Dairy Foods:

These foods provide calcium for healthy bones and teeth. Packed lunches should include 1 portion at lunch.

Examples of these could be:

- A pot of yoghurt, custard or rice pudding
- A piece of cheese (match box sized)
- 2 triangles of spreadable cheese (this could be included in the sandwich)

Meat, Fish, Eggs, Beans:

These foods provide protein for growth. Packed lunches should include 1 portion of these foods.

Examples of these could be: (these could be included in the sandwich)

- Slices of cooked meat
- Slices of chicken or turkey breast
- Hard-boiled egg
- Tuna, salmon, mackerel or sardines
- Hummus

Snacks:

- All snacks provided must consist of fruit and vegetables only, supporting our commitment to promoting healthy eating.



Benefits of Children Eating the Same Food and Promoting Inclusion:

- Encouraging children to eat the same or similar foods helps promote a sense of community and belonging within the nursery.
- Sharing meals supports social development and helps children learn about different foods in a positive, inclusive environment.
- Promoting inclusion through shared food experiences respects cultural diversity and supports children with dietary needs by normalising safe and healthy eating habits.
- This approach helps reduce feelings of exclusion or difference among children, fostering empathy and understanding from an early age.
- It also simplifies food management and safety protocols, ensuring all children receive nutritious and allergen-safe meals consistently.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed Biannually to ensure it remains up to date with current nutritional guidelines and nursery practices.

This policy was adopted on 17th February 2026.

Date for review
February 2028

