



Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-School Services



Foreword

As Minister of State at the Department of Health & Children with a special responsibility for Children, I am delighted to publish these Food & Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-schools.

These guidelines are relevant to pre-school children aged 0-5 years and are intended as a resource and guide for all relevant stakeholders; carers, parents and pre-school inspectors.

This booklet also fulfils the important commitment to "sufficient, nutritious and varied food, available to a pre-school child", under the Childcare Regulations 1996.

As outlined in the guidelines, the early years are critically important for the formation of good habits and a positive attitude towards healthy, varied eating. Research findings show a correlation between a wide range of positive health behaviours and the consumption of fruit and vegetables, amongst school children, and healthy eating is essential for long-term health benefits.

I am grateful for the on-going efforts and commitment demonstrated by Health Promotion Departments, Community Dietitians, Health Board Personnel and key support agencies nationwide, who ensure the dissemination and fulfilment of the healthy eating message.

Brian Lenihan

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Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children
with a special responsibility for children



Table of Contents

TITLE	PAGE NO.
Table of Contents	2
Summary of Key Recommendations	4
Introduction	5
Section One: Children Less Than 1 Year old	
START WITH HEALTHY EATING FOR INFANTS	6
Breastfeeding	6
Supporting the breastfeeding mother	6
Expressed breast milk	7
Formula feeding	7
Feeding infants	8
Timing of feeds	8
Starting foods in addition to breast milk/formula feeds	8
Checklist for infant feeding	10
<i>TABLE 1 : Guidelines for Introducing Complementary Foods</i>	11
Section Two: Children From 1 to 5 Years Old	
OFFER A WIDE VARIETY OF FOODS	12
Food Pyramid	12
Suggestions to give variety	13
<i>TABLE 2 : Snacks</i>	16
OFFER SUITABLE SIZED PORTIONS	17
<i>TABLE 3 : Recommended number of daily servings and portion size</i>	17
OFFER HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES AND TOOTH-FRIENDLY DRINKS FREQUENTLY	18
Drinks	18
<i>TABLE 4 : Milk drinks</i>	19
<i>TABLE 5 : Non-milk drinks</i>	20
ACCOMMODATE SPECIAL FOOD NEEDS OF INDIVIDUAL CHILDREN	21
Peanut allergy	21
Vegetarian diet	21
Vegan diet	22
Food customs of different cultures	22
<i>TABLE 6: Some food customs</i>	23

PLAN HEALTHY VARIED MEALS	24
Sample menu	25
Budget	25
<i>TABLE 7 : Sample 5 day menu</i>	26
<i>TABLE 8 : 5 day menu plan</i>	27
Main meal suggestions	28
Checklist for menu planning	29

Section Three: Important Issues

HELP CHILDREN LEARN TO EAT	30
Food refusal and fussy eating	30
FOSTER GOOD DENTAL HEALTH	32
Tips for healthy teeth and gums	32
PREPARE FOOD IN A CLEAN AND SAFE WAY	33
Food purchase	33
Food storage	34
Kitchen hygiene	34
Food preparation	35
Re-heating food	35
Safety	35

Section Four: Healthy Eating Policy

DEVELOP A HEALTHY EATING POLICY	37
<i>TABLE 9: Sample Pre-School Nutrition Policy</i>	38
Food for special occasions	39
Rewards and treats	39
Outside catering companies	39
Learn through food	39
Food related activities	40
Physical activity is important too	41

Conclusion	42
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Section Five: Further Information

Community Nutrition & Dietetic Services	43
Pre-school Inspection Teams	44
Consultation Group	47
Other Contacts	48
Acknowledgements	49

Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-schools: Summary of Key Recommendations

- **Start with healthy eating for infants**
- **Offer a wide variety of foods**
- **Offer suitable sized portions**
- **Offer healthy food choices and tooth-friendly drinks frequently**
- **Accommodate special food needs of individual children**
- **Plan healthy, varied meals and snacks**
- **Help children learn to eat**
- **Foster good dental health**
- **Prepare food in a clean and safe way**
- **Develop a healthy eating policy**



Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-school Services 0 – 5 Years of Age Introduction

A child's early years are important for their future health and well being, and good nutrition during this time lays a healthy foundation for all of childhood and life. These Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-school Services have been developed in response to the objectives and goals of the National Health Promotion Strategy 2000 - 2005 and the National Children's Strategy - Our Children - Their Lives (2000).

