

Nutrition matters for the early years

Healthy eating for the under fives in childcare



Health
Promotion
Agency

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Foreword



What we eat can play a critical role in determining our health, whatever our age. The eating patterns established in the first few years of life influence our health during childhood and adulthood. Encouraging good nutrition during the early years of life is therefore an investment for the health of our population in years to come.

With more parents working, increasing numbers of children are spending long periods of time in childcare outside their own homes. This has implications for their dietary intake as a large proportion of meals and snacks are now eaten away from home. Childminders and the staff in nurseries and playgroups, therefore, have a crucial role to play in promoting healthy nutrition in young children.

The Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland (HPA) and the Health and Social Services Boards have been working to promote and encourage good nutrition for young children for a number of years. As a result of this work, and particularly in response to a need highlighted by community dietitians throughout Northern Ireland and the HPA, nutritional guidelines for children in day nurseries and playgroups were developed. *Nutrition matters for the early years: guidance for feeding under fives in the childcare setting* was published by the HPA in 2001. This document was based on current government guidelines, good practice and advice from a wide range of people involved in both childcare and children's health. *Nutrition matters for the early years* provided day nurseries and playgroups with information on a range of nutritional issues relating to children up to the age of five.

It became clear that there was a similar need for information among childminders caring for children under five years of age. After consulting with those who had been involved with the original document and also the Northern Ireland Childminding Association, this document, *Nutrition matters for the early years: healthy eating for the under fives in childcare* was produced. Adapted to be suitable for day nurseries, playgroups and home-based childcarers, it provides straightforward practical advice and information on a range of nutrition related issues and in particular advice on how to ensure a healthy diet is provided for the children in their care.



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Why good nutrition is important

Good nutrition is essential during childhood, as it is a time of rapid growth, development and activity. This is also a vital time for healthy tooth development and prevention of decay. General eating habits and patterns are formed in the first few years of life. Poor nutrition during these years is associated with an increased risk of obesity, hypertension, diabetes and coronary heart disease. Childcare providers therefore have a key role in introducing children to a wide variety of foods and establishing a pattern of regular meals and healthy snacks.

The arrangements for children's meals and snacks will of course vary considerably between different childcare providers. Some nurseries and childminders may provide all meals, snacks and drinks. This document offers them straightforward guidelines on how to ensure they are giving the children in their care a healthy diet. In other cases, where parents provide drinks and snacks, or all foods and drinks for their child, childcare providers can use the document to help in any discussions they may have with parents about the food that they are providing.



When providing food for young children consideration must be given to the following points.

- Children's appetites may vary, not only from day to day, but also from one meal to the next.
- Young children are very active and have high energy (calorie) and nutrient needs in proportion to their small body size.
- Children have small stomachs and may be physically unable to eat large meals.
- Every day children need three meals plus snacks. Use the ideas given in this document to provide nutritious meals and snacks.
- Children should be encouraged to drink adequate amounts of fluids.
- A frequent intake of sugar and sugary foods and drinks between meals causes tooth decay. Snacks and drinks taken between meals should be sugar-free.
- Foods and drinks containing sugar should only be given occasionally and should be limited to mealtimes. Sugar may also appear on labels as sucrose, glucose, syrup, fructose or dextrose.
- Puddings offered each day should be nutritious and based on milk and/or fruit (fresh, stewed or tinned).
- Avoid low fat or diet products, as children need the extra calories from fat to grow and develop properly. Full fat spreads and whole milk dairy products are recommended.
- A diet high in fibre is not suitable for young children. It can fill them up without providing all the nutrients they require. Foods of varying fibre content should be offered, eg both white and wholemeal breads and pasta; a variety of breakfast cereals, eg Corn Flakes, Rice Krispies, Weetabix, porridge, etc. Children between the ages of two and five should gradually be encouraged to increase their intake of higher fibre foods.
- Dry, unprocessed bran should never be used as it can reduce the absorption of important nutrients and can cause bloating, wind and loss of appetite.
- There is no need to add salt to food either in cooking or at the table, as there is enough present in the food we eat. Too much salt is linked with high blood pressure later in life and may encourage a liking for salty food, which is difficult to change. Salty snacks such as crisps should be limited.
- Whole nuts are unsuitable for children under the age of five years because of the risk of choking. It is recommended that peanuts and products containing them, eg peanut butter, are not provided. This is to protect children who may be at risk of nut allergy.

A guide to weaning

All the nourishment a baby needs during the first six months comes from either breast milk or infant formula milk. Based on current research, health experts recommend that babies should begin to take solid foods from six months to allow them to grow and develop - this process is called weaning.

Weaning before six months is not recommended as babies' digestive systems and kidneys are still developing. Weaning too soon may increase the risk of infections and allergies.

The tables on the following pages outline the current recommendations for weaning.

Foods to avoid giving to babies

- **Salt.** Do not add any salt to foods for babies as their kidneys are not fully developed. You should also avoid foods that contain a lot of salt, eg packet soups, stock cubes, crisps, bacon, smoked meats.
- **Sugar.** Do not add sugar to the foods or drinks you give a baby. Sugar could encourage a sweet tooth and lead to tooth decay when the first teeth start to come through.
- **Honey.** Don't give honey to a child under the age of one year, as it can contain a kind of bacteria which can produce toxins in the baby's intestines and can cause a very serious illness (infant botulism).
- **Nuts.** It is recommended that peanuts and products containing them are not provided. This is to protect children who may be at risk of peanut allergy. Whole nuts should never be given to children under the age of five because of the risk of choking.

Weaning before six months

Weaning before six months is not recommended; however, childcare providers will obviously have to follow the parents' wishes about weaning their children. If the parents of a baby in your care are determined to wean before six months, there are a number of other foods that should be avoided in addition to the list above.

- Foods which contain gluten, eg wheat flour, bread, breakfast cereals made from wheat, rusks, spaghetti or other pastas (eg tinned pasta in tomato sauce).
- Nuts and seeds.
- Eggs.
- Cow's milk, either as a drink or mixed with food.
- Fish and shellfish.

- Citrus fruits, including citrus fruit juices, eg orange juice.
- Soft and unpasteurised cheeses.
- Tofu, Quorn, soya protein.

More detailed guidance on weaning can be found in the HPA leaflet *Weaning made easy: moving from milk to family meals*. This leaflet is aimed at parents but childcare providers working with young babies will also find the information useful.

