

This publication was withdrawn on 23 July 2025

This guidance has been withdrawn because it's out of date.

For up-to-date guidance, see [Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition](#).



HM Government

Example menus for early years settings in England

Part 1: Guidance

Includes menus and useful information for early years settings to help them to meet the Early Years Foundation Stage welfare requirements for food and drink.

14 August 2024:

Some of the food safety guidance in this document is out of date. For example, we do not recommend giving popcorn to children under 5. This document is currently being updated. For the most up to date advice on food safety, please go to the Department for Education page [Help for early years providers: Food safety](#).

About Public Health England

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ⁱ The Children's Food Trust (CFT) ceased trading in September 2017, at which point Action for Children acquired the Eat Better Start Better programme from CFT. As a result it has been necessary to amend this document to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

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Executive summary

Children's food preferences and eating habits are formed early in life with consequences for a range of health and development outcomes in later life. It is therefore important that the food offered in early years settings provides appropriate amounts of energy and nutrients and encourages the development of healthy eating habits in young children, both to support appropriate growth and development, and as part of national priorities to reduce childhood obesity and ensure every child has the best start in life.

To support healthier food provision in early years settings in line with current government dietary recommendations, a series of example menus and associated guidance have been developed. Two three-week example seasonal menus, each including examples of breakfasts, lunches, teas and snacks, help illustrate the types and amounts of food and drink that can be offered to meet the nutritional requirements of infants and children aged six months to four yearsⁱⁱ.

The principles underpinning the development of the example menus are outlined and key information on using the example menus, including advice on menu planning, food safety, managing food allergies and reading food labels, is provided. Together, the example menus and associated guidance provide an illustration of how early years settings (such as nurseries and child minders) can meet the Early Years Foundation Stage welfare requirement to provide "healthy, balanced and nutritious" meals for children, whilst supporting them to make healthier choices in relation to food and drink. Other resources giving more detailed information on how to encourage children to eat well are also signposted.

Recipes for each of the menu items included in the example menus are available in the accompanying document [Example menus for early years settings in England: Part 2 - Recipes](#).

ⁱⁱThese menus have been developed to ensure the nutritional requirements of infants and children from six months up to four years have been met. These requirements have been derived from average energy requirements and Dietary Reference Values for infants and children aged six months – four years. This includes children up to their fifth birthday, and covers the age range for which food is typically provided in early years settings.

Acknowledgements

The development of these example menus and guidance was informed by an External Reference Group. The External Reference Group terms of reference and list of members can be found in the [technical report](#).

Public Health England and the Children's Food Trust would like to thank the External Reference Group members, and the early years settings and organisations who provided recipes and feedback on the menus.

1. Introduction

Children's early years provide an important foundation for their future health and strongly influence many aspects of well-being.¹ Children's food preferences and eating habits are also formed early in life with consequences for a range of health and development outcomes in later life.² It is therefore important that the food provided in early years settings provides appropriate amounts of energy and nutrients and supports development of healthy eating habits in young children, both to support individual children's growth and development, and as part of national priorities to reduce childhood obesity and ensure every child has the best start in life.³

In June 2016, Public Health England commissioned the Children's Food Trust to develop a series of example menus for early years settings in England. Subsequently the Government's 'Childhood Obesity - A Plan for Action'⁴ was published and the example menus will help contribute towards delivery of the Plan.

These example menus build on the Voluntary Food and Drink Guidelines for Early Years Settings in England published in 2012 (an updated version was published by Action for Children in 2017),⁵ and have been developed to illustrate how settings can provide meals and snacks in line with current government dietary recommendations for infants and children aged six months to four years (up to their fifth birthday). The example menus reflect updates to government dietary recommendations (including revised estimated average requirements for energy (calories),⁶ and new recommendations for maximum intakes of free sugars and minimum intakes of dietary fibre applying to children over two years⁷).

The complete example menus can be introduced by settings, or individual recipes can be included within existing menus. The example menus and recipes have been designed for use by all regulated early years providers including children's centres, nurseries and childminders.

Meeting children's nutritional requirements

The example menus have been developed to meet a nutrient framework to ensure they provide an appropriate amount of energy (calories) and a range of nutrients that are important for children's health and development.

This framework, and the principles underpinning it, were discussed and informed by an External Reference Group (ERG). A [technical report](#) describing how the new menus were developed is available. The [minutes from the ERG meetings](#) which informed this process are also available.

2. Children aged one to four years

Eating well for children aged one to four years

A healthy, balanced diet and regular physical activity are essential for children's health and wellbeing. Good nutrition is important for children to:

- ensure they get the right amount of energy and nutrients needed to support growth, development, health and well-being
- ensure they do not consume too many calories, which may lead to overweight or obesity
- encourage children to eat a wide range of foods and develop healthy eating habits to take with them into later childhood and beyond.

A healthy balanced diet for children aged from one to four years is based on the four food groups listed below, which provide a range of essential nutrients that children need to grow and develop:

- potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates
- fruit and vegetables
- beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins
- dairy and alternatives

One of the basic principles of healthy eating is variety, as eating a wider range of different foods provides a better balance of nutrients. Planning meals and snacks to include a variety of food and drinks from the four food groups listed above each day will provide children with a good balance of nutrients and help ensure their nutritional needs are met. Young children are growing quickly and have high energy and nutrient requirements for their size. They also eat smaller amounts of food than older children and adults, so it is important for them to eat regular meals and snacks that contain sufficient energy and nutrients to meet their needs. Between the ages of two and five years, children should make a gradual transition to follow the balance shown in the Eatwell Guide.⁸ The [Eatwell Guide booklet](#) provides further information on each of the food groups above.

The example menus have been planned in line with overarching principles detailed in the [technical report](#) to ensure that they are practical to implement and take into account the diversity of early years settings in England. The example menus aim to include a variety of different foods, tastes, textures and colours across each day and across meals on different days in the week, and to meet the needs of all children.⁹ An overview of menu planning advice for early years settings is also

included in Section 4: menu planning, food safety, managing food allergies and reading food labelling advice of this document.

Eating well across the day

It is important that the food and drink provided for children aged one to four years is balanced across each day and that children eat regularly, with breakfast, lunch, tea, and two or three snacks provided daily, either within an early years setting or at home. This also helps to ensure that the needs of children who move between different settings and home are met.

The example menus included in this document have been planned to provide approximately 90% of the average daily energy and nutrient requirements for a child aged one to four years, divided across meals and snacks provided during full day care in the following proportions:

- breakfast 20%
- mid-morning snack 10%
- lunch 30%
- mid-afternoon snack 10%
- tea 20%

These proportions are based on the assumption that lunch is a main meal, and tea is a light meal, but these can be reversed to fit with setting provision. This leaves 10% for an additional drink or snack at home (or in the setting if children are attending for extended hours), which is roughly equivalent to a small glass of milk and a portion of fruit.

Vitamin supplements for children aged one to four years

Government recommends:¹⁰

- breastfed infants from birth to one year of age should be given a daily supplement containing 8.5 to 10µg of vitamin D, to make sure they get enough¹¹
- infants fed infant formula should not be given a vitamin D supplement until they are receiving less than 500ml (about a pint) of infant formula a day, because infant formula is fortified with vitamin D
- children aged 1 to 4 years old should be given a daily supplement containing 10µg of vitamin D

In addition to vitamin D advice, the government also recommends that children aged from six months to five years are given daily vitamin supplements containing vitamins A (233µg) and C (20mg). This is a precautionary measure, to ensure that

their requirements for these nutrients are met, at an age when it is difficult to be certain that the diet is a consistently reliable source.¹⁰

Families who qualify for the Healthy Start scheme are eligible to receive free vitamin drops for children from six months until their fourth birthday, as well as free vitamin supplements for pregnant women and women with a child under 12 months. In some areas vitamins are free to all families and information about this can be obtained from a health visitor. Food vouchers are also available under the Healthy Start scheme that can be used to purchase plain cows' milk, plain fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables, or for infants, first infant formula.¹²

It is the responsibility of parents to give these vitamin supplements to children, but settings can help support families by highlighting this advice, and by encouraging families who may be eligible to apply for Healthy Start.

The example menus for children aged one to four years



The example menus have been planned to meet current government dietary recommendations for this age group. Typical portion sizes utilised in the menus provide appropriate amounts of energy and nutrients.

The example menus illustrate three weeks of recipes for breakfasts, lunches, teas and snacks. These are displayed in weekly menus to illustrate how the recipes can be used to provide varied food provision. The recipes can also be used individually, or on menus put together using different combinations of the recipes, but the overall menus should be checked by the setting to ensure they remain varied and meet dietary requirements for this age group.

The ingredients used in the example menus and recipes are not intended to be prescriptive; they are illustrative of the types and variety of foods that can be provided to meet children's dietary requirements. Settings can therefore use the example menus and recipes as a guide when planning their own food provision, but substitute ingredients where necessary or desired to take advantage of foods that are available and cost effective for their circumstances. Where ingredients are substituted, meals and snacks should still include a variety of different foods from each food group, and included different colours, tastes and textures.

Understanding the example menus for early years settingsⁱⁱⁱ

The following symbols and terms are used in the ‘at a glance’ sections to help interpret the advice and can be used to help plan menus.













| Key to symbols/definitions used in the ‘at a glance’ information on pages 11-15 | |
|---|---|
|  | Guidelines – use these to plan your meals and snacks |
|  | Good practice – consider these when planning your meals and snacks |
| Limit | Where the guidelines advise that foods should be limited, these should be provided no more than once a week. This will help to decrease the amount of sugar, salt and saturated fat in children’s diets and increase the variety of foods they are offered. |
| Avoid | Where the guidelines advise that food or drinks should be avoided, these should not be provided as part of any meals or snacks |

ⁱⁱⁱ The at a glance information for meals and snacks is based on the Voluntary Food and Drink Guidelines for Early Years Settings in England, published in 2012 with revisions to reflect current dietary recommendations for children aged one to four years. An updated version to reflect the changes within this document is available from Action for Children

At a glance advice for children aged one to four years












Breakfast at a glance

The table below summarises the key menu planning advice relating to the provision of breakfast in early years settings and the example breakfast menus have been planned to meet this.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Menu planning advice | Breakfast is an important meal for young children. Settings should liaise with parents to make sure that children always eat breakfast, whether at home or when they arrive at the setting. | |
| Food group | Guidelines | |
| Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates |  | Provide a portion of starchy food as part of breakfast each day. |
| |  | Provide at least three different types of starchy food across breakfasts each week, for example cornflakes, wholegrain toast, porridge. |
| |  | Provide a variety of wholegrain and white starchy foods as part of breakfast each week. |
| |  | It is good practice to provide wholegrain starchy foods for at least one breakfast each week |
| |  | Choose breakfast cereals with the lowest sugar content. Choose those which are labelled as 'low' (green) or 'medium' (amber) in sugar. |
| |  | Avoid cereals labelled 'high' (red) in sugar such as sugar-coated or chocolate-flavoured cereals. |
| |  | Choose bread and bread products with a lower salt content. Choose those which are labelled as 'low' (green) or 'medium' (amber) in salt. |
| Fruit and vegetables |  | Provide a portion of fruit or vegetables at breakfast each day. |
| Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins |  | Food from this group provides a useful source of iron and zinc and can be provided as part of breakfast. |
| Dairy and alternatives |  | It is good practice to provide three portions of milk and dairy foods each day (including those provided at home); one of these can be provided as part of breakfast. |
| Drinks |  | Children must have access to fresh drinking water. |
| |  | Provide only fresh tap water and plain milk for children to drink. |


















Snacks at a glance





The table below summarises the key menu planning advice relating to the provision of snacks in early years settings and the example snack menus have been planned to meet this.