The aim of these Guidelines is to provide practical information to pre-schools on a varied and healthy diet for children from 0 to 5 years of age in a pre-school setting, in the context of promoting health and the Child Care Regulations 1996, which state:

"A person carrying on a pre-school service shall ensure that suitable, sufficient, nutritious and varied food is available for a pre-school child attending the service on a full-time basis."

Article 26 (1) of the Child Care Regulations 1996

Children's food needs for different daycare periods

Children spend varying amounts of time in Pre-school services and so they are there for a different number of meals. *Food should be offered to young children at least every 3 hours.*

Children in full day care (more than 5 hours) -

Offer at least two meals and two snacks, for example – breakfast, snack, lunch and snack. One meal should be a hot meal. If children are there for a long day, an evening meal may also need to be provided. If a main meal is not provided for some reason, ensure that parents know this so they can offer suitable meals at home.

Children in day care for up to 5 hours maximum per session -

Offer at least two meals and one snack, for example – breakfast, snack and lunch. It is not necessary to have a hot meal, however the meal should include at least 1 serving from each of the four main shelves of the Food Pyramid.

Children in day care up to 3.5 hours per session -

Offer one meal and one snack – for example, snack and lunch. This group may also include after-school care.

The food served in pre-school services is of key importance in the young child's health, particularly for children in full day care. Some areas of nutritional concern for young children are;

- ensuring appropriate energy intake for growth and development,
- the prevention of iron deficiency anaemia,
- adequate intake of vitamin C and calcium.

The pre-school service provides an excellent setting for promoting positive habits and attitudes to healthy eating and being active as part of a healthy lifestyle. The provision of nutritious food positively enhances not only a child's health, but also allows the child to take full advantage of the learning opportunities provided in pre-schools.

These Guidelines were developed by Community Dietitians in consultation with the Health Promotion Unit of the Department of Health and Children and a broad range of key stakeholder groups. The Pre-School Guidelines are intended as a standard resource for Pre-School Managers and Pre-School Inspection Teams. They can also be used for in-service health board training of pre-school workers.

The Community Nutrition and Dietetic Service and the Pre-School Inspection Team in each health board area can provide further information and assistance in using this document, in implementing the Guidelines and in supporting pre-schools in developing a healthy eating policy for the pre-school. Current contact details are in Section Five.

SECTION ONE : CHILDREN LESS THAN ONE YEAR OLD

Start with healthy eating for infants

Breastfeeding

Breast milk is the best food for infants. *Breast milk is an ideal blend of nutrients, which provides everything a baby needs for growth and development in the first six months of life.* Fully breastfed babies do not need any extra water.

Breast milk is also easy for the baby to digest, so the young baby may want more frequent, smaller feeds than formula fed babies. Be prepared to offer expressed breast milk whenever the baby seems to want it.

Breast milk contains antibodies. These protective factors help to protect the baby from infections such as coughs, colds and tummy upsets, as well as long-term health benefits. Continuing to breastfeed may help protect the baby from illnesses they might pick-up from other children in the pre-school.

Fully breastfed babies have stools that are loose and yellowish with very little smell. They may have small frequent bowel movements or large bowel movements less often.

Breastfeeding enhances the emotional and physical well-being of both mother and baby. Many mothers find that breastfeeding after work helps them to get re-connected to their baby. Carers should support breastfeeding mothers and encourage them to continue providing breast milk for their baby, as appropriate, while in childcare.