You can download the leaflet from the publications section of our website www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk or ask for a copy from the Central Health Promotion Resource Service of your Health and Social Services Board.



Weaning: from 6 months

Texture: First weaning foods should be smooth or well mashed.

Suitable foods

First weaning foods:

- plain baby rice mixed with baby's usual milk;
- smooth or well-mashed cooked potato, carrot, parsnip, turnip, cauliflower;
- smooth or well-mashed banana, stewed fruits, eg apple, pear, apricots;
- unsweetened custard (made using custard powder);
- plain/natural yogurt.

As babies get used to spoon feeds:

After a couple of weeks begin to add different foods and different tastes:

- mashed or minced meat, chicken, fish (with bones removed), lentils, hard boiled egg (serve these with well-mashed potatoes, rice or pasta and veg);
- foods made from wheat, eg bread, pasta, semolina;
- breakfast cereals such as plain Ready Brek, Weetabix, porridge.

The food doesn't need to be quite so runny - you can start to leave a few soft lumps.

Notes

- Cook vegetables or fruit (without added salt or sugar) until they are soft, then mash well.
- Breast milk or infant formula milk can be used to mix with cereals, potatoes etc to give a smooth consistency. Pasteurised whole cow's milk can be used to mix into foods, such as mashed potato and breakfast cereal, but should not be given as a main drink until after 1 year.
- At this stage the baby will continue to receive the usual amount of expressed breast milk or infant formula milk each day. This should be provided in accordance with the parent's guidance.
- Cooled boiled water can be offered between feeds if the baby seems thirsty.
- Introduce a cup for drinks of infant formula or water.
- Introduce finger foods.

Finger foods

Finger foods encourage babies to feed themselves. Try:

- soft fresh fruit, eg banana, melon, peeled pear;
- pieces of cooked vegetables, eg green beans, cauliflower, carrot;
- fingers of toast, unsalted breadsticks, pitta bread;
- fingers of hard cheese;
- low-sugar rusks (these should only be used occasionally, as even low-sugar varieties still contain a lot of sugar).

From about 7 months

Texture: From about 7 months just mash food with a fork. This will encourage the baby to learn how to chew.

Suitable foods

All family foods can be offered at this stage.

Notes

- By this age the baby should be having three meals a day and eating more at each spoon feed.
- The amount of milk can be gradually reduced as the baby eats more solid food - continue to give at least 500-600ml (16-20fl oz) of expressed milk or infant formula each day.
- Encourage babies to hold spoons.

Menu ideas

Main meal ideas:

- mashed baked beans with fingers of toast;
- tuna and pasta bake with broccoli;
- macaroni cheese with peas;
- shepherd's pie with carrots;
- minced chicken with mashed potato and Brussels sprouts;
- corned beef hash with sliced green beans;
- meat or lentil stew with mashed potato.

Dessert ideas:

- pieces of fresh soft fruit, eg pear, banana, melon;
- stewed fruit, eg apples, apricots, prunes (with stones removed);
- tinned soft fruit in its own juice, eg strawberries, peaches, pears;
- milk pudding, yogurt or fromage frais (do not use 'diet' varieties).



From 9 months

Texture: During this stage babies will move on from mashed to chopped foods.

Suitable foods

All family foods can be offered at this stage.

Notes

- Continue to give three meals a day plus snacks.
- At this stage babies will continue to receive about 500-600ml (16-20fl oz) of expressed breast milk or infant formula milk each day.
- Water or very dilute pure fruit juice can be given as a drink at mealtimes. By now, most drinks should be given from a cup. From 12 months, the use of a bottle should be discouraged.
- Encourage babies to eat a wide variety of foods.
- For suitable drinks refer to page 14.

Menu ideas

Some meal ideas to try

Breakfast:

- unsweetened breakfast cereal with whole cow's milk;
- toast with well-cooked egg - scrambled, poached or boiled.

Lunch:

- baked beans with fingers of toast;
- sandwiches filled with tuna or chopped chicken;
- soup with a sandwich;
- pasta with tomato sauce and grated cheese;
- pizza with chopped fresh tomato.

Dinner:

- minced or chopped meat, mashed potatoes and carrots;
- fish fingers, peas and mashed potatoes;
- chicken casserole and rice;
- lasagne with broccoli;
- vegetable risotto with grated cheese;
- beef or lentil burgers, courgettes, sliced tomato and boiled potatoes;
- cauliflower cheese, boiled potatoes and green beans.