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Menu planning advice | Plan menus for snacks to ensure that they are varied across the week and that the food provision across the day is balanced. | |
| |  | Avoid sweet foods such as cakes, biscuits and confectionery between meals. |
| Food group | Guidelines | |
| Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates |  | Provide a starchy food such as crackers, breadsticks, rice cakes as part of at least one snack each day. |
| |  | Provide at least three different types of starchy food across snacks each week. |
| |  | Choose bread and bread products with a lower salt content. Choose those which are labelled as 'low' (green) or 'medium' (amber) in salt. |
| Fruit and vegetables |  | Provide vegetables or fruit as part of some snacks. |
| |  | Provide a variety of vegetables and fruit across the day, and each week. |
| |  | Dried fruit should not be provided as part of snacks. |
| Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins |  | Foods from this group provide a useful source of iron and zinc and can be provided as part of snacks once or twice each week |
| Dairy and alternatives |  | It is good practice to provide three portions of milk and dairy foods each day (including those provided at home); one of these can be provided as part of snacks. |
| Drinks |  | Children must have access to fresh drinking water. |
| |  | Provide only fresh tap water and plain milk for children to drink. |

Lunch at a glance















The table below summarises the key menu planning advice relating to the provision of lunch in early years settings and the example lunch menus have been planned to meet this.








| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Menu planning advice | Each lunch should include a main course and a dessert. Vary the desserts you offer with lunch and tea each week. For main meals (typically lunch), provide a variety of different desserts each week (for example fruit-based desserts such as apple crumble, dairy-based desserts such as rice pudding) and limit provision of cakes and biscuits. | |
| Food group | Guidelines | |
| Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates |  | Provide a portion of starchy food as part of each lunch. |
| |  | Provide at least three different starchy foods as part of lunch each week. |
| |  | Provide a variety of wholegrain and white starchy foods each week. |
| |  | It is good practice to provide wholegrain starchy foods for at least one lunch each week. |
| |  | Limit starchy foods which have been fried to once a week at lunch. |
| |  | Limit canned pasta in sauce. |
| |  | Avoid flavoured dried rice, pasta and noodle products, for example packets and pots of instant flavoured noodles, pasta and rice. |
| Fruit and vegetables |  | Provide at least one portion of vegetables and/or fruits as part of lunch each day. |
| |  | Provide a variety of vegetables and fruit across the week at lunch |
| |  | Check product labels to choose canned vegetables and pulses without added salt and sugar, fruit canned in juice not syrup, and reduced salt and sugar baked beans. |
| |  | Baked beans can count as a vegetable only once during each week. |
| Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins |  | Provide a portion of beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat (for example red meat or poultry) or other proteins (for example meat alternatives) as part of lunch each day. |
| |  | Provide a variety of foods from this group as part of lunch across the week. |
| |  | It is good practice to provide a portion each of beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat (for example red meat and poultry) or other proteins (for example meat alternatives) each week as part of lunch. |
| |  | Provide vegetarian children with a variety of protein sources such as pulses, eggs and meat alternatives each week as part of lunch. |
| |  | Provide one lunch for all children each week which uses pulses or a meat alternative as the protein source |
| |  | Provide oily fish (such as salmon, sardines or pilchards) at least once every three weeks; this can be provided as part of lunch or tea. |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| |  | Limit the provision of meat products (for example sausages, meatballs), fish products (for example fish fingers, fish cakes), and products made from meat alternatives (for example vegetarian sausages), to once a week for each of the three types. |
| Dairy and alternatives |  | It is good practice to provide three portions of milk and dairy foods each day (including those provided at home); one of these can be provided as part of lunch. |
| Drinks |  | Children must have access to fresh drinking water. |
| |  | Provide only fresh tap water and plain milk for children to drink. |

Tea at a glance

The table below summarises the key menu planning advice relating to the provision of tea in early years settings and the example tea menus have been planned to meet this.

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Menu planning advice | Each tea should include a main course and a dessert. Vary the desserts you offer with lunch and tea each week. For light meals (typically tea) provide fruit (such as seasonal fruit salad) and/or dairy-based desserts such as yoghurt, and avoid cakes and biscuits. | |
| Food group | Guidelines | |
| Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates |  | Provide a portion of starchy food as part of each tea. |
| |  | Provide at least three different starchy foods as part of tea each week. |
| |  | Provide a variety of wholegrain and white starchy foods each week. |
| |  | It is good practice to provide wholegrain starchy foods for at least one tea each week. |
| |  | Limit starchy foods which have been fried to once a week at tea. |
| |  | Limit canned pasta in sauce. |
| |  | Avoid flavoured dried rice, pasta and noodle products for example packets and pots of instant flavoured noodles, pasta and rice. |
| Fruit and vegetables |  | Provide at least one portion of vegetables and/or fruits as part of tea each day. |
| |  | Provide a variety of vegetables and fruit across the week at tea |
| |  | Check product labels to choose canned vegetables and pulses without added salt and sugar, fruit canned in juice not syrup, and reduced salt and sugar baked beans. |
| |  | Baked beans can count as a vegetable only once during each week. |
| Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins |  | Provide a portion of beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat (for example red meat or poultry) or other proteins (for example meat alternatives) as part of tea each day. |
| |  | Provide a variety of foods from this group as part of tea across the week. |
| |  | It is good practice to provide a portion each of beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat (for example red meat and poultry) or other proteins (for example |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| | | meat alternatives) each week as part of tea. |
| |  | Provide vegetarian children with a variety of protein sources such as pulses, eggs and meat alternatives each week as part of tea. |
| |  | Provide one tea for all children each week which uses pulses or a meat alternative as the protein source |
| |  | Provide oily fish (such as salmon, sardines or pilchards) at least once every three weeks; this can be provided as part of lunch or tea. |
| |  | Limit the provision of meat products (for example sausages, meatballs), fish products (for example fish fingers, fish cakes), and products made from meat alternatives (for example vegetarian sausages), to once a week for each of the three types. |
| Dairy and alternatives |  | It is good practice to provide three portions of milk and dairy foods each day (including those provided at home); one of these can be provided as part of tea. |
| Drinks |  | Children must have access to fresh drinking water. |
| |  | Provide only fresh tap water and plain milk for children to drink. |

Week 1: Example spring/summer menu for early years settings in England (children aged 1-4 years)

| Week 1 | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| Breakfast Planned to provide 20% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | Malt wheat cereal with milk and sliced banana Crumpet and spread | Cornflakes with milk, raisins and kiwi fruit quarters White toast and spread | Hard-boiled egg and tomatoes with wholemeal bread and spread Banana | Wheat bisks with milk and mixed berries Half a slice of fruit bread and spread | Crisped rice cereal and milk Half a bagel with spread and melon |
| Mid-morning snack Planned to provide 10% of a child's daily nutritional requirements | Breadsticks and mixed vegetable sticks Milk or water | Toasted crumpet, spread and strawberries Milk or water | Yoghurt and sliced grapes Milk or water | Wholemeal toast with spread and mangetout Milk or water | Banana slices Milk or water |
| Lunch Planned to provide 30% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | Thai chicken curry (or Thai tofu curry) with white rice Seasonal fruit salad | Lamb moussaka (or Lentil moussaka) with garlic bread and mixed salad Rhubarb fool | Pork ragu (or soya and apple ragu) with new potatoes, broad beans and courgettes Pineapple upside down pudding with custard | Salmon and pea risotto (or bean and pea risotto) Blueberry sponge cake | Bean and veggie sausage wholemeal pasta bake Plain Greek yoghurt with raspberry puree |
| Mid-afternoon snack Planned to provide 10% of a child's daily nutritional requirements | Cheese (sliced or cut into sticks) and sliced tomatoes Milk or water | Pineapple slices Milk or water | Mashed avocado and pitta bread Milk or water | Mixed chopped seasonal fruit Milk or water | Cucumber and carrots sticks with crackers and cream cheese Milk or water |
| Tea Planned to provide 20% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | Bean and tomato gnocchi bake with bread and spread Strawberry frozen yoghurt | Tuna fishcakes (or potato and lentil cakes) with tomato relish Seasonal fruit salad | Pasta with beans and peas Rice pudding with peach purée | Wholemeal English muffin pizza with various toppings Banana slices | Crustless quiche with potato salad and pepper sticks Apple slices and raisins |
| Note: Fresh drinking water must be available and accessible at all times. | | | | | |

