

One Minute Guide to Safer Eating Practices in the Early Years

Creating a safe and nurturing mealtime environment is essential for supporting young children's health, development, and wellbeing. This guide provides a quick reference for practitioners working in early years settings, aligning with the **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) 2026** and the **Department for Education (DfE) Nutrition Guidance 2025**. It highlights key practices to ensure that food provision is not only nutritious and developmentally appropriate but also safe, inclusive, and responsive to individual needs.

Embedding Nutrition and Safety into Everyday Practice

Having clear policies and procedures around healthy eating and food safety is essential in early years settings. These guidelines help ensure consistency, support staff in knowing what to do, and protect children's wellbeing. Clear rules around food preparation, allergy management, supervision, and hygiene help reduce risks and create a safe environment for all.

Staff training is key to making sure policies are followed effectively. When team members understand their roles and feel confident in their actions, they can respond calmly to any food-related concerns. Ongoing training keeps everyone informed and helps embed safe and healthy eating into everyday routines.

Young children are especially vulnerable to food-related risks, so it's important to build healthy habits into daily routines. When staff model positive food choices and encourage children to explore a variety of nutritious options, it supports their growth and long-term wellbeing.

Food safety is a shared responsibility. When staff, families, and children all understand and follow agreed practices, risks are reduced, and concerns can be addressed quickly. This team approach helps create a safe, inclusive environment where every child can enjoy mealtimes and thrive.

Key principles for safer eating practices

Policy and procedure

- Develop clear policies and procedures for food safety and nutrition
- Regularly reviewing policies and procedures for food safety and nutrition and adapt accordingly
- Promote shared responsibility among staff, families, and children

Supervision & Safety

- Ensure a Paediatric First Aid trained staff member is present during all eating times.
- Ensure children are seated safely in developmentally appropriate highchairs or low chairs with minimal distractions.
- Supervise children closely during mealtimes to prevent choking and other risks and ensure staff face children during meals to monitor for choking or allergic reactions.

Allergy & Dietary Management

- Gather information about allergies and dietary needs before the child starts.
- Create and follow Allergy Action Plans.
- Share allergy action plans with staff and parents/carers.
- Train staff to recognise and respond to allergic reactions.
- Regularly update information on allergies, intolerances, and dietary needs.
- Assign a nominated staff member to check food safety for each child.

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Food Preparation & Hygiene

- Ensuring safe food storage, preparation, and serving practices.
- Ensure food is prepared in a way to prevent choking—use age-appropriate textures and sizes.
- Follow a Food Safety Management System (e.g., HACCP).
- Maintaining high standards of hygiene in all food-related areas.
- Avoid pre-packaged purées; prepare fresh food to introduce varied textures and flavours.

Nutrition Standards

- Ensure Meals, snacks, and drinks provided are healthy, balanced, and nutritious.
- Include all four food groups: fruit/veg, starchy foods, protein, and dairy/dairy alternatives.
- Use age-appropriate portion sizes and limit sugar and salt.
- Plan menus that reflect cultural, religious, and individual dietary needs.
- Encourage children to try a variety of healthy foods

Infant Feeding & Weaning

- Before a child starts gather information from parents/carers on weaning and food introduction.
- Work in partnership with parents to introduce solids based on developmental readiness which may be around 6mths.
- Feed babies responsively, watch for hunger and fullness cues.
- Support breastfeeding and ensure safe formula preparation.
- Introduce solids based on developmental readiness which may be around 6 months.

Cultural & Dietary Needs

- Create inclusive mealtime environments that respect cultural and dietary needs.
- Include healthy options in celebrations.

Partnership with Parents

- Share progress and preferences to support responsive feeding and healthy habits.
- Engage families in conversations about weaning, food introduction nutrition and food safety

Staff training

- Providing regular staff training to reinforce responsibilities and build confidence.
- Ensure staff are trained in paediatric first aid and allergy awareness.
- A PFA-trained staff member must be present during all mealtimes.

Further information and useful links

[Early years foundation stage nutrition](#)

[Nutrition guidance: help for Early Years Providers](#)

[Help-for-early-years-providers food-safety](#)

[Early years choking hazards poster and table \(foundationyears.org.uk\)](#)

[Early Start Nutrition - Preparing food safely for young children \(video\)](#)

[Paediatric Allergy Action Plans - BSACI](#)

[Anaphylaxis](#)

[Food-allergy NHS](#)

[Choking hazards in the home and how to avoid them \(rospa.com\)](#)

[Weaning Start for Life NHS](#)