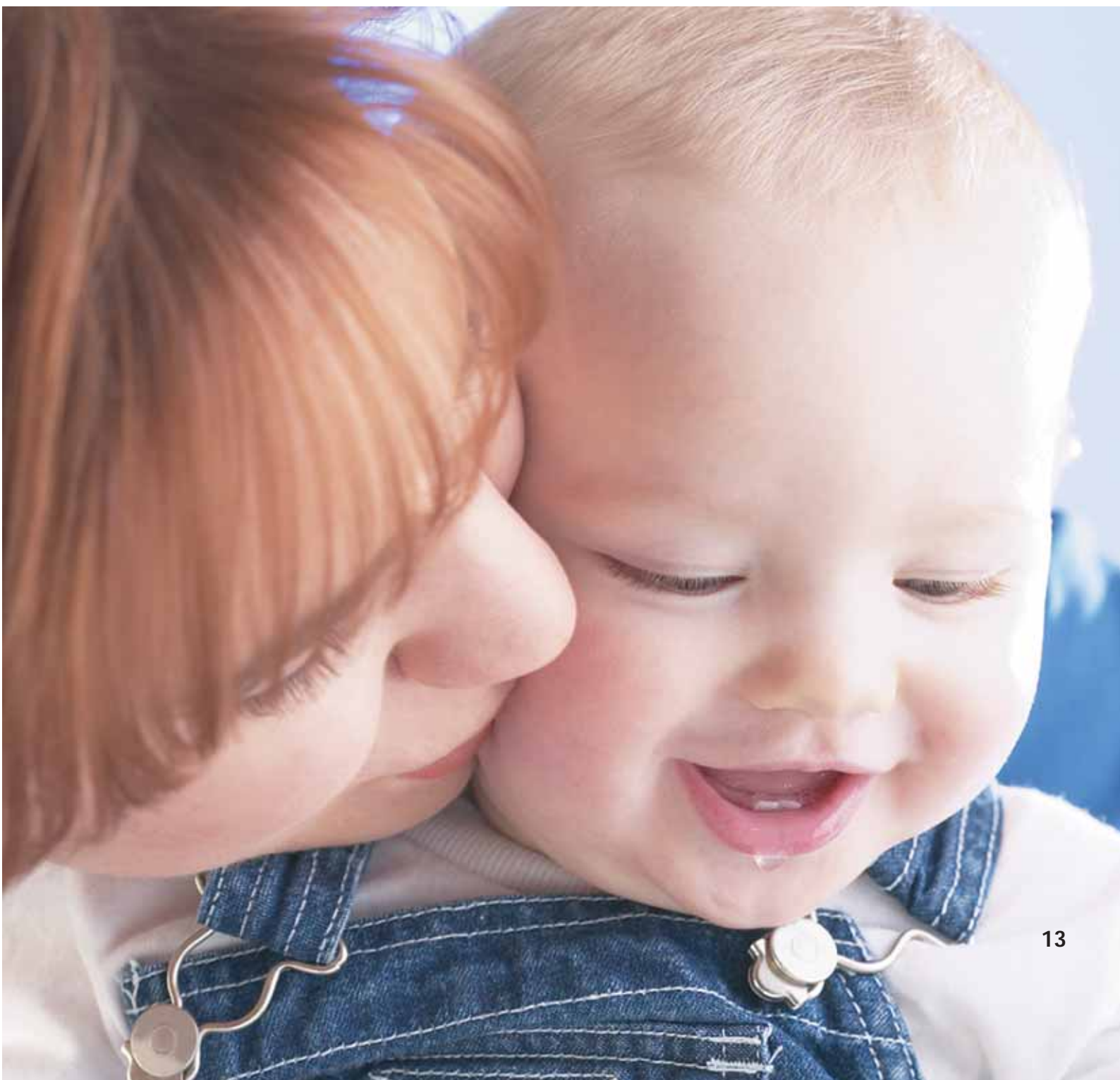
Snack ideas

Healthy snacks to use between meals include:

- chopped fruit and vegetables, eg peeled apple, pear, peach, banana, orange, carrot, cucumber;
- bread, toast, scones, pancakes;
- natural yogurt or plain fromage frais - add your own fruit for extra flavour;
- cheese.

Snacks that contain quite a lot of sugar should only be given occasionally between meals. These include:

- flavoured yogurt, flavoured fromage frais;
- low-sugar rusks;
- plain biscuits, eg Rich Tea, Marie, Digestive.



Drinks for babies up to 12 months old

Breast milk or infant formula milk

This should be the main drink during the first year. Expressed breast milk should be stored in the fridge and reheated to room temperature in a jug of hot water before it is given to the baby. It is now recommended that powdered infant formula is freshly prepared for each feed. Use bottles that have been sterilised and always reconstitute the formula in water which has been boiled and is still hot (above 70°C). Cool the reconstituted formula rapidly to room temperature, use immediately and discard any formula left over after the feed. If parents are providing formula already made up, store it in the fridge until required and make sure your fridge is maintained at the correct temperature (see section on *Food safety* on page 29). Never warm bottles in a microwave as it can heat the milk unevenly and cause scalding.

Follow-on formula

This is not necessary and is unsuitable for babies under six months.

Cow's milk

Whole cow's milk should not be used as the main drink until after one year. If a child is eating a varied diet, semi-skimmed milk may be given from two years. Skimmed milk should not be given to children under five years.

Other drinks

A little cooled boiled tap water can be given if a baby seems very thirsty (after six months, water straight from the mains tap is suitable). Very dilute fruit juice (one part pure fruit juice to ten parts water) from a cup may be given occasionally with meals.

Drinks that are not recommended

Baby juices and herbal drinks

These contain sugar and can damage developing teeth if they are used frequently or given from a bottle.

Sugary diluting squashes

These contain sugar and can damage developing teeth. If used, they should be very well diluted (one part squash to ten parts water) and given from a cup at main meals.

Drinks that should not be given

Colas, lemonades and fizzy drinks including 'diet' drinks and sugar-free squashes

These are acidic and can cause damage to teeth. 'Diet' drinks are also high in artificial sweeteners which are unsuitable for babies under one year.

Tea and coffee

These may reduce the absorption of iron.

Bottled mineral waters, still and sparkling

These may contain high levels of minerals which make them unsuitable for babies under one year.

Goat's and sheep's milk

These lack essential vitamins and minerals needed for babies' growth and development.

A varied balanced diet for the under fives

Growing children need plenty of energy (calories) and nutrients, eg protein, fat, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals. These needs can be met by including a variety of foods from each of the main food groups. The following tables outline the recommended number of servings, per child, from each of the four food groups for a whole day. The actual number of servings provided will depend on the length of time the child is in childcare.

Food group: Bread, other cereals and potatoes



What's included	Recommended servings
<p>This group includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all types of bread, eg wholemeal, wheaten, granary, multigrain, white, brown, soda bread, potato bread, rolls, baps, chapattis; • crispbreads, savoury crackers, crumpets, pancakes; • breakfast cereals without added sugar, honey or chocolate, eg Weetabix, Ready Brek, porridge oats, Corn Flakes, Rice Krispies; • boiled, mashed or baked potatoes (chips should be limited to once a week); • pasta, noodles and rice. 	<p>Offer a minimum of one portion per child with each meal. Examples of one portion are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 slice of bread; • 1 small potato; • 8 oven chips; • 3 tbsp cooked pasta or 2 heaped tbsp cooked rice; • 2 tbsp breakfast cereal. <p>Portion sizes should be increased according to appetite.</p>
Key nutrients	
<p>The main nutrients provided are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • energy (calories); • B vitamins (needed for growth and activity); • fibre (needed for healthy bowels). <p>Some breakfast cereals are fortified with iron (needed for healthy blood).</p>	
Notes	
<p>These foods should also be offered as snacks.</p>	