Week 2: Example spring/summer menu for early years settings in England (children aged 1-4 years)

| Week 2 | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--|--|---|---|---|--|
| Breakfast Planned to provide 20% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | Wheat bisks with milk and kiwi fruit Wholemeal toast and spread | Berries and yoghurt with toasted oats and cornflakes | Crisped rice cereal with milk and sliced banana Crumpet with spread | Cornflakes and milk Half a toasted teacake with spread and melon | Toasted English muffin with spread, egg and mushrooms |
| Mid-morning snack Planned to provide 10% of a child's daily nutritional requirements | Beanie dip and bread sticks Milk or water | Pepper sticks and tomato slices Milk or water | Wholemeal toast with spread and kiwi fruit quarters Milk or water | Banana slices Milk or water | Bagel and cream cheese Milk or water |
| Lunch Planned to provide 30% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | BBQ chicken (or BBQ Quorn TM pieces) with new potatoes and roast vegetables Lemon and sultana cake | Beef and spinach curry (or chickpea and spinach curry) with white rice and naan bread Seasonal fruit salad | Steamed cod in tomato and pepper sauce (or tofu in tomato and pepper sauce) with couscous and green beans Rice pudding and raspberries | Vegetable and red lentil dhansak with brown rice Fruit, jelly and ice cream | Turkey meatballs (or veggie 'meatballs') with white spaghetti Peach fool ripple |
| Mid-afternoon snack Planned to provide 10% of a child's daily nutritional requirements | Nectarine slices Milk or water | Oatcakes and cream cheese Milk or water | Cucumber and carrot sticks Milk or water | Crackers, tzatziki and tomato slices Milk or water | Melon and blueberries Milk or water |
| Tea Planned to provide 20% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | Cous cous and chickpea salad Rice pudding and raisins | Sardine pâté (or pinto bean spread) on white toast with grilled tomatoes Fruit yoghurt pots | Billy can beans (veggie sausage and beans) with wholemeal pasta Seasonal fruit kebabs | Lemon chicken (or Lemon soya) wrap with lettuce and cucumber Plain Greek yoghurt with strawberries and blackcurrants | Pea and asparagus frittata with new potato salad Pineapple slices |
| Note: Fresh drinking water must be available and accessible at all times. | | | | | |

Week 3: Example spring/summer menu for early years settings in England (children aged 1-4 years)

| Week 3 | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--|---|--|---|--|---|
| Breakfast Planned to provide 20% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | Malt wheat cereal with milk Half a white bagel with spread, tomato and mushrooms | Cornflakes with milk and banana Wholemeal toast and spread | Shredded wheat with milk Toasted fruit bread with spread and kiwi fruit | Wheat bisks with milk and raisins Half a crumpet and spread | Crisped rice cereal with milk and grapes Wholemeal toast and spread |
| Mid-morning snack Planned to provide 10% of a child's daily nutritional requirements | Peach slices and plain yoghurt Milk or water | Breadsticks with carrot and pepper sticks Milk or water | Mixed berries and plain yoghurt Milk or water | Wholemeal toast and spread Milk or water | Sugar snap peas and houmous Milk or water |
| Lunch Planned to provide 30% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | Beef and mushroom stroganoff (or bean and mushroom stroganoff) with white rice Banana buns | Pasta primavera with garlic bread Yoghurt and dried apricots | Gammon (or Quorn™ fillet) with parsley sauce, new potatoes and green beans Seasonal fruit platter | Cod, potato and spinach curry (or lentil, potato and spinach curry) with cous cous Creamy apricot dessert | Chicken and vegetable pie (or cheese and vegetable pie) with roast potatoes and spring greens Summer crumble and custard |
| Mid-afternoon snack Planned to provide 10% of a child's daily nutritional requirements | Crumpets and spread Milk or water | Banana and yoghurt Milk or water | Pitta bread and tuna dip Milk or water | Pepper sticks and cheese (sliced or cut into sticks) Milk or water | Rice cakes, cucumber sticks and tomatoes Milk or water |
| Tea Planned to provide 20% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | Savoury omelette with potato salad and cucumber Strawberry frozen yoghurt | Lamb and mint koftas (or veggie mince and mint koftas) with tomato sauce and wholemeal pita breads Apple slices and dates | Salmon and broccoli pasta (or lentil and broccoli pasta) with sweetcorn Semolina and nectarine compote | Homemade ham flatbread (or cheese flatbread) Grapes and melon | Bean and vegetable enchiladas Dairy ice cream and mango slices |
| Note: Fresh drinking water must be available and accessible at all times. | | | | | |

Week 1: Example autumn/winter menu for early years settings in England (children aged 1-4 years)

| Week 1 | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--|---|--|---|---|--|
| Breakfast Planned to provide 20% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | Wheat bisks with yoghurt and dried apricots White toast and spread | Cornflakes and milk Wholemeal toast with, spread, tomatoes and mushrooms | Porridge with raisins Banana | Malt wheat cereal and milk Crumpet with spread and pear | Crisped rice cereal and milk with satsumas Fruit toast and spread |
| Mid-morning snack Planned to provide 10% of a child's daily nutritional requirements | Toasted English muffin and spread with a clementine Milk or water | Runner beans with bean dip Milk or water | Rice cakes with beetroot dip Milk or water | Banana Milk or water | Toasted pitta bread with mashed avocado Milk or water |
| Lunch Planned to provide 30% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | Haddock and salmon pie (or bean pie) with red cabbage and runner beans Eve's pudding and custard | Lamb tagine (or mixed bean tagine) with vegetable cous cous Warm winter fruit salad and vanilla sauce | Pork meatballs (or vegetarian meatballs) with spaghetti, peas and carrots Seasonal fruit salad | Chickpea and vegetable biryani Mandarin jelly | Roast chicken (or Quorn™ fillet) with roast potatoes, root vegetables and gravy Yoghurt and dates |
| Mid-afternoon snack Planned to provide 10% of a child's daily nutritional requirements | Tomato slices and cheese cut into sticks Milk or water | Plain popcorn with pear Milk or water | Oatcake and satsuma Milk or water | Baby corn, crackers and spread Milk or water | Carrot, pepper sticks and houmous Milk or water |
| Tea Planned to provide 20% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | Cous cous with chicken (or houmous), beetroot and mixed salad Seasonal fruit salad | Tuna mayonnaise (or cheese) with a jacket potato and carrot and cucumber sticks Bananas and custard | Sweet potato and lentil soup with wholemeal bread and spread Yoghurt and blackberry compote | Pea, ham (or veggie mince) and mushroom pasta bake Rice pudding and apricots | Mexican bean and cheese wraps with red pepper and celery Apples, pears and plums |
| Note: Fresh drinking water must be available and accessible at all times. | | | | | |

Week 2: Example autumn/winter menu for early years settings in England (children aged 1-4 years)

| Week 2 | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--|---|--|---|--|--|
| Breakfast Planned to provide 20% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | Crisped rice cereal and milk Plain bagel quarter with spread and chopped plum | Malt wheats and milk with banana Wholemeal toast and spread | Egg and mushroom cups, wholemeal toast, spread and tomatoes Pear slices | Cornflakes with milk and raisins Half a crumpet and spread | Wheat bisks with milk Half a toasted teacake and spread with apple |
| Mid-morning snack Planned to provide 10% of a child's daily nutritional requirements | Carrot and pepper sticks Milk or water | Rice cakes with cream cheese Milk or water | Crackers with spread and sliced grapes Milk or water | Wholemeal pitta fingers with mint raita and cucumber sticks Milk or water | Plum and satsuma Milk or water |
| Lunch Planned to provide 30% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | Lamb goulash (or bean goulash) with brown rice and green beans Shortbread and satsuma segments | Creamy chicken and leek hotpot (or Quorn TM and leek hotpot) with broccoli Baked apple with cinnamon | Beef lasagne (or tomato and lentil lasagne) with garlic bread and peas Semolina with raisins | Fish and pea fishcakes (or cheese and mushroom cakes) with potato wedges and spinach Seasonal fruit salad and yoghurt | Sweet and sour tofu with noodles Banana and cinnamon rice pudding |
| Mid-afternoon snack Planned to provide 10% of a child's daily nutritional requirements | Banana on toast Milk or water | Yoghurt and pear Milk or water | Cheese sticks and tomatoes Milk or water | Pineapple Milk or water | Toasted English Muffin with spread and carrot sticks Milk or water |
| Tea Planned to provide 20% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | Wholemeal macaroni cheese with peas Warm fruit salad and yoghurt | Squash and lentil soup with wholemeal bread and spread Peaches and custard | Salmon (or chickpea) vegetable rice salad Seasonal fruit salad | Chicken fajitas (or vegetarian red pepper fajitas) Autumn fruit kebabs | Mixed bean chilli and jacket potato Yoghurt with date and apple puree |
| Note: Fresh drinking water must be available and accessible at all times. | | | | | |

Week 3: Example autumn/winter menu for early years settings in England (children aged 1-4 years)

| Week 3 | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--|---|---|---|--|---|
| Breakfast Planned to provide 20% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | Wheat bisks with milk and raisins Half a crumpet and spread | Porridge with stewed apples and dates | Malted wheats and milk Plain pancake with banana | Egg with tomatoes and wholemeal toast and spread | Yoghurt, fruit and cereal pots White toast and spread |
| Mid-morning snack Planned to provide 10% of a child's daily nutritional requirements | Rice cake and houmous Milk or water | Plain yoghurt and banana slices Milk or water | Avocado on toast Milk or water | Carrot and celery sticks Milk or water | Breadsticks with apple Milk or water |
| Lunch Planned to provide 30% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | Mixed bean and root vegetable stew with herb cous cous Apple and rhubarb crumble and custard | Pork (or soya), leek and mustard casserole with mashed potatoes and Brussels sprouts Banana pancakes | Chicken korma (or chickpea korma) with brown rice Semolina with blackberry compote | Lamb pearl barley hotpot (or vegetarian pearl barley hotpot) with root vegetable mash Mini carrot cakes | Haddock ratatouille (or lentil ratatouille) with white pasta Fruity oat crumble sundaes |
| Mid-afternoon snack Planned to provide 10% of a child's daily nutritional requirements | Crackers and cream cheese Milk or water | Pitta bread and tzatziki with pepper sticks Milk or water | Seasonal chopped mixed fruit Milk or water | Crumpets with spread and grapes Milk or water | Hard-boiled egg and tomatoes Milk or water |
| Tea Planned to provide 20% of a child's daily nutritional requirements Drinks: Water only | Homemade mackerel pate (or cheese) with baked potatoes and salad Seasonal fruit salad | Parsnip, butterbean and apple soup with a wholemeal roll and spread Poached pears with Greek yoghurt | Roast vegetable and red lentil pasta Satsumas and grapes | Cous cous and chickpea salad Poached plums and custard | Pitta pockets with egg mayonnaise, cucumber and carrot salad Yoghurt and mixed dried fruit |
| Note: Fresh drinking water must be available and accessible at all times. | | | | | |

3. Infants

Infants aged 0-6 months

In the UK, exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for around the first six months of a baby's life with continued breastfeeding throughout the first year, and after that for as long as the mother wishes to continue.¹³

Breastfeeding has long-term benefits for infants. Not breastfeeding can increase the risk of gastrointestinal, respiratory and middle ear infection. There is also an association between not breastfeeding and risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), and growing evidence that not breastfeeding may increase the risk of overweight/obesity and diabetes later in life. Breastfeeding also has benefits for the mother, with good evidence to suggest that breastfeeding decreases the risk of breast cancer, and may also reduce the risk of ovarian cancer and type 2 diabetes. More information on the benefits of breastfeeding is available on the NHS¹⁴ and Start4Life websites.¹⁵

Complementary foods should be introduced alongside breastmilk from around six months to ensure that infants get all the nutrients they need and start their food journey to ensure they develop appropriately.

