Lunchbox policy

We believe that food is about so much more than simply filling tummies. Nutrition during this critical stage lays the foundation for healthy physical growth, optimal brain development, and the establishment of lifelong eating habits. In these formative years, children are not only growing rapidly, they're also developing their taste preferences, shaping eating behaviours, and forming relationships with food that can influence their long-term health, wellbeing, and even academic outcomes. That's why we place such importance on the quality of the food we serve.

We're proud to partner with Nursery Kitchen to provide nutritionally balanced, sustainable, and delicious meals that meet rigorous food-based standards developed by public health nutritionists and early years experts and which reflect our values in food provision and our dedication to supporting every child's health.

Whenever possible, we encourage all children attending our nurseries to enjoy meals from our menu, not just for the nutritional benefits, but also for the valuable social and developmental experiences that come from shared mealtimes. These include exposure to a wide variety of foods, learning through peer role-modelling, developing self-serving skills, and establishing positive mealtime routines.

Where food is brought from home, it's essential that it aligns with equivalent nutritional standards and reflects our shared values around food and mealtimes. This ensures consistency in the food experiences we provide and maintains our focus on nourishing children well.

Lunchboxes should comply with the necessary nutritional criteria as outlined in the EYFS nutrition guidance. This includes;

Bread, cereals, potatoes and other starchy foods

How many? At least one item from this food group at every mealtime.

Examples: sandwiches, pitta bread, wraps, pasta salad, potato or sweet potato wedges, rice dishes, couscous, rice cakes.

Why? These foods will provide energy, fuel for vital tissues and organs including the brain, as well as fibre, B vitamins and other minerals.

Top tip: include at least one wholegrain carbohydrate at lunch and tea each week. Wholegrain starchy foods offer more fibre and support good gut health, they include, brown or wholemeal, whole-wheat pasta, brown rice quinoa, oats.

Avoid: Flavoured dried rice, pasta and noodle products e.g. packets and pots of instant flavoured noodles, pasta and rice.

Fruits and vegetables

How many? At least one fruit and one vegetable at every mealtime and a variety of vegetables or fruit across the day and each week.

Examples: fresh, frozen, tinned, or dried fruits and vegetables. You could include vegetable sticks for dipping or add veggies to salads, pasta or rice or couscous dishes.

Why? Fruit and vegetables are a good source of vitamins, minerals, fibre and antioxidants.

Top tip: aim for a variety of colours. Not only will it make the lunchbox look more appetising, but it also provides a variety of different vitamins and minerals.

Avoid: Tinned fruit in syrup – use tinned fruit in juice instead. Avoid tinned vegetables in salted or sugared water – opt for vegetables in plain water instead. Avoid dried fruits at snack time. Dried fruit should only be served as part of a main meal only.

Dairy and dairy alternatives

How many? At least one portion of dairy or fortified dairy alternative.

Examples: cheese, unsweetened yoghurts or fromage frais (or a fortified dairy-free alternative e.g. soya or oat yoghurts), a carton of milk or a fortified dairy-free alternative such as soya or oat milk.

Why? Dairy foods provide calcium, iodine, vitamin B12, vitamin A and protein.

Top tip: If you're using a dairy-free alternative check the label to ensure it is unsweetened and has been fortified with calcium and other vitamins and minerals.

Avoid: Sweetened yoghurts and fromage frais (including non-dairy alternatives) this includes any dairy items sweetened with sugar or artificial sweeteners - choose plain unsweetened options.

Drinks

Milk and water are the only permitted drinks.

Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein

How many? At least one portion from this food group at every mealtime and a variety of different protein sources across the week.

Examples: chicken, turkey, beef, lamb, beans, fish, shellfish, lentils, chickpeas, pulses, hummus, falafel. Eggs.

Why? These foods provide protein, iron and zinc. Iron is particularly important as our bodies cannot make iron so we rely on obtaining it solely from the foods we eat. Children who do not eat enough iron are at risk of iron deficiency anaemia which can affect both mental and physical development and performance.

Top tip: Unless your child is vegetarian or vegan you should include at least one portion of fish each week. Oily fish is particularly beneficial for children's cognitive development. Oily fish, includes fresh, tinned or frozen salmon, sardines, pilchards, mackerel and herring. Oily fish should be included every other week and no more than twice per week.

Avoid: Processed meat, fish or vegetarian products such as sausages, burgers, ham, pepperoni, chicken nuggets, sausage rolls, canned meats, fish fingers or other shop bought coated fish products, Quorn or soya sausages, burgers or nuggets.

Lunchbox ideas

Grated carrot and hummus wraps. Cheese wedges and apple slices with crackers. Water to drink

Wholemeal pitta pizza topped with roast chicken strips, chopped tomatoes, sweetcorn and cheese. Watermelon fingers. Water to drink

Tuna and pea pasta salad topped with grated cheese. Tinned pineapple (in juice). Water to drink

Chickpea and red pepper cous cous. Tinned peaches (in juice) with natural yoghurt. Water to drink

Bean and cheese quesadillas. Pepper and cucumber stick salad. Banana and yoghurt. Water to drink

Courgette and cheese savoury muffins. Hummus dip with vegetable crudités. Water to drink

Tinned salmon, spinach and cream cheese wraps. Fruit salad. Water to drink

Lunchbox Tapas: Sliced wholemeal pitta bread, hardboiled egg quarters, cream cheese dip and cucumber sticks. Chopped berries with Greek yoghurt. Water to drink

Other recipes and lunchbox tips can be found here:

https://www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/recipes/healthier-lunchboxes/

Keeping lunchboxes safe

To keep children safe and healthy, it's essential that any food brought from home is stored and transported safely. Lunchboxes are often prepared several hours before they're eaten, and without proper handling, they can become a breeding ground for bacteria that cause food poisoning.

Please note: As we are unable to guarantee fridge space for lunchboxes, it is vital that families take extra care in preparing and packing food safely.

To reduce the risk of foodborne illness, all food should be kept below 8°C. Please follow the guidance below to help keep your child's lunch safe and fresh.

Safe preparation tips:

- Wash and dry your hands thoroughly before preparing food. Cover any cuts with a waterproof plaster.
- Clean work surfaces with an anti-bacterial solution before and after preparing food.
- Always check that food is within its use-by or best-before date.
- Wash all fruit and salad ingredients under cold running water, even pre-washed bags of salad.
- Keep raw and cooked foods separate. Use different chopping boards and utensils for each, or clean thoroughly between uses.
- Cook meat and poultry thoroughly to kill harmful bacteria. Allow it to cool quickly and store in the fridge until needed (never put hot food directly in the fridge).
- Ideally, prepare sandwiches on the same day. If made in advance, keep them refrigerated until packing.
- Wrap sandwiches in greaseproof paper or foil and store them in a clean, sealed lunchbox.
- Ensure your fridge is working correctly (ideally kept between 0–5°C) - use a thermometer to check.

Safe storage tips:

- Always use an insulated cool bag with ice packs to keep food cold until lunchtime. This is essential year-round, not just in summer.
- Distribute ice packs throughout the box or bag, not all at the bottom so that all the contents can be kept cold. You can also use frozen bottles of water to help keep your cool bag cold.
- Keep the lunchbox out of direct sunlight or warm places (e.g. radiators or car interiors).

By following these steps, you help us ensure that all children can enjoy their meals safely and with minimal risk of food-related illness.

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