Food group: Fruit and vegetables

What's included	Recommended servings
<p>This group includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all types of fresh, frozen and canned vegetables, eg broccoli*, Brussels sprouts*, cabbage*, carrots, cauliflower*, mushrooms, parsnips, frozen peas*, peppers*, swede, sweetcorn, turnip; • all types of salad vegetables, eg lettuce, cucumber, tomato*; • all types of fresh fruit, eg apples, bananas, grapes, kiwi fruit*, oranges*; • all types of tinned fruit in juice, eg peaches, pears, pineapple, prunes; • stewed fruit; • dried fruit. <p>* All these are good sources of vitamin C.</p>	<p>Five child-sized portions should be offered each day.</p> <p>Examples of one child-sized portion are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1/2 apple, 1/2 pear, 1/2 banana or 1/2 orange; • 1 tbsp fruit salad, tinned or stewed fruit; • 1/2 cup of strawberries or grapes; • 1 tbsp cooked vegetables; • 1 tbsp chopped or raw salad vegetables.
Key nutrients	
<p>The main nutrients provided are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vitamins, especially vitamin C (needed for general good health and to help absorb iron); • fibre; • iron (from dark green vegetables). 	
Notes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruits and vegetables make good snacks and are ideal as finger foods. Dried fruit, such as raisins or dates, can be included in main meals but is not recommended as a snack because it is a concentrated source of sugar, which may cause tooth decay. • Frozen vegetables are high in vitamins. • Vegetables can be added to soups, casseroles and stews. • Do not overcook fruit and vegetables, as this will reduce the vitamin content. 	

Food group: Milk and milk products



What's included	Recommended servings
<p>This group includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• milk;• cheese;• yogurt.	<p>Each day allow 350-600ml (1/2-1 pint) of milk from one year of age onwards</p> <p>OR</p> <p>2-3 servings of foods from this group should be provided, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 25g (1oz) of hard cheese;• 125g carton of yogurt - avoid "diet" varieties;• a bowl of milk pudding. <p>Each of these provides equivalent amounts of calcium.</p>
Key nutrients	
<p>The main nutrients provided are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• calcium (needed to build strong bones and for nerve and muscle function);• protein (for growth);• fat (for calories);• vitamin A (needed for growth, a healthy respiratory and digestive tract and maintenance of skin);• vitamin D (needed to help absorb calcium and to build strong bones).	
Notes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If a child is eating a varied diet, semi-skimmed milk may be given from two years. Skimmed milk should not be given to children under five years.• Milk can be used in drinks, on breakfast cereals, in milk puddings or sauces.• Cheese can be added to jacket potatoes, spaghetti or toast. Grated cheese, cottage cheese, cheese portions or spreads can be used as sandwich fillers or on toast.• The length of time the child is cared for will determine how much of the recommendation is met.	

Food group: Meat, fish and alternatives



What's included	Recommended servings
<p>This group includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all types of meat including beef*, lamb*, pork*, bacon*, ham*, liver*, chicken and turkey; • white fish, oily fish (eg tuna and sardines*), fish cakes, fish fingers; • baked beans*, mushy peas*, butter beans*, kidney beans*, chickpeas*; • eggs* including boiled, scrambled, poached, omelette; • meat alternatives, eg soya mince, textured vegetable protein (TVP); • bean curd, Quorn; • processed meats/meat products, eg chicken nuggets, sausages, sausage rolls and burgers. <p>*These foods are rich sources of iron and should be included regularly.</p>	<p>Two servings of these foods should be taken every day, ie at lunch and evening meal. Examples of one serving include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40-50g (1½-2oz) beef, pork, lamb, chicken or fish; • 2 fish fingers; • 1 egg; • 2-3 tbsp baked beans. <p>Processed meat products should be given no more than once a week in the childcare setting. Examples of one serving are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 chicken nuggets; • 4 fish bites; • 2 sausages; • 1 junior (50g/2oz) burger.
Key nutrients	
<p>The main nutrients provided are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protein; • iron (to prevent anaemia); • vitamins, especially B vitamins. • Omega 3 fatty acids in oily fish. 	
Notes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole nuts are unsuitable for children under the age of five years because of risk of choking. • It is recommended that peanuts and products containing them, eg peanut butter, are not provided. This is to protect children who may be at risk of peanut allergy. • Ensure that all meat and fish dishes are free from bones to prevent choking. Be aware that chicken nuggets can sometimes contain small bones. • Red meat should be included as it is a good source of iron. Mince is acceptable as red meat. Minced meat may be used for shepherd's pie, meatballs and spaghetti bolognese. Where possible use leaner cuts of meat and trim off visible fat. Processed meat products contain less protein and iron. • All eggs must be well cooked. • Vegetarian choices could include omelette, cheese quiche, bean and pasta bake, macaroni cheese, vegetable lasagne. 	

These recommendations are for the whole day. Children will be cared for over varying lengths of time and therefore will be receiving different combinations of meals and snacks. The sample menu below shows an example of how you could meet the recommendations over a full day.

Sample menu for a full day	
Breakfast	small cup of pure orange juice, well diluted cereal with milk
Mid-morning	1/2 banana
Lunch	carrot and lentil soup with fingers of toast yogurt
Mid-afternoon	1/2 pancake with butter or margarine small cup of milk
Tea/dinner	beef, carrot and turnip casserole served with boiled potato 1 kiwi fruit



Snacks

Young children need snacks between meals, as they are not usually able to eat enough at mealtimes to meet their needs for energy (calories). The best snacks are those which are sugar-free or low in added sugar and packed with nutrients. However, it is important to ensure that children are not allowed to snack freely throughout the day as this can reduce the amount that they eat at mealtimes and also increase the risk of tooth decay. A variety of snacks should be offered. Examples are listed below.

- Toast or bread - offer wheaten, wholemeal, white, granary, potato bread, soda bread, scones, crumpets or pancakes. These should not be covered in sugary spreads, such as jam, honey or chocolate spread.
- Sandwiches - suitable fillings include banana, spreading cheese, egg, tomato, tuna and lean meat such as ham, chicken or turkey.
- Pieces of fresh fruit - try sliced or chopped apples, bananas, pears, kiwi fruit, grapes and other seasonal fruits. Dried fruit is not recommended as a snack between meals as it contains concentrated sugar and may cause tooth decay. However, it can be included in main meals.
- Raw vegetable sticks - carrot, cucumber, celery, tomato can all be sliced up or cut into sticks.
- Natural yogurt or plain fromage frais - chopped fruit (eg banana, apple or mandarin orange) can be added to plain unsweetened yogurt. Fruit tinned in its own juice rather than syrup can also be used.
- Cereal and milk - offer unsweetened varieties, eg Weetabix, Cornflakes, Ready Brek, Puffed Wheat.