Supporting women to breastfeed in early years settings

Early years settings should support breastfeeding mothers, and encourage them to continue providing breastmilk for their baby while attending the setting. Supporting women to continue breastfeeding could include providing a comfortable place to breastfeed within the setting, signposting to evidence-based and expert information and support, as well as encouraging mothers who wish to provide expressed breastmilk for their infants and children to do so. The UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative provides training and assessment for hospitals and community health services (including children's centres) to enable them to give breastfeeding mothers the help and support they need to breastfeed successfully as well as supporting all mothers to form close and loving relationships with their baby.¹⁶

Safe storage of expressed breastmilk

Expressed breastmilk provided for infants in early years settings should be labelled, stored safely and used only for that child. Breastmilk should be stored in a sterilised container, and can be kept:

- in the fridge for up to five days at 4°C or lower
- for two weeks in the ice compartment of a fridge
- for up to six months in a freezer.¹⁷

If breastmilk is frozen, it should be defrosted in the fridge before giving it to a baby. Once it is defrosted, it should be used straight away, and cannot be refrozen. The milk can be warmed to body temperature by placing it in lukewarm water. Do not use a microwave to heat it, as this can cause hot spots which can burn a baby's mouth. Once the baby has drunk from the bottle of milk, it should be used within an hour and anything left over thrown away.¹⁷

Infant formula

If an infant is not exclusively breastfed, then infant formula suitable from birth (first infant formula) is the appropriate addition, or alternative, to breastmilk for infants in the first year of life, unless an alternative milk has been prescribed by a doctor.

Infant formula can be made from cows' milk or goats' milk and all infant formula has to meet the same compositional regulations. Infant formula can also be made from soya protein or hydrolysed proteins, but these preparations should not be used without medical supervision. For information on infant formula and other infant milks, see the NHS Choices website¹⁸ or First Steps Nutrition Trust website.¹⁹

Good hygiene is very important when making up infant formula. Anyone preparing infant formula should wash their hands thoroughly and all bottles, teats and other equipment should be sterilised before use. Follow the instructions on how to prepare the formula carefully. Adding too much powder to a feed can make a baby constipated and dehydrated; adding too little will mean insufficient energy and nutrients are provided.

Powdered infant formula is not sterile, and therefore needs to be made up with water at a temperature of at least 70°C to kill any harmful bacteria, and then cooled before being given to a baby. Further advice on making up infant formula safely can be found on the NHS Choices website²⁰ or in the Start4Life booklet 'guide to bottle feeding'.²¹

Infants aged 6-12 months

Most infants are developmentally ready for complementary feeding, the addition of solid foods alongside breastmilk (or first infant formula), at around six months of age. After about six months of age additional foods are needed to complement the nutrients in breastmilk (or infant formula) and to introduce infants to a range of tastes and textures as they start their journey to healthy family foods.²² When

providing food for infants, it is important that settings work closely with families to ensure a consistent approach in food provision for infants, both at home and within the setting, and to support families by signposting to appropriate evidence-based advice where needed.

Infants' first foods can include a range of foods from the different food groups, and can be provided blended, mashed and as a finger food:

- soft cooked vegetables such as parsnip, yam, butternut squash, carrot, broccoli, cauliflower
- meat such as chicken, lamb
- fish without bones
- starchy foods such as potato, sweet potato, pasta, noodles, chapatti, rice
- hard-boiled eggs
- pulses such as peas, beans and lentils
- dairy products made from whole milk, such as unsweetened yoghurt, fromage frais, custard.
- fruit (soft, or cooked without adding sugar) such as apple, pear, peach, melon, banana

Table 1. Summary of guidance on choosing first foods

| Information based on Start4life guidance on choosing first foods ²³ | | |
|--|---|---|
| Food group | Advice | Examples |
| Vegetables | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cook vegetables to soften them, then serve them blended or mashed, in a suitable texture for the baby, or give them as finger foods • offer a variety of vegetables including ones with bitter flavours. Offer a small amount and remember it may take many attempts for infants to get used to new foods • it's good to offer infants different foods every day • never add salt or | Broccoli Cauliflower Green beans Carrots Parsnips Swede Courgette Avocado Peppers Mushrooms Asparagus Butternut squash Peas Spinach Kale Cabbage Choose seasonal vegetables where possible. ²⁴ |

| | sugar to infants' food | |
|---|--|---|
| Fruits | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • serve blended or mashed soft, ripe fruits in a suitable texture for infants, or give them as finger foods. • harder fruits will need to be cooked to soften them. • remove any pips, stones and hard skin. • offer a small amount and remember it may take many attempts to get infants used to new foods. • it's good to offer infants different foods every day. | Banana Apple Pear Melon Blueberries Raspberries Strawberries Peach Kiwi Mango Pineapple Plum Oranges Nectarine Papaya Choose seasonal fruits where possible. ²⁴ |
| Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • these can be cooked and mashed to a suitable texture for infants, or offered as finger foods. • cereals can be mixed with breastmilk or first infant formula, or with pasteurised whole (full fat) cows' milk (or goats' or sheep's milk) if the baby is over six months old. | Potato Sweet potato Rice Pasta Baby Rice Porridge Oats Oatmeal Cornmeal Maize Millet Quinoa Toast Breads Chapatti Pitta Bread |
| Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protein foods such as beans and pulses, well cooked eggs, fish and meat are all suitable foods for infants from about six months. | Chicken Beef Lamb Turkey Fish (no bones) Egg Tofu Lentils |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> as well as giving infants protein, they also contain other useful nutrients such as iron and zinc, which are important for infants. | Pulses (for example chickpeas) |
| Dairy and alternatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> pasteurised dairy foods such as pasteurised full fat yoghurt and cheese are suitable foods for infants from six months. full fat, unsweetened or plain yoghurts are a good choice for infants because they don't contain added sugars. whole pasteurised (full fat) cows' milk, goats' or sheep's milk can be used in cooking or mixed with food from six months, but they shouldn't be given as a drink until 12 months. | Dairy products made from whole milk such as Unsweetened yoghurt/fromage frais, custard |

Foods to avoid before six months of age

If families do offer foods earlier than six months, then it is important to remember that there are some foods which should not be given before six months of age:²⁵

- cows' milk
- eggs
- foods containing wheat or gluten (for example bread, pasta).
- nuts, peanuts and peanut products
- seeds
- fish and shellfish

Introducing a variety of foods

Offering a wide variety of different foods is important to ensure that sufficient energy and nutrients are added to the diet. It is also important that infants get used to a variety of tastes. Ensuring that savoury foods and less sweet vegetables, rather than just fruits and sweet flavoured dishes are offered can help encourage infants to accept a wide range of different tastes. It is preferable to prepare food for infants from scratch, rather than using commercially produced baby foods, as this gives greater control over the tastes and textures of food provided, and can also be more cost effective. Using foods and flavours that will help infants to become familiar with the sort of foods they will be encouraged to eat as toddlers, and which allow them to share meals with others, will also help their social development.

Once food has been introduced, infants can gradually move towards eating three meals a day, including a mixture of soft finger foods, and mashed or chopped foods. Including food from each of the main food groups (fruit and vegetables, starchy foods, sources of protein and dairy foods) will provide the energy and nutrients which infants of this age need. Remember that infants and young children should never be left alone while eating, and should be closely supervised, in case they start to choke.

At about six months

The first aim of introducing solids is to familiarise infants with new tastes and textures and get them used to moving foods around their mouths and swallowing them. At about six months many infants will be able to manage a range of blended and mashed foods as well as being able to hold food and feed themselves. Some infants need a little longer to get used to new textures, so may prefer blended foods on a spoon at first. To help infants progress to a range of textures and tastes quickly, and encourage them to move lumps around their mouths and chew them, try to move on from purees to mashed foods as soon as infants can manage them. Offer finger foods for infants to hold and feed themselves alongside any blended or mashed foods. From six months of age, infants can be encouraged to drink water from a cup (or beaker with a free-flowing valve).

Around 7-9 months

By about 7-9 months, infants should be offered three meals a day (breakfast, lunch and tea), in addition to their breastmilk (or first infant formula) feeds. Infants of this age may have about four feeds a day, but should still be fed responsively to meet their individual needs. Breastfed infants will adapt their milk intake as their food intake increases; bottle fed infants will probably need about 600ml of milk a day at this age.

As infants become more confident eaters, food can be offered as mashed food with increasing texture and soft lumps. Providing finger foods as part of each meal helps

to encourage infants to feed themselves, develop hand and eye co-ordination and learn to bite off, chew and swallow pieces of soft food.

Around 10-12 months

Infants aged 10-12 months should be offered three meals a day (breakfast, lunch and tea) in addition to their breastmilk (or first infant formula) feeds. Infants may have about three feeds a day at this age, with infants fed infant formula drinking about 400ml daily. Breastfed infants will adapt their milk consumption as their food intake changes. Lunches and teas can include a main course, and a fruit or dairy-based dessert, to move eating patterns closer to those of children over one year, and to ensure meals are sufficiently varied and nutrient dense.

Each meal should include a finger food to encourage infants to feed themselves, and infants of this age will be able to manage a wider range of textures in finger foods, including crunchier foods such as breadsticks and raw vegetables.

Food for infants aged 10-12 months can be minced or chopped, rather than mashed, and should include a wide range of different tastes and textures.

Drinks to offer from six months

Once food has been introduced, infants should continue to be given breastmilk or first infant formula, and shouldn't be given cows' milk as a drink until they are a year old (cows' milk can be used in cooking or in food from six months).

The only drinks that are recommended for infants aged 6-12 months are breastmilk, first infant formula and water. Other milks are available that are labelled as being suitable for infants aged six months and over (for example 'follow on formula'), but these are not necessary. Infants who are not receiving breastmilk should continue with a first infant formula until one year of age, when cows' milk can be introduced as a drink. Infants should be encouraged to drink from an open cup from six months.²⁶

Encouraging infants to eat well

As well as helping ensure that children's nutritional needs are met, mealtimes provide an opportunity to support children to eat well and develop healthy eating habits for the future. Early years settings can play an important role in encouraging children to eat well, and supporting families to do so too, by providing information and reassurance.