Supporting the breastfeeding mother

- Provide a space that is private, warm and has a comfortable chair for the mother who wishes to breastfeed her baby at the pre-school.
- Some mothers may wish to feed just before leaving the baby or on arrival to collect the baby. Some mothers may come to feed the baby at lunchtime, particularly when the baby is very young.
- If the mother wishes to feed the baby at the pre-school before going home, avoid giving the baby a full expressed milk feed too soon before the going home time.

Expressed breast milk

- Breast milk can look thin and slightly blue when fresh. It may turn pale yellow after freezing. When left to stand, the cream will rise to the top. Shake the container before using the milk.
- If milk storage bags are used, it may be easier to cut off the bottom corner with a washed scissors to form a spout rather than untie the top of the bag.
- Keep track of how much milk the baby is taking and ask the mother to bring extra as needed. Some mothers bring extra milk to keep in the freezer at the pre-school in case the baby is extra hungry one day.
- Frozen milk should be dated and the oldest milk used first. Let the mother know when the stock of milk in the freezer is running low.
- Do not re-freeze thawed milk.
- Some mothers prefer their breastfed baby to be fed with a cup rather than a bottle and teat. Discuss this with the mother and ask her to show you how she wants her baby fed.
- When the baby starts on solid foods, expressed breast milk can be used to mix into cereal or other foods.

STORAGE GUIDELINES FOR EXPRESSED BREAST MILK

Fresh Milk	At room temperature (25°C) : 6 hours Refrigerated: 8 days
Frozen Milk	In a freezer compartment inside fridge: 2 weeks In a freezer part of a fridge-freezer: 3 months In a separate deep freeze: 6 months Thawed in a refrigerator: 24 hours (do not re-freeze)

Formula Feeding

Infants who do not receive breast milk should be given an appropriate infant formula. Whey-dominant formula are generally recommended for infants who are not breastfed. Parents may change to casein dominant formula to make the baby go longer between feeds. However, there is no firm evidence that these milks are more suitable.

Follow-on formula can be used for infants over 6 months of age or they can continue with regular infant formula. There is no need for a follow-on formula if children have a diet containing sufficient iron-rich foods. Breast milk or formula milk should be the main drink for infants for the first year.

Encourage parents to bring the baby's feeds already prepared for the day. If the feeds are prepared at the pre-school, ideally this should be done in an area kept only for preparation of feeds. The instructions on the tin should be carefully followed using freshly boiled (and cooled) water and the correct amount of powder. Use feeds and bottles only for the baby to whom they belong. Do not add anything to the bottle such as baby rice or rusks.

Feeding Infants

- Babies should be held and have warm physical contact from an attentive adult while being fed.
- Whenever possible, the same person should feed the baby at each feed.
- Babies should never be left with propped bottles as this is both dangerous and does not meet their emotional needs.
- Feeding bottles and expressed breast milk containers should be marked with the child's name and date.
- Keep milk feeds covered and in the fridge at 5°C. Store milk in the inside of the fridge not in the door shelves, which get warmer.
- Do not microwave the milk. Warm by standing in a jug of hot water or in a bottle warmer. Do not leave in the warmer for longer than necessary.
- Defrost frozen breast milk by standing it in a jug of hot water for about 15 minutes. Shake as it is thawing. Only defrost as much as is needed for that feed.
- If milk is heated in a jug of water, ensure the jug is in a safe place where children cannot get scalded by the water if it spills.
- Discard unfinished breast or formula milk after 1 hour. Let the mother know if the baby is leaving a lot of milk at feeds so she can bring the milk in smaller quantities.
- Bottles and teats should be thoroughly washed after use and sterilised until the baby is 12 months old.

Timing of feeds

Infants follow their own individual patterns of feeding and sleeping. It is recommended that these patterns be followed rather than try to adapt the baby to the pre-school schedule.

Watch the baby for feeding cues or signals such as restlessness, sucking on fists and mouthing. Crying is a late signal for feeding.

Babies vary in the amount they take at a feed. Watch the baby for signs they have had enough. Do not force them to take more than they want or to finish the bottle.

Starting foods in addition to breast milk or formula feeds

When to start solids?