Foods and drinks which are high in sugar, eg sweets, biscuits, sweetened yogurts and desserts, are most damaging to teeth when they are taken between meals. This doesn't mean that they should never be taken, but they are less damaging to teeth if they are taken at the end of meals.

If you choose to offer biscuits occasionally, eg once or twice a week, these should be plain without chocolate or cream, eg plain crackers.

Drinks

- Milk or water is the recommended drink for young children.
- Pure unsweetened fruit juice, well diluted (one part juice to ten parts water) can be given at main meals.

- Sweetened juices, squashes and minerals/fizzy drinks are not recommended. If used, they should be confined to main meals and squashes and juices should be well diluted. Sugar-free drinks contain artificial sweeteners which are not recommended for young children.
- Children should be introduced to a cup from six months to protect their developing teeth. From one year all drinks should be from a cup and the use of a feeding bottle should be discontinued.

Note: It is recommended that these snacks and drinks should also be provided to any older children who are cared for after school.

For guidance on suitable snacks and drinks for infants up to 12 months refer to pages 13 and 14.



Meal ideas

To ensure that children have a healthy, well balanced diet they need to eat a variety of foods every day. A number of meal ideas are given below as a guide. A variety of hot main meals and lighter meals are shown, including vegetarian choices and desserts.

Main meal ideas include:

- Savoury mince* with baked potatoes, frozen peas and sweetcorn.
- Grilled fish fingers with baked beans and boiled potatoes.
- Roast chicken with carrots/parsnips and roast potatoes.
- Pork pieces casseroled with pineapple and peppers, with boiled rice.
- Homemade beef burgers* (grilled or oven baked) with cabbage and champ.
- Tuna, sweetcorn and pasta bake with sliced tomatoes.
- Beef casserole with carrots and turnip, with boiled potatoes.
- Spaghetti bolognese* with green beans.
- Chicken casserole with leeks and carrots, with mashed potatoes.
- Shepherd's pie* with cauliflower or broccoli.



- Fish in white sauce or oven-baked fish in breadcrumbs with mashed potato and mixed frozen vegetables.
- Boiled ham with cabbage/carrots and boiled potatoes.
- Roast pork or oven-baked pork steaks and gravy with roast potatoes and broad beans/peas.
- Chickpea and vegetable casserole with pasta.
- Vegetable lasagne with salad or vegetable sticks and wheaten or soft grain white bread.
- Risotto made with tinned tomatoes and topped with grated cheese.
- Tinned beans (eg butter, kidney) mixed with vegetable rice.
- Slice of quiche with tomato and baked potato.
- Pizza with added vegetable topping (eg peppers, mushrooms, sweetcorn, onion) and bread.

*Soya mince or textured vegetable protein (TVP) may be used to replace minced meat in these dishes.

Lighter meal ideas include:

- Sandwiches or baked potatoes with a variety of fillings**, eg egg and onion, cheese and tomato, cold meat, tuna and sweetcorn served with vegetable sticks and/or slices of fruit.
- Toast with baked beans.**
- Scrambled eggs on toast with tomatoes.
- Macaroni cheese with chopped fresh tomato.
- Omelette with added mixed vegetables served with white or wholemeal bread.
- Homemade vegetable or lentil soup with bread or rolls.
- Hummus on toast with sliced tomatoes and cucumber sticks.**
- Slice of tortilla made with potato, mixed vegetables and chopped ham.
- Soda farl mini-pizza topped with chopped tomato and cheese.**
- Tuna melt made with tuna, chopped pepper, sweetcorn and grated cheese.

** These, or similar ideas, can be used as substantial afternoon snacks if a child is not picked up until late in the evening and their evening meal is delayed.

Dessert ideas include:

- Chopped fresh or tinned fruit on its own or with natural yogurt or fromage frais.
- Baked apple with custard.
- Ice cream with tinned fruit.
- Fruit crumble with custard.
- Fruit salad.
- Rice pudding and tinned peaches.
- Milk-based instant dessert with banana.
- Kiwi fruit served in an egg cup.
- Sponge pudding topped with tinned fruit and fromage frais.
- Bread and butter pudding.
- Fruit jelly.



Planning meals for children



The following points will be helpful when planning meals for children.

- Children need to eat regularly and it is recommended that they be offered something to eat at least every three hours.
- All children need a breakfast - either at home or provided in childcare.
- Children cared for all day will receive most of their food whilst in childcare. The number of meals and snacks provided will vary depending on the length of time the child is cared for. In general it is recommended that children being cared for over a normal working day receive at least one main meal and two snacks. In some instances childcare providers may also need to offer breakfast and/or an evening meal.
- Some children eat slowly. It is important to ensure that they have enough time to eat.
- Encourage children to try all the foods offered but never force a child to eat.
- A variety of foods from the four main food groups should be provided daily.
- A main meal must include a portion of food from the following food groups:
 - bread, other cereals and potatoes
 - fruit and vegetables
 - meat, fish and alternatives (see information on food groups, pages 15-18)
- Wherever possible healthier cooking methods should be used, eg baking, boiling, steaming, grilling, microwaving, etc.
- It is recommended that parents/guardians are given the opportunity to discuss their child's food preferences and are kept informed about meals and snacks offered.
- Choose combinations of colours to make food look attractive. Three or four defined areas of colour look good on a plate.
- A combination of different textures increases appeal. Children will appreciate crisp, crunchy, chewy, smooth and soft foods.
- Taste should be varied but meals containing too many new flavours may not be acceptable to children.
- Providing finger foods, as well as foods that require cutlery, allows variation at mealtimes. This is also a good way to encourage children under two years of age to feed themselves and to try new foods.

- Child-sized cutlery and crockery, and being able to sit comfortably and safely at mealtimes may make it easier for children to serve themselves and learn to eat independently.
- Meals are social occasions, so try to sit with children when they are eating and talk with them. If possible eat with them. This can be used to help encourage good table manners and if you are eating healthily it sets a good example to the children.
- Avoid distractions such as television during meals and snacks.
- Encourage children to try foods from other cultures to promote a respect for other cultures and traditions.