Eating should be a sociable occasion, and mealtimes provide a good opportunity to include infants in family and setting routines. During mealtimes, ensure that infants are each given individual attention and interaction - make eye contact, and interact with and talk to infants while helping them to eat.

Mealtimes also help to develop infants' co-ordination and communication skills. Infants should be encouraged to explore, touch and try new foods. Giving infants finger foods to hold and feed themselves with, or a spoon to hold if being offered food on a spoon also helps encourage them to feed themselves.

How much infants eat depends on their appetite, so let infants guide you on how much food they need and never force them to eat. Look out for signs that infants might be full, such as turning their head away from the food or clamping their mouth shut. Allow plenty of time for eating, especially in the beginning and allow infants to eat at their own pace and stop eating when they are full.

Infants and children may not like new foods the first time they are offered, but after repeated tastes will learn to like new foods offered regularly, so even if a baby spits out a food initially, offer it again at another meal. Remember it may take a number of attempts for a baby to accept a new food.

More tips for families and settings are available on the Start4Life website²⁷, and from the HENRY programme website²⁸ and First Steps Nutrition Trust website.¹⁹

Information on vitamin supplements for infants under 12 months is included in Section two: children aged one to four years of this document.

Example menus for infants aged 7-12 months

An example menu for infants aged 7-12 months is included in this section to show the type and amount of food that meets average energy and nutrient needs for infants of this age (as set out in the nutrient framework). In order to help early years settings who provide food for children at a range of ages, this example menu is an adapted version of the example menu for children aged one to four years, included in Section two: children aged one to four years of this document.

Providing food for infants aged six months

A menu for infants in the early stages of eating solid foods (6-7 months) has not been included within this document. This is because the main aims for this age group are to introduce them to a range of foods and flavours, and for them to get used to eating solid foods. Foods from the example menu offered to older infants and children can be prepared for infants just starting to eat solid foods. For

example, by:

- preparing cooked vegetables, cooked fruit and soft ripe fruit into blended, or slightly lumpy textures, or by offering as finger foods that infants can pick up and feed themselves with
- preparing blended or mashed starchy foods and protein foods, or offering these as finger foods
- offering dairy foods such as plain whole milk yoghurt on a spoon

For more detailed guidance on preparing foods for the initial stages of introducing solid foods, refer to 'Eating well: the first year' by First Steps Nutrition Trust.²⁹

Modified menu for infants aged 7-12 months

The table below shows a typical daily pattern of food and breastmilk/first infant formula intake for infants aged 7-9 months and 10-12 months.

Table 2. Typical daily pattern of food and breastmilk/first infant formula for infants aged 7-9 months and 10-12 months

| Meal | 7-9 months | 10-12 months |
|--|--|--|
| Breakfast | Breakfast (blended or mashed with soft lumps depending on development), served with a finger food | Breakfast (chopped or minced as needed), served with a finger food |
| Lunch | Main course (blended or mashed with soft lumps depending on development), served with a finger food | Main course (chopped or minced as needed), served with a finger food Dairy dessert/fruit course including finger food |
| Tea | Main course (blended or mashed with soft lumps depending on development), served with a finger food | Main course (chopped or minced as needed) served with a finger food Dairy dessert/fruit course including finger food |
| Breastmilk/first infant formula | Typically, four milk feeds daily (for example on waking, after lunch, after tea, before bed) totalling approximately 600ml/day for formula fed infants ^{iv} | Typically, three milk feeds daily (for example after breakfast, after lunch, and before bed) totalling approximately 400ml/day for formula fed infants ^{iv} |

^{iv} Breastfed infants should be fed responsively, and it is not necessary to monitor intakes of breastmilk.

The example menu for infants aged 7-12 months shows how the example menu for 1-4 year olds can be modified to meet the needs of infants, following the meal pattern outlined above. However, it is important to remember that infants develop at different rates. Progression from the introduction of first foods (at about six months), to a range of blended or mashed foods, and then to a wider range of chopped or minced foods should be a gradual process, based on each infants' developmental readiness, rather than a staged process based on age alone. Provision of additional courses at mealtimes to meet increased energy requirements from food (alongside a reduction in breastmilk/first infant formula feeds), should also be a gradual process as the infant progresses through the complementary feeding journey and the diet diversifies.

To help illustrate typical progression in food patterns, the differences in typical food provision for infants 7-9 and 10-12 months and then children aged 1-4 years for one day of the example menu is provided below.

Table 3. Example of typical food provision for infants aged 7-9 months, infants aged 10-12 months and children aged 1-4 years.

| Meal | Infants 7-9 months | Infants 10-12 months | Children 1-4 years |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|
| Breakfast | Malt wheat cereal with whole milk (mashed as needed) and sticks of banana served as a finger food | Malt wheat cereal with whole milk (mashed if needed) and sticks of banana served as a finger food | Malt wheat cereal with whole or semi-skimmed milk and sliced banana Crumpet and spread |
| Mid-morning snack | Not provided (energy and nutrient needs met by main meals and breastmilk/first infant formula) | Not provided (energy and nutrient needs met by main meals and breastmilk/first infant formula) | Breadsticks and mixed vegetable sticks Milk or water |
| Lunch | Thai chicken or tofu curry and white rice (blended/mashed with soft lumps) and broccoli florets served as a finger food | Thai chicken or tofu curry and white rice (chopped or minced) and broccoli florets served as a finger food Seasonal fruit slices served as a finger food | Thai chicken or tofu curry, white rice and broccoli florets Seasonal fruit salad |
| Mid-afternoon snack | Not provided (energy and nutrient needs met by main meals and breastmilk/first infant formula) | Not provided (energy and nutrient needs met by main meals and breastmilk/first infant formula) | Cheese (sliced or cut into sticks) and sliced tomatoes Milk or water |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| Tea | Bean and tomato gnocchi bake (blended/mashed with soft lumps) with green beans served as a finger food | Bean and tomato gnocchi bake (chopped or minced) with green beans served as a finger food Plain yoghurt, with sliced strawberries as a finger food | Bean and tomato gnocchi bake with bread and spread Strawberry frozen yoghurt |
| Breastmilk/first infant formula | Typically, four breastmilk/first infant formula feeds per day (for example on waking, after lunch, after tea, before bed), but provided in line with individual routines | Typically, three breastmilk/first infant formula feeds a day (for example after breakfast, after lunch, before bed), but provided in line with individual routines | Provided in line with individual routines |
| Fresh drinking water | To be available throughout the day, and offered as appropriate to all infants and children. | | |

Week 1: Example spring/summer menu for early years settings (infants aged 7-12 months)

This example menu shows how meals for 1-4 year olds can be adapted for infants aged 7-12 months^v. For full guidance on introducing complementary foods for infants see the Start4Life website and resources.²³

| Week 1 | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--|---|---|--|--|--|
| Breakfast For all infants 7-12 months | Malt wheat cereal with whole milk and sticks of banana* | Cornflakes with whole milk, chopped raisins and kiwi fruit quarters* | Sliced or mashed hard-boiled egg and tomatoes with wholemeal bread and spread * | Wheat bisks with milk and mixed berries Fruit toast fingers* | Crisped rice cereal with whole milk and melon slices* |
| Lunch Main course for all infants 7-12 months | Thai chicken (or tofu) curry, white rice and broccoli florets* | Lamb (or lentil) moussaka with carrot batons* and toast strips* | Pork (or soya) ragu with new potatoes, broad beans and courgette batons* | Salmon (or bean) and pea risotto with red pepper sticks* | Bean and veggie sausage wholemeal pasta bake with broccoli florets* |
| Second course for infants 10-12 months only | Seasonal fruit salad* | Custard with banana sticks* | Pineapple slices* and custard | Plain yoghurt with blueberries* | Plain yoghurt with raspberries* |
| Tea Main course for all infants 7-12 months | Bean and tomato gnocchi bake with green beans* | Tuna fishcakes (or lentil and potato cakes) with vegetable sticks* | Pasta with beans and peas and cooked carrot batons* | Wholemeal English muffin pizza with cheese and vegetable topping* | Crustless quiche with potato salad and pepper sticks* |
| Second course for infants 10-12 months only | Plain yoghurt and strawberries* | Seasonal fruit salad* with plain yoghurt | Rice pudding with peach slices* | Banana slices* | Apple slices* and cheese (cut into sticks) |
| Breastmilk/first infant formula | To be offered to infants according to their individual routines (as discussed with families). In addition to offering three meals a day, infants may typically have breastmilk or first infant formula feeds of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7-9 months: four breastmilk/first infant formula feeds per day (for example on waking, after lunch, after tea, before bed) 10-12 months: three breastmilk/first infant formula feeds a day (for example after breakfast, after lunch, before bed). | | | | |
| Fresh drinking water | To be available throughout the day, and offered as appropriate to all infants. | | | | |

* Indicates the part of each meal that can be held and eaten by infants as a finger food.

^v For further details, including modification in texture for infants aged 7-9 months and 10-12 months, and further adaptations required to each recipe for this age group, see 'Example menus for early years settings in England: Part 2- Recipes'

Week 2: Example spring/summer menu for early years settings (infants aged 7-12 months)

This example menu shows how meals for 1-4 year olds can be adapted for infants aged 7-12 months^{vi}. For full guidance on introducing complementary foods for infants see the Start4Life website and resources.²³

| Week 2 | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| Breakfast For all infants 7-12 months | Wheat biscuits and whole milk with kiwi fruit quarters* | Cornflakes and whole milk with berries* | Crisped rice cereal with whole milk and banana sticks* | Instant oat cereal with melon slices* | Toasted English muffin strips* with scrambled egg and sliced mushrooms |
| Lunch <u>Main course</u> for all infants 7-12 months | BBQ chicken (or soya) with new potatoes and roast vegetable strips* | Beef (or chickpea) and spinach curry with white rice and broccoli florets* | Steamed Cod (or tofu) in tomato and mixed pepper sauce served with cous cous and green beans* | Vegetable and red lentil dhal with brown rice and carrot batons* | Turkey (or soya mince) meatballs* in tomato sauce with spaghetti |
| Second course for infants 10-12 months only | Yoghurt and chopped raisins with peach slices* | Seasonal fruit salad* | Rice pudding and raspberries* | Cheese (cut into sticks)* and sliced grapes* | Peach fool ripple with nectarine slices* |
| Tea <u>Main course</u> for all infants 7-12 months | Cous cous and chickpea salad with cucumber batons* | Sardine pâté (or pinto bean spread) on white toast* with grilled tomato slices | Billy can beans (sliced veggie sausage and beans) with wholemeal pasta and courgette batons* | Lemon chicken (or soya) with pitta strips and cucumber batons* | Pea frittata with potato salad and asparagus sticks* |
| Second course for infants 10-12 months only | Rice pudding and chopped raisins with apricot slices* | Plain yoghurt with strawberries* | Seasonal fruit kebabs* and cottage cheese dip | Sliced strawberries and blackcurrants* with Greek yoghurt | Pineapple slices* with plain yoghurt |
| Breastmilk/first infant formula | To be offered to infants according to their individual routines (as discussed with families). In addition to offering three meals a day, infants may typically have breastmilk or first infant formula feeds of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7-9 months: four breastmilk/first infant formula feeds per day (for example on waking, after lunch, after tea, before bed) 10-12 months: three breastmilk/first infant formula feeds a day (for example after breakfast, after lunch, before bed). | | | | |
| Fresh tap water | To be available throughout the day, and offered as appropriate to all infants. | | | | |

* Indicates the part of each meal that can be held and eaten by infants as a finger food.