As the infant grows, a more varied diet is needed to meet his/her growing needs. Solid foods are added to complement the breast milk or formula – complementary feeding. Milk remains the major part of the infant's diet throughout the first year and continues to be important in the diet after that time.

Breastfeeding provides all a baby needs for the first six months. Further research needs to be carried out to indicate the best time to add complementary foods for an infant that is formula fed. In Ireland, the current recommendation is 4-6 months for the introduction of complementary foods in formula-fed babies. Some parents like to introduce small quantities of food from 4 months, but this is not essential. Foods other than breast milk or infant formula should not be started before 4 months.

Young children need regular small meals and nutritious snacks daily, this may include up to 2-3 small meals and 2-3 snacks. Solids are not recommended earlier than 6 months for breastfed infants and 4-6 months for formula-fed infants, as they can displace the infant's intake of breast milk or formula. For example, if a very young baby is fed a few spoons of pureéd apple, he/she may not have room in their stomach to take sufficient amounts of milk. Early introduction of foods other than breast milk or formula, to the baby, may increase their risk of childhood obesity, wheezing or allergies, as they are difficult for the very young baby to digest.

For babies who are breastfed and those who are formula fed, it is recommended that complementary foods be introduced by the end of six months of age. Introducing complementary foods too late can put the baby at risk of iron deficiency and of not receiving enough energy to grow adequately.

Adding complementary foods also encourages the development of motor skills, dexterity, exploratory behaviour and social development.

How to start?

TABLE 1, (page 11) outlines guidelines on suitable foods, consistency, and suitable drinks for infants.

- First foods should be pureéd and of a soft runny consistency, without lumps, and should be introduced one at a time, leaving a few days between the addition of each new food. Introduce the spoon to the baby's mouth gently and slowly so that the baby can suck the food from the spoon.
- Iron containing foods should be started from six months including meat and iron-fortified cereals, as iron is needed at this age.
- Cereals (gluten-free to the age of six months), fruits or vegetables are also suitable first foods. Use expressed breast milk, infant formula or cooled boiled water to mix foods.
- Infants and young children have high-energy needs. Full-fat dairy products should be used until age 2. However, high fat and high sugar processed foods should be used sparingly.
- In families where there is a confirmed diagnosis of allergy or atopy, breastfeeding should be encouraged and medical advice provided on the introduction of complementary foods, especially potentially allergenic foods.
- If the introduction of complementary foods is delayed past six months or foods are excluded, on the parents advice, the adequacy of an infant's diet may need to be assessed by a Dietitian.
- During this period of introducing complementary foods, babies are learning the skills of eating, so be patient. Gradually as they perfect their skills, more of their diet will come from foods and less from breast milk or formula.
- Breast milk or infant formula remain the central part of the diet, until the baby is eating solid foods well, or is about 12 months old.

REMEMBER

- Always stay with baby when eating.
- Introduce drinks from a feeding beaker or cup from about six months.
- Allow children to use their fingers to eat food and help to feed themselves.
- Avoid adding food to baby’s bottle.
- Avoid adding sugar or salt to food.
- Avoid using packet sauces, soups or stock cubes, as the salt content is high.

Checklist for Infant feeding

PRACTICE	YES	NO
1. Breast feeding encouraged and supported <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a place to breastfeed available • mothers encouraged to bring breast milk 		
2. Parents encouraged to prepare their baby’s feeds		
3. Expressed breast milk or formula labelled with child’s name and date		
4. Expressed breast milk or formula stored in the fridge at 5°C or below		
5. Unfinished expressed breast milk or formula discarded after 1 hour		
6. Bottles heated in a warmer or safely in a jug of water		
7. Bottles, teats and feeding utensils sterilised for infants under 1 year		
8. Infants held while being bottle fed by an attentive adult		
9. All food spooned out of the jar, can or saucepan into a separate dish before feeding		
10. Unused food in jars, cans or containers stored according to manufacturers guidelines		
11. All preparation of milk feeds and foods