Fussy eaters

It is quite normal for an infant or child to refuse a food occasionally. However if a child continually refuses food, the parent or guardian should be informed. If a child refuses a snack or meal, gently encourage them to eat. If they refuse to eat even after gentle encouragement, the following suggestions may be helpful.

- Remove the food without making a fuss or passing judgement and offer food at the next meal or snack time.
- Keeping your attitude friendly and relaxed will help children to feel that eating is a pleasurable way to satisfy hunger rather than a battleground.
- Small helpings may be better accepted. Second helpings can then be offered if appropriate.
- Do not try to bribe children to eat food they do not want with the reward of a pudding or sweet snack.
- It may be useful to adopt the approach that a food refused is 'not liked today'. If a food is refused, try it again a few days later; changing the form a food is given in may make it more acceptable.
- Consider possible reasons for the food refusal, such as drinking continually throughout the day, or frequent large snacks between meals, as both of these can reduce the appetite for main meals.
- **Never force a child to eat.**

Children with individual dietary needs

Childcare providers may care for children with a variety of dietary requirements. The most common are outlined below. You should discuss the child's particular needs with the parents. More detailed information and advice is available from either the child's health visitor or local community dietitian. The Early Years Team or the child's health visitor can put you in contact with the community dietitian.

Children following a vegetarian diet

People who follow vegetarian diets may differ in the types of food they eat or exclude. It is important therefore to find out the types of food that the vegetarian child can eat. For example, some children may eat chicken, fish, eggs, milk and dairy products such as cheese or yogurt, whereas strict vegans exclude all foods of animal origin.

A vegetarian diet is a healthy diet providing that a wide variety of foods are eaten. When meat and animal products are excluded from meals it is important that the nutrients they provide are gained from other foods. Vegetarian sources of protein should be provided at each meal. Refer to the notes on *Meat, fish and alternatives*, page 18 for main meal ideas.

To ensure a balanced intake on a vegetarian diet a vegetable source of protein (eg pulses - dried peas, beans and lentils) should be eaten with a cereal food (eg bread, rice, pasta), for example, chickpea casserole with pasta, lentil stew with rice, beans on toast.

NOTE: Nuts are also a vegetable source of protein; however it is advised that you avoid giving whole nuts to children in your care because of the risk of choking. It is also advised that peanuts and products containing them are avoided - see the section on peanut allergy overleaf.

Children from ethnic communities following a traditional diet

When planning food provision and menus, childcare providers must accommodate the traditions and customs of ethnic communities. Childcare providers should take parental guidance on special dietary requirements. Details of the foods traditionally avoided by particular groups are shown below:

- Hindus and Sikhs are strict vegetarians and do not eat meat, fish, eggs or anything made with them.
- Muslims eat meat provided it has been killed by the halal method. They exclude all pork and pork products. Other foods may also be avoided if there is uncertainty about the content, eg pastries and puddings which may contain pig fat. Many savoury baby products contain meat which has not been killed by the halal method, and these products are unacceptable to Muslims.
- Jewish people eat meat provided it is kosher. They exclude all pork and pork products. They eat those fish which have fins and scales, but exclude all shellfish and eels. Products from animals that have not been prepared by the kosher method are also avoided, eg gelatine, animal fats. They do not eat meat and milk or milk products at the same meal. They should not be offered cheese that contains rennet or biscuits that contain animal fat.

- Chinese people generally exclude dairy produce. The Chinese community also believes that good health depends on a balance of two opposite elements in the body: yin (referred to as 'cold') and yan (referred to as 'hot'). Infant formula milk is regarded as 'very hot'. Where a mother has chosen to bottle feed her baby, she may want to give her baby 'cooling' drinks such as cooled boiled water.

Children with special dietary needs

Providing special diets

Special diets such as gluten-free (coeliac), diabetic, milk-free or nut-free, can be quite complex. Parents should be able to provide a diet sheet about their child's specific dietary needs which has been prepared by a registered dietitian.

Food allergy

Many parents believe that their child is sensitive to certain foods. However the true incidence of food allergy is likely to be much lower than reported. Parents requesting special diets for their children because of food allergy should be encouraged to seek medical advice. It is unwise to restrict food choice among young children without professional help and advice.

Peanut allergy

Peanut allergy is usually severe - sensitive individuals may even react to peanut dust. All nuts and nut products must be avoided, including peanut butter.

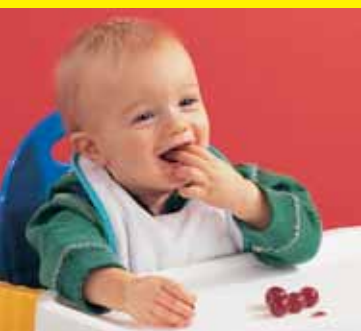
Care should also be taken to prevent accidental consumption of food containing nuts or nut products or food that has come into contact with them.

Children with peanut allergy are advised to carry identification and may require a pre-filled syringe of adrenaline (eg epipen) which can be administered if they have a reaction.

The Department of Health Expert Panel recommends that children with a family history of asthma, eczema, hay fever or food allergy should avoid peanuts and peanut products until the age of three years.

So as a precautionary measure, it is recommended that childcare providers should not provide peanuts or foods containing them, eg peanut butter, to any child in their care.

Food safety



Food safety is an important issue in caring for the under fives. The areas where food is stored, prepared and served should be safe, clean and hygienic. Extra care is needed for babies and young children as they may have a lower resistance to food poisoning.

Listed below are some general points on food safety:

- Always wash hands (yours and the children's) with soap and warm water before and after handling food and always after touching the dustbin, pets, changing nappies or going to the toilet.
- Keep your kitchen clean and dry.
- Don't use the same knife or chopping boards for raw meat, cooked food and fresh vegetables without washing them between times. Ideally keep a separate chopping board for raw meat.
- When shopping take chilled or frozen food home as quickly as possible.
- Keep your fridge/freezer at the correct temperature - get a fridge thermometer. Fridges should be kept at 5°C or below and freezers at minus 18°C or below.
- If parents are supplying food for their children, make sure anything perishable is stored in the fridge straight away.
- Cook food thoroughly.
- Do not eat or serve raw eggs.
- Store raw and cooked food separately.
- Check use-by dates and always use food within the recommended time.
- Reheat food thoroughly and do not reheat it more than once.
- Keep pets and their feeding bowls out of the kitchen.

For more information on the safe handling and storage of food, visit www.foodlink.org.uk for an A-Z of food safety.