^{vi} For further details, including modification in texture for infants aged 7-9 months and 10-12 months, and further adaptations required to each recipe for this age group, see 'Example menus for early years settings in England: Part 2- Recipes'

Week 3: Example spring/summer menu for early years settings (infants aged 7-12 months)

This example menu shows how meals for 1-4 year olds can be adapted for infants aged 7-12 months^{vii}. For full guidance on introducing complementary foods for infants see the Start4Life website and resources.²³

| Week 3 | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| Breakfast For all infants 7-12 months | Malt wheat cereal with milk and melon slices* | Cornflakes and whole milk with banana sticks* | Instant oat cereal with kiwi fruit quarters* | Wheat biscuits with whole milk, chopped raisins and nectarine slices* | Crisped rice cereal with whole milk and sliced grapes* |
| Lunch Main course for all infants 7-12 months | Beef (or cannellini bean) and mushroom stroganoff with white rice and sugar snap peas* | Pasta primavera and courgette batons* | Omelette popovers with new potatoes and green beans* | Cod (or lentil) potato and spinach curry with cous cous and cauliflower florets* | Chicken (veggie sausages) with roast potatoes* and spring greens |
| Second course for infants 10-12 months only | Banana sticks* | Yoghurt and dried chopped apricots with melon strips* | Seasonal fruit platter* | Creamy apricot dessert, with sliced apricot* | Seasonal berries* and custard |
| Tea Main course for all infants 7-12 months | Savoury omelette with new potatoes and cucumber sticks* | Lamb (or veggie mince) and mint koftas with tomato sauce and pitta bread strips* | Salmon (or lentil) and broccoli pasta with baby corn* | Homemade flatbread pizza strips and pepper sticks* | Baked sweet potato strips* with bean, vegetable and cheese dip |
| Second course for infants 10-12 months only | Plain yoghurt with strawberries* | Slices of cheese and apple* | Semolina and nectarine slices* | Sliced grapes and melon slices* with cottage cheese dip | Plain yoghurt and mango slices* |
| Breastmilk/first infant formula | To be offered to infants according to their individual routines (as discussed with families). In addition to offering three meals a day, infants may typically have breastmilk or first infant formula feeds of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7-9 months: four breastmilk/first infant formula feeds per day (for example on waking, after lunch, after tea, before bed) 10-12 months: three breastmilk/first infant formula feeds a day (for example after breakfast, after lunch, before bed). | | | | |
| Fresh drinking water | To be available throughout the day, and offered as appropriate to all infants. | | | | |

* Indicates the part of each meal that can be held and eaten by infants as a finger food.

^{vii} For further details, including modification in texture for infants aged 7-9 months and 10-12 months, and further adaptations required to each recipe for this age group, see 'Example menus for early years settings in England: Part 2- Recipes'

Week 1: Example autumn/winter menu for early years settings (infants aged 7-12 months)

This example menu shows how meals for 1-4 year olds can be adapted for infants aged 7-12 months^{viii}. For full guidance on introducing complementary foods for infants see the Start4Life website and resources.²³

| Week 1 | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--|---|--|--|--|---|
| Breakfast For all infants 7-12 months | Wheat bisk with whole milk, chopped apricot and kiwi quarters* | Wholemeal toast fingers* and spread, with tomatoes and mushrooms | Porridge with chopped raisins and sticks of banana * | Malt wheat cereal and whole milk with pear sticks* | Crisped rice cereal and whole milk with canned peach slices* |
| Lunch Main course for all infants 7-12 months | Haddock and salmon (or bean) pie with runner beans* | Lamb (or mixed bean) tagine with vegetable cous cous and green beans* | Pork (or soya mince) meatballs in tomato sauce with pasta shapes, peas and carrot batons* | Chickpea and vegetable biryani with cauliflower florets* | Roast chicken (or veggie sausage) with roast potatoes and root vegetables* |
| Second course for infants 10-12 months only | Stewed apple and custard with sliced apple* | Winter fruit salad* with yoghurt | Seasonal fruit salad* | Sliced grapes and cheese (Edam) strips* | Yoghurt and chopped dates with sticks of pear * |
| Tea Main course for all infants 7-12 months | Cous cous with chicken (or houmous) and beetroot and cucumber strips* | Jacket potato with tuna (or cheese), with baby corn* | Sweet potato and lentil soup with wholemeal bread and spread* | Pea, ham (or veggie mince) and mushroom pasta bake with broccoli florets* | Toast fingers with mashed beans and cheese, with cooked red pepper sticks* |
| Second course for infants 10-12 months only | Seasonal fruit salad* with plain yoghurt | Bananas* and custard | Yoghurt and blackberry compote with canned pineapple* | Rice pudding with chopped dried apricots and canned mandarin segments* | Apple, pears and plums* |
| Breastmilk/first infant formula | To be offered to infants according to their individual routines (as discussed with families). In addition to offering three meals a day, infants may typically have breastmilk or first infant formula feeds of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7-9 months: four breastmilk/first infant formula feeds per day (for example on waking, after lunch, after tea, before bed) 10-12 months: three breastmilk/first infant formula feeds a day (for example after breakfast, after lunch, before bed). | | | | |
| Fresh drinking water | To be available throughout the day, and offered as appropriate to all infants. | | | | |

* Indicates the part of each meal that can be held and eaten by infants as a finger food.

^{viii} For further details, including modification in texture for infants aged 7-9 months and 10-12 months, and further adaptations required to each recipe for this age group, see 'Example menus for early years settings in England: Part 2- Recipes'

Week 2: Example autumn/winter menu for early years settings (infants aged 7-12 months)

This example menu shows how meals for 1-4 year olds can be adapted for infants aged 7-12 months^{ix}. For full guidance on introducing complementary foods for infants see the Start4Life website and resources.²³

| Week 2 | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| Breakfast For all infants 7-12 months | Crisped rice cereal with whole milk, chopped raisins and slices of plum* | Malt wheat cereal and whole milk with banana sticks* | Breakfast egg cups with wholemeal toast* , spread and tomato slices | Cornflakes with whole milk and chopped raisins with canned pear slices* | Wheat bisks and whole milk with sliced apple* |
| Lunch Main course for all infants 7-12 months | Lamb (or butter bean) goulash with brown rice and green beans* | Creamy chicken (or soya) and leek hot pot and broccoli* | Beef (or lentil) lasagne and swede batons* | Fish and pea (or cheese and mushroom) fishcakes, potato wedges* and spinach | Sweet and sour tofu with pasta shapes* |
| Second course for infants 10-12 months only | Canned mandarin segments* | Apple slices* and plain yoghurt | Semolina with chopped raisins and pear strips* | Seasonal fruit salad* | Banana sticks with rice pudding* |
| Tea Main course for all infants 7-12 months | Wholemeal macaroni cheese* with peas | Butternut squash and lentil soup with wholemeal bread fingers and spread* | Salmon (or chickpea) and vegetable rice salad and avocado slices* | Chicken (or hard-boiled egg) with pitta strips and cooked red pepper sticks* | Mixed bean chilli and yoghurt with jacket potato* |
| Second course for infants 10-12 months only | Winter fruit salad* and yoghurt | Peaches* and custard | Fruit salad* | Autumn fruit kebabs* and yoghurt dip | Yoghurt with date and apple purée and canned mandarin segments* |
| Breastmilk/first infant formula | To be offered to infants according to their individual routines (as discussed with families). In addition to offering three meals a day, infants may typically have breastmilk or first infant formula feeds of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7-9 months: four breastmilk/first infant formula feeds per day (for example on waking, after lunch, after tea, before bed) 10-12 months: three breastmilk/first infant formula feeds a day (for example after breakfast, after lunch, before bed). | | | | |
| Fresh drinking water | To be available throughout the day, and offered as appropriate to all infants. | | | | |

* Indicates the part of each meal that can be held and eaten by infants as a finger food.

^{ix} For further details, including modification in texture for infants aged 7-9 months and 10-12 months, and further adaptations required to each recipe for this age group, see 'Example menus for early years settings in England: Part 2- Recipes'

Week 3: Example autumn/winter menu for early years settings (infants aged 7-12 months)

This example menu shows how meals for 1-4 year olds can be adapted for infants aged 7-12 months^x. For full guidance on introducing complementary foods for infants see the Start4Life website and resources.²³

| Week 3 | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--|---|---|---|---|--|
| Breakfast For all infants 7-12 months | Wheat bisk with whole milk and chopped raisins with pear strips* | Porridge made with whole milk with apples* and blackberries | Malt wheat cereal with whole milk and banana sticks* | Wholemeal toast and spread fingers* with boiled egg and tomato | Cornflakes with whole milk and plum quarters* |
| Lunch Main course for all infants 7-12 months | Mixed bean and root vegetable stew with herb cous cous and cooked carrot sticks* | Creamy pork (or soya), leek and mustard casserole with mashed potatoes and sliced sprouts* | Chicken (or chickpea) korma with brown rice and green beans* | Lamb (or soya mince) pearl barley hotpot with root vegetable sticks* | Haddock (or lentil) and ratatouille with pasta shapes* |
| Second course for infants 10-12 months only | Stewed apple* and rhubarb with custard | Banana pancakes* and yoghurt dip | Semolina and blackberry compote with plum slices* | Banana sticks* | Canned fruit cocktail* and custard |
| Tea Main course for all infants 7-12 months | Baked potatoes with homemade mackerel pate (or cheese) and cucumber* | Parsnip, butterbean and apple soup with wholemeal toast strips and spread* | Roast vegetable and red lentil pasta and rice cake strips* | Cous cous and chickpea salad and broccoli florets* | Pitta strips with egg mayonnaise, cucumber strips and cooked carrot sticks* |
| Second course for infants 10-12 months only | Seasonal fruit salad* | Poached pears* and plain Greek yoghurt | Sliced grapes and cheese cut into sticks* | Soft poached plums* and custard | Yoghurt and mixed dried fruit and apple slices* |
| Breastmilk/first infant formula | To be offered to infants according to their individual routines (as discussed with families). In addition to offering three meals a day, infants may typically have breastmilk or first infant formula feeds of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7-9 months: four breastmilk/first infant formula feeds per day (for example on waking, after lunch, after tea, before bed) 10-12 months: three breastmilk/first infant formula feeds a day (for example after breakfast, after lunch, before bed). | | | | |
| Fresh drinking water | To be available throughout the day, and offered as appropriate to all infants. | | | | |

* Indicates the part of each meal that can be held and eaten by infants as a finger food.