More detailed information and advice on food hygiene is available from the Environmental Health Department of your local council.

See page 14 for information on breast and formula milk. Further advice and information on bottle feeding including preparing feeds safely, sterilising equipment and practical tips can be obtained from either the child's health visitor or the Early Years Team.

Rewards and celebrations



Rewards for good behaviour and the celebration of special occasions, such as birthdays, often involve sugary foods and drinks. The frequent consumption of sugary foods and drinks can adversely affect dental and general health; therefore they should be limited.

Encouraging good behaviour

Children should be given encouragement for good behaviour. This can be in the form of smiles or praise, or simply giving the child attention. This form of positive encouragement is preferable to the practice of giving items such as sweets, chocolates, small toys etc.

Parties and special occasions

Depending on how frequently these are celebrated you may want to try some of the following.

- Discuss with parents what foods and drinks are appropriate for them to provide - encourage healthier choices.
- Offer some ideas for healthier party food, for example:
 - sandwiches cut into fancy shapes;
 - finger sized pieces of pizza and quiche;
 - cocktail sausages;
 - plain, unsalted popcorn;
 - birthday cake (a plain sponge cake decorated with fruit by the birthday child);
 - fruit punch (diluted pure fruit juice - 1 part juice to 10 parts water - with chopped fruit added);
 - fruit and raw vegetables cut into fingers or fancy shapes.
- Focus on the sense of occasion rather than simply the supply of party food.
- Hold a theme party and encourage children to dress up.
- Encourage children to play active party games, eg musical statues; blind man's bluff; musical chairs; have a mini disco.

Physical activity for children



- Physical activity contributes to a healthy appetite, which will help to ensure that children get all the nutrients they need.
- Physical activity builds up muscle strength and overall fitness, as well as developing physical skills such as balance, coordination and climbing skills.
- Children who develop an active lifestyle when they are young are more likely to maintain a healthy active lifestyle as they get older. They should be encouraged to be active all year round and not just in the summer months. Visits to parks and play areas, going for walks and playing games indoors should all be encouraged. This is important as an active lifestyle helps to reduce the risk of ill health in later life, including the risk of developing heart disease.
- Outdoor play provides great opportunities for learning, for example children can learn about the environment around them. Playing with other children can develop their social skills and help build their confidence. Childcare providers should ensure that children have access to outdoor play every day.
- Exposure to summer sunlight in outdoor play helps to ensure an adequate supply of vitamin D. Childcare providers should agree guidelines with parents on how long children can remain outdoors and on the use of sunscreens and protective clothing such as sun hats. Babies under one year should be kept out of the sun. Older children should be kept in the shade during the hottest part of the day, between 11am and 3pm.



Preparing a nutrition policy

A nutrition policy is an additional way to highlight to parents your commitment to the children in your care. It also provides an opportunity to ensure that the recommendations and advice about healthy eating are agreed between you and the parents or guardians.

Writing a nutrition policy is not as difficult as it may sound. Childcare providers will have a lot of 'unwritten' rules about eating and drinking. This is just a way of bringing these together and provides an opportunity for you to discuss healthy eating with parents and how it will apply to their child/children. A policy may also be useful in cases where parents are providing their own food. It could, for example, be used to agree suitable alternatives should a child refuse the food the parent has provided. A policy should not be seen as fixed, but open to regular review.

Some suggestions about the type of information that could be included in such a policy are given below.

Introductory statement

I aim to offer a high quality service to the children I care for and their parents. I recognise the need to encourage healthy eating habits from an early age to help children to reach their full potential in terms of growth and development.

Meals

- Well-balanced and nutritious meals are provided for the children.
- All puddings provided are based on fruit and/or milk.
- Fresh fruit is always available.
- Processed meat products such as sausages, chicken nuggets, burgers and fish bites, if provided, are limited to once a week.
- Healthier cooking methods are used, eg boiling, grilling, steaming, microwaving, stewing, rather than frying.
- Special diets are respected. Parents will be asked to provide a copy of the diet sheet from a registered dietitian.
- Cultural dietary habits are respected. Parents should provide details of these.
- Mealtimes are used as an opportunity to encourage good table manners. For example, whenever possible children and adults eat together.

Snacks and drinks

- Snacks provided are healthy and nutritious.
- Sweets and fizzy drinks are not routinely offered.
- Where possible snacks are sugar-free to avoid causing damage to teeth.
- Fresh fruit is regularly offered as a healthy snack.
- Whole milk or water is provided for children as a drink between meals.
- If juices and squashes are given these are well-diluted and only given at mealtimes to avoid causing damage to teeth.

For more ideas of what could be included see sections on *Snacks* and *Drinks*, page 20.

Rewards and special occasions

- Praise and attention are used to help develop children's self-esteem and to act as a positive reward for good behaviour.
- If other forms of reward are used, they do not conflict with the healthy eating principles that are in everyday use. For example, sweets and sugary drinks are not given as rewards.
- On special occasions the focus will be on the occasion rather than providing fatty or sugary foods or drinks.

For more ideas of what could be included see *Rewards and celebrations*, page 30.

Activities

- A healthy lifestyle is promoted through a variety of activities including active play, outings, cookery, stories, music, etc.



Nutrition checklist

This checklist has been provided to help childcare providers see at a glance that they are providing a healthy diet for the children in their care. As there is a great variation in the number of meals and snacks that children receive while in childcare, the checklist covers meals and snacks provided over a full day - select the ones which are relevant to you.

This can also be used, on its own or with a nutrition policy, to show parents what food/meals are provided, or as an agreement for an individual child which could include likes and dislikes or any other relevant information about the child's eating habits.