^x For further details, including modification in texture for infants aged 7-9 months and 10-12 months, and further adaptations required to each recipe for this age group, see 'Example menus for early years settings in England: Part 2- Recipes'

4. Menu planning, food safety, managing food allergies and reading food labels

Seven steps to planning healthy meals, snacks and drinks

The seven steps in the table below have been adapted from the practical guide to the food and drink guidelines,⁵ and gives a summary of points to consider when planning meals and snacks within early years settings.

| Seven steps to planning healthy meals, snack and drinks |
|--|
| <p>Step 1. Plan menus for all the meals and snacks you provide for children. This will help you to check that food and drink provision across the day is balanced and includes variety, and also helps planning for shopping and food preparation.</p> |
| <p>Step 2. Plan menus lasting at least one week. In practice, a menu that covers between one and four weeks will give children lots of variety. Try to make sure that children who attend your setting on the same day each week are not always provided with the same meal.</p> |
| <p>Step 3. Plan each meal and snack menu to meet the guidance for each meal and snack provided (outlined on pages 11-15). This means that children attending your setting for sessional care or who move between different settings will still meet their nutritional requirements overall.</p> |
| <p>Step 4. Plan menus to include a variety of foods, tastes, textures and colours. This will give children the opportunity to try a wide range of foods, and make meals and snacks colourful and tasty.</p> |
| <p>Step 5. Make sure you cater for the cultural and dietary needs of all the children in your care. You can also plan your menus to enable children to experience food from different cultures.</p> |
| <p>Step 6. Introduce new menu cycles at least twice a year. This will incorporate seasonality and give children the chance to try different foods.</p> |
| <p>Step 7. Share menus for meals and snacks with parents. This can help parents to balance meals and snacks with the food they provide at home. For example, if children are having a light meal at teatime and you expect them to eat again at home, make sure that parents are aware of this.</p> |

Costing of example menus and recipes

Cost information has not been produced for the example menus and individual recipes, as the costs will vary depending on sourcing of ingredients and ingredient quantities, as well as general and seasonal fluctuations in food costs. Cost of individual ingredients will vary depending on where they are bought from, and the time of year.

Tips for providing varied and cost-effective meals and snacks include:

Menu planning

- planning menus for meals and snacks in advance helps to reduce time and can also help to control ingredient costs.
- standardising tried and tested popular recipes can also help to reduce time, sourcing ingredients and keeping track of allergens.

Shopping

- when shopping, do not overlook 'value' brands, especially for staple foods such as dried pasta, rice, canned tomatoes. There is not always much difference between value and premium ranges, and some value brands can contain less added sugar and salt than premium brands.
- beware of special discounts such as buy-one-get-one-free (BOGOF) deals. These can offer good value, but only if they can be kept and used – tinned or frozen fruit and vegetables or dried rice and dried pasta are a good example.

When preparing meals

- cooking from scratch can be more cost effective (and healthier) than using bought products – use ingredients like canned tomatoes, onions and herbs instead of jars of cooking sauce, and try making fruit yoghurt by mixing stewed, canned or frozen fruit (whole or blended) with plain whole yoghurt.
- for smaller numbers of portions, consider using a slow cooker to cook main meals such as stews, curries and soups, for a prepare-ahead option that makes the most of cheaper cuts of meat.
- batch cooking and freezing additional portions can be a cost-effective way to reduce time spent cooking, particularly for childminders catering for smaller numbers of children – try freezing surplus bread for another day. Remember to follow food safety advice when storing, freezing and reheating foods.^{30,31}

Fruit and vegetables:

- choose fruits and vegetables in season where possible, to be at their tastiest and cheapest.²⁴

- compare the price per weight between loose and pre-packed fruit and vegetables, sometimes the packed produce is cheaper, sometimes it's more expensive.
- buying fruit and vegetables from local markets can be a cost effective option and a great way to involve children.
- frozen or canned fruit and vegetables can be used as an alternative to fresh. Using frozen vegetables can help to minimise waste and they can contain higher nutrient levels. Remember to choose canned vegetables without added sugar and salt, and fruit canned in juice not syrup.
- settings can consider growing fruit and vegetables to use – tomatoes, courgettes, runner beans and potatoes can all be grown in pots or bags, and fresh herbs can be grown in pots on window sills. This is a great way to start to teach children about growing food, and may provide some ingredients to use as part of meals or snacks.

Meat and fish

- meat and fish are typically the most expensive food ingredients. Add pulses such as beans, lentils and peas to replace some of the meat or fish in casseroles and curries.
- cheaper cuts of meat, such as braising steak, shin or shoulder, may need longer cooking to help break down the fibres, but can give a great tasting dish at a lower cost.
- eggs and tinned fish are economical, and remember that canned salmon counts as an oily fish in the same way that fresh salmon does – try using canned salmon for more cost effective fish cakes and fish pies.

Minimize food waste

- **check the date:** understand the difference between 'use by' dates (which are important for food safety) and 'best before' dates (which relate to product quality), to ensure you don't waste food unnecessarily.³²
- **store your food correctly to keep it fresher for longer.** Apples go in the fridge, potatoes in a cool dark place, and store bread in the cupboard or freezer.
- **use leftover food wisely.** Freeze any unused food in line with food safety advice. For further information, see the Change4life website for tips on shopping smart.³³

Sustainability of foods

Early years settings can help make a positive contribution to the economy and environment by considering how the food they use is grown, stored, prepared and used. They can also play an important role in teaching children about seasonality and sustainability (how food used meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs).

Practical guidance on eating well sustainably for early years settings has been produced by First Steps Nutrition Trust,³⁴ and information on how to create more sustainable menus is available from Soil Association Food for Life.³⁵

Further advice on sustainable procurement is available as part of the Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering Services.³⁶

Food safety advice for young children

Food should be stored, prepared and presented in a safe and hygienic environment. This is especially important when providing food for young children, as they may have a low resistance to food poisoning. It is also important that children are taught basic hygiene themselves, such as not eating food that has fallen on the floor, and washing their hands with soap and warm water before eating meals or snacks and after going to the toilet or handling animals. For more information about safe handling, storage and preparation of food, refer to the Food Standards Agency's 'Safer food, better business',³⁰ or the NHS choices food safety and home hygiene webpage.³¹

General safety advice for children aged six months to four years at mealtimes

- infants and young children should never be left alone while they are eating, and staff should be familiar with paediatric first aid advice for children who are choking³⁷
- ensure food is cooked until steaming hot to kill harmful bacteria,³⁸ and is then cooled sufficiently before giving it to infants and young children
- ensure infants and young children are seated safely in a highchair or appropriately sized low chair, and that they are closely supervised

| Specific food safety advice for different types of food | |
|---|--|
| Food Group | Advice |
| Fruit and vegetables | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> all fruit and vegetables should be washed thoroughly before being eaten or cooked for children. to reduce the risk of choking: offer soft fruit and vegetables as finger foods to infants to begin with, and remove any skins remove any stones and pips before serving halve or quarter small fruit and vegetables like grapes and cherry tomatoes cut large fruits like melon, and hard fruit or vegetables like raw apple and carrot into slices instead of small chunks. |
| Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> avoid shark, swordfish and marlin as the levels of mercury in these fish can affect a child's developing nervous system. although it is recommended to provide oily fish in early years settings at least once every three weeks, don't provide it more than twice a week, as it can contain low levels of pollutants. avoid raw shellfish to reduce the risk of food poisoning, and make sure any shellfish you use is thoroughly cooked. avoid raw eggs, or food containing partially cooked eggs, for example uncooked cake mixture and runny boiled eggs. Avoid bought fresh pate (meat, fish or vegetable-based) to reduce the risk of food poisoning. cut sausages into strips rather than chunks to reduce the risk of choking, and remove the skins for infants. make sure fish dishes are free of bones to reduce the risk of choking. do not give whole nuts to children under five years old, as they can choke on them. nuts, especially peanuts, can cause severe allergic reactions in some children and all settings should have an allergy plan in place (see page 46). |
| Dairy and alternatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> avoid unpasteurised milk, milk drinks and cheese, mould-ripened cheeses and soft blue-veined cheese, to reduce the risk of food poisoning. children under the age of five years should not be given rice drinks, because of the level of arsenic they contain. There is no need to avoid rice cakes, as |

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| | <p>there are strict limits in place in Europe on the arsenic content in rice and rice products.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cut cheese into strips rather than chunks to reduce the risk of choking. |
| Other foods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • avoid giving popcorn as a snack to infants to reduce the risk of choking. • avoid giving children jelly cubes from a packet as part of messy play activities to reduce the risk of choking. |

Other foods and drinks to avoid for children under five years

- avoid honey for infants under one year, as it occasionally contains bacteria which can make them ill.³⁹
- avoid food and drinks containing the colours Tartrazine (E102), Quinoline yellow (E104), Sunset yellow (E110), Carmoisine (E122), Ponceau 4R (E124) or Allura red (E129) as they may have an adverse effect on activity and attention in children.⁴⁰
- avoid drinks with added caffeine or stimulants
- avoid tea, coffee and alcohol.

Managing food allergies, intolerances and meeting cultural needs

Early years settings and their caterers should work closely with families to support children with allergies or intolerances. As part of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework, settings are required to obtain information about children's special dietary requirements – including food allergies and intolerances – before they attend, and record and act on the information provided about children's dietary needs.⁴¹ It is important that requests for special diets are handled sensitively and appropriately, and this can be included as part of a policy, describing how these are managed, and the procedure that is followed.

There should be a protocol in place which is accessible to all staff, to ensure everyone is aware of individual children's allergies and symptoms. If you suspect that a child has a food allergy, encourage parents or carers to seek advice and diagnosis from their doctor, to ensure it is appropriately managed, and foods are only excluded from children's diets where necessary, with appropriate alternatives identified to ensure they still eat a balanced diet.

Settings must ensure that they make appropriate provision for parental preferences including cultural and religious food sensitivities, for example the provision of halal and kosher food as appropriate.

Providing food allergen information

Understanding which allergens are present in every meal and snack you provide is an important step in providing food which is safe for children with food allergies and intolerances. Since 2014, all food businesses, including early years settings have been required by law^{42,43} to give details about the allergens in the food they provide.

There are 14 allergens covered by this requirement:

- celery
- cereals containing gluten (including wheat, rye, barley and oats)
- crustaceans (including prawns, crab and lobster)
- eggs
- fish
- lupin
- milk
- molluscs (including squid, mussels, cockles, whelks and snails)
- mustard
- nuts
- peanuts
- sesame seeds
- soya beans
- sulphur dioxide/sulphites (at levels above 10mg/kg)

It is important to remember that children can have allergies to foods and ingredients not covered by this list (and which therefore won't be highlighted in bold on product ingredients lists), and the same policy and procedure should be followed where a child has an allergy to a food not included on this list, to ensure appropriate and safe meals and snacks are provided for them.

For further guidance, see:

- The NHS Choices website⁴⁴ for further information on food allergies
- The Allergy UK website⁴⁵ for information on managing food allergies
- The Food Standards Agency website⁴⁶ for guidance on producing food allergen information for meals and snacks, and to subscribe to receive food allergen alerts⁴⁷
- The Action for Children website⁴⁸ for factsheets for early years settings on managing special dietary requirements, and producing food allergen information.

Reading food labels

To help provide food lower in salt, sugars and saturated fat for children, it is recommended that early years settings cook from scratch as much as possible. When bought in products are used, look at the ingredients list and the nutrition information on product labels to choose products lower in saturated fat, sugars and salt.

Full nutrition information is generally displayed on the back or side of packaging. This shows the energy value (in kJ and kcal) plus amounts of fat, saturates (saturated fat), carbohydrate, sugars, protein and salt. The information will be given per 100g, and sometimes also per portion. Certain nutrition information may also be repeated on the front of the packaging, to give 'at a glance' nutrition information to help quickly compare products. This generally shows the energy value (kJ and kcal) plus amounts (in grams) of fat, saturates (saturated fat), sugars and salt in a portion. Energy must also be declared per 100g. The portion size will affect how much saturated fat, sugar and salt a child will consume. Remember that the portion size given on the product label may not be appropriate for young children.

Guidelines are available to help compare the fat, saturates (saturated fat), sugars and salt content of food. Colour coded nutrition information shows at a glance if food is high (**red**), medium (**amber**) or low (**green**) in fat, saturates (saturated fat), sugars and salt.

As young children need a higher fat diet than older children and adults, there is no need to compare foods to choose lower-fat options. However, when catering for young children, try to choose products which are low or medium in *saturated* fat and

sugars, and low in salt, and limit those that are high. Remember that the colour coding is based on categories for the whole population, so a food marked as 'medium' for sugars can contain 5g - 22.5g of sugar per 100g of the food, which means some foods in this category contain a significant amount of sugar. To reduce the use of sugary foods look at the amount of sugar per 100g of the food as stated in the back of pack information, and choose products with the lowest sugar content.

| Check how much fat, saturates, sugars and salt is in food (per 100g) | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| | Low a healthier choice | Medium OK most of the time | High just occasionally |
| Fat | 3g or less | Between 3g-17.5g | More than 17.5g |
| Saturates (saturated fat) | 1.5g or less | Between 1.5g-5g | More than 5g |
| Sugars | 5g or less | Between 5g-22.5g | More than 22.5g |
| Salt | 0.3g or less | Between 0.3g-1.5g | More than 1.5g |

Front of pack food labels also include information on Reference Intakes – the approximate amounts of energy and particular nutrients required for a healthy diet – and the proportion provided by a portion of the food. These figures relate to adults, and don't apply to children.

For more information about reading food labels, see the NHS Choices website.⁴⁹

5. Recipe information

Each recipe included in the seasonal menus is included within [Example menus for early years settings in England: Part 2 - Recipes](#).

Each recipe includes the following information:

Ingredients

Ingredient quantities are given for 5 or 20 portions (10 or 20 for cakes and desserts), so can be easily used for small or large groups of children, and can be multiplied up where needed. Ingredients used are in line with dietary advice and good practice guidance for early years settings.⁵ For example:

- canned pulses contain no added salt or sugar
- canned fruit is canned in juice and not syrup
- whole milk yoghurt and cheese are used
- 'spread' used on toast, crackers, is a vegetable oil-based spread (for example sunflower spread).

Milk provision

Where milk is provided as a drink or on breakfast cereals, this is whole milk for children aged one to two years, and semi-skimmed milk for children aged two years and over^{xi}. For more information on alternatives to cows' milk refer to the NHS Choices website,⁵⁰ or the First Steps Nutrition Trust resource 'Good food choices and portion sizes for children 1-4'.⁵¹ Morning and afternoon snacks include the choice of milk or water as a drink for children. This enables settings to provide drinking milk for children (for example as part of the Nursery Milk scheme⁵²), and for children to choose whether they would like milk or water with their snack.

Typical portion sizes

Each recipe includes typical portion size information for children aged one to four years. These portion sizes are based on the energy and nutrient requirements of

^{xi} Children aged one to two years should have whole milk and dairy products to ensure they provide enough energy and other nutrients. After the age of two years, children can gradually move to semi-skimmed milk as a drink, as long as they are eating a varied and balanced diet and growing well. Avoid skimmed and 1% fat milk for children under five years, as they don't provide enough energy for young children. If only one type of milk is available, or you are providing milk as a drink to children under two years old, use whole milk and dairy products to ensure that all children (including younger children and those who don't eat well) do not miss out on energy and important nutrients. For more information, see www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/milk-dairy-foods.aspx

children aged one to four years. In order to ensure that the energy and nutrient needs of those in the group with the highest requirements are met, these are based on estimated average energy requirements for children aged three to four years, and for other nutrients, on the highest requirements within the one to four year age range. This means that the typical portion sizes stated on the recipes will be appropriate for children with the highest requirements (generally children aged three-four years), and smaller portion sizes may be appropriate for children younger than this (children one to two years old). As children's requirements for growth and activity, and their appetites will vary, young children should be encouraged to eat healthy food according to their appetite. Children should not be expected to finish everything on their plate, and should be allowed to eat their dessert even if they have not finished their main course. If children are still hungry after their main course, they should have the opportunity to have second helpings.

Allergen information

Each recipe/ingredient list states which of the 14 allergens covered by EU and UK food labelling legislation are present (based on allergens typically included in commonly available brands of each ingredient). It is important to remember that products can be reformulated, that different brands may contain different allergens, and that children can have allergies to ingredients and foods not covered by the labelling requirements. If you are preparing food for a child with a food allergy, always make sure you check the packaging for all ingredients and products you are using. Allergens covered by the legislation should be highlighted (for example in bold) on the ingredient label of products, or you can request this information from suppliers.

Recipe adaptations for infants aged 7-12 months:

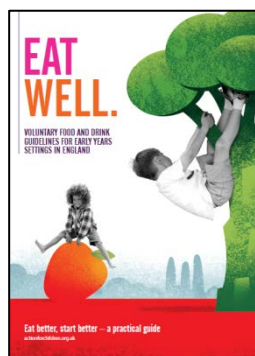
Each of the recipes included within this document includes a box with a typical portion size for infants aged 7-12 months, and any additional information for preparation and serving of the recipe for this age groups (for example where particular ingredients should be omitted). However, it is important to remember that these are just a guide, and the meal patterns, milk intakes and amounts of food will vary between individual children, and settings should discuss this with families.

When preparing food for infants, also remember that:

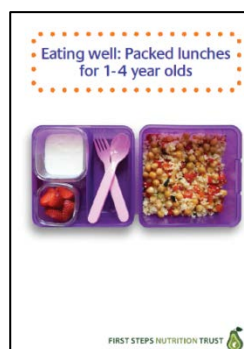
- salt should not be added to food served to infants, and stock cubes and gravy shouldn't be used either
- there is no need to add sugar to food for infants

6. Useful resources

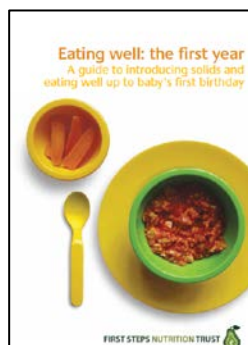
Action for Children (2017).
Voluntary Food and Drink Guidelines for Early Years Settings in England – A Practical Guide⁵



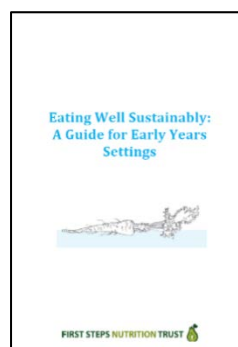
First Steps Nutrition Trust (2015).
Eating well: packed lunches for 1-4 year olds⁵³



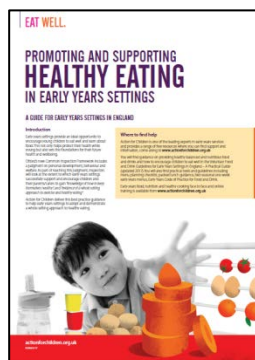
First Steps Nutrition Trust (2017).
Eating well: the first year. A guide to introducing solids and eating well up to baby's first birthday²⁹



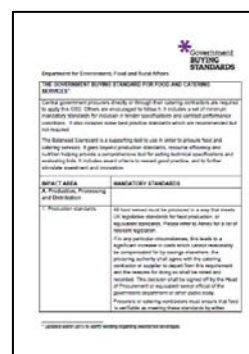
First Steps Nutrition Trust (2013).
Eating Well Sustainably: A guide for Early Years Settings³⁴



Action for Children (2017).
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