	YES	NO	COMMENTS
Breakfast			
Bread or toast is always available.			
Cereals are always available (unsweetened breakfast cereals are preferred, eg porridge, Weetabix, Cornflakes, Rice Krispies).			
Suitable choices are provided for babies and infants.			
Midday meal			
One portion of food from the meat, fish and alternatives group is provided.			
At least one portion from the fruit and vegetable group is provided.			
At least one portion is provided from the bread, cereals and potatoes group.			
Desserts are based on fruit and/or milk. (See end of table for details of food groups)			

	YES	NO	COMMENTS
Evening meal (if provided)			
One portion of food from the meat, fish and alternatives group is provided.			
At least one portion from the fruit and vegetable group is provided.			
At least one portion is provided from the bread, cereals and potatoes group.			
Desserts are based on fruit and/or milk. (See below for details of food groups)			
Snacks between meals			
Morning and afternoon snacks are served at regular times.			
Recommended snacks include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - bread*, toast*, scone*, pancake*, crumpet*, bread muffin*; - sandwiches (eg meat, cheese, egg, fish); - fresh fruit; - raw vegetables; - cheese; - natural yogurt, unsweetened fromage frais; - low-sugar cereal and milk. (*all served without jam, honey, marmalade, chocolate spread). Children are not encouraged to snack freely. Suitable snacks are served for infants.			
Drinks			
These are sugar free.			
Water and milk are the most suitable drinks at all times.			
Unsweetened pure fruit juices and squashes, if used, are well diluted (1 part juice to 10 parts water) and only given at mealtimes.			

	YES	NO	COMMENTS
Milk and milk products			
300-600ml (1/2-1 pt) of milk per day is provided for each child OR 2-3 portions of milk-based foods are provided each day. One portion is 25g (1oz) of hard cheese or 125g carton of yogurt or a bowl of milk pudding.			
Breast milk or infant formula is provided as the main drink for infants under 12 months.			
Meat, fish and alternatives			
One portion of food from the meat, fish and alternatives group is provided at each main meal, eg: beef, lamb, pork, liver, kidney, ham, poultry, fish, fish fingers, egg*, cheese*, beans*, lentils*, Quorn*, Tofu*, TVP*. (*Suitable for vegetarians).			
Red meat should be included at least two times a week as it is a good source of iron. Mince is acceptable as red meat.			
Processed meat products, eg sausages, burgers, sausage rolls, fish/chicken nuggets are served no more than once each week.			
Cultural and religious preferences are catered for where appropriate.			
Bread, cereals and potatoes			
A variety of these foods is offered, eg bread, pasta, rice and potatoes.			
At least one portion is included at each meal. Extra servings are available if the child is hungry.			
Mashed potatoes are made with fresh potatoes rather than instant potato.			
Chips or roast potatoes are served a maximum of once a week.			

	YES	NO	COMMENTS
Fruit and vegetables			
A total of five child-sized portions should be provided over the day, three of which should be provided in childcare.			
A child's portion is smaller than an adult's, eg 1/2 piece of fresh fruit, 1 tablespoon cooked vegetables.			
A variety of types is included.			
A vitamin C rich fruit is included daily, eg orange, kiwi fruit.			
Puddings			
Puddings served at main meals are milk or fruit based (preferably both).			
Milk pudding is provided at least three days per week eg, custard, semolina, rice, instant whipped dessert, yogurt. <i>'Ready to eat' custard or rice are suitable choices.</i>			
Fruit is also included in the dessert at least three days per week. <i>Fruit-based desserts include fruit crumble, fruit sponge, fruit tart, fruit jelly, stewed fruit.</i>			
A variety of puddings is included over the menu cycle.			
Spreads			
Low fat spreads are not used.			
Salt			
No salt is added at the table.			
The minimum possible amount of salt is used in cooking. If stock cubes are used, salt is not added in cooking.			

Contacts for more information

Enquiries should, in the first instance, be directed to the Early Years Team in your local area. They can put you in touch with other health professionals such as community dietitians and dental staff. Health visitors can be contacted directly with the parent's permission. The Northern Ireland Childminding Association is another source of information, training and support for childminders.

Armagh and Dungannon Health and Social Services Trust

Social Services Department
Gosford Place
The Mall
Armagh
BT61 9AR
Tel: 028 3752 2262

Lurgan Health and Social Services
100 Sloan Street
Lurgan
BT66 8NT
Tel: 028 3832 7824

Portadown Health and Social Services
Tavanagh Avenue
Portadown
BT62 3BU
Tel: 028 3839 3328

Causeway Health and Social Services Trust

Riverside House
28 Portstewart Road
Coleraine
BT52 1RN
Tel: 028 7035 8158

Down Lisburn Health and Social Services Trust

Warren Children's Centre
61 Woodland Park
Lisburn
BT28 1LQ
Tel: 028 9260 7528

Craigavon and Banbridge Health and Social Services Trust

Banbridge Health and Social Services
Scarva Street
Banbridge
BT32 3AD
Tel: 028 4066 2866

Early Years Team
Downshire Hospital
Ardglass Road
BT30 6RA
Tel: 028 4461 3311

Foyle Health and Social Services Trust

Brownlow Health and Social Services
1 Legahory Centre
Brownlow
Craigavon
BT65 5BE
Tel: 028 3834 3011

Early Years Services
Clooney Hall Centre
Clooney Terrace
Waterside
BT47 6AR
Tel: 028 7132 0950



Homefirst Health and Social Services Trust

Audley Centre
27 Ballymoney Road
Ballymena
BT43 5BS
Tel: 028 2564 1207

Ellis Street
Carrickfergus
BT38 8AZ
Tel: 028 9331 5112

Sperrin House
43 Queen's Avenue
Magherafelt
BT45 6BX
Tel: 028 7930 1700

Newry and Mourne Health and Social Services Trust

Butterfield House
24 Monaghan Street
Newry
BT35 6AA
Tel: 028 3025 0808

North and West Belfast Health and Social Services Trust

124 Stewartstown Road
Belfast
BT11 9JQ
Tel: 028 9060 4208

South and East Belfast Health and Social Services Trust

Glen Villa
Knockbracken Healthcare Park
Saintfield Road
Belfast
BT8 8BH
Tel: 028 9056 5555

Sperrin Lakeland Health and Social Care Trust

Community Services
Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital
Omagh
BT79 0NS
Tel: 028 8283 5020

Community Services
2 Coleshill Road
Enniskillen
BT74 7HG
Tel: 028 6634 4000

Ulster Community and Hospitals Trust

Family and Childcare Services
Dunlop Unit 57-58
4 Balloo Drive
Bangor
BT19 7QY
Tel: 028 9127 0672

Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA)

16-18 Mill Street
Newtownards
BT23 4LU
Tel: 028 9181 1015
www.nicma.org
info@nicma.org

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Health
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Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland

18 Ormeau Avenue, Belfast BT2 8HS.

Tel: 028 9031 1611 (voice/minicom). Fax: 028 9031 1711.

www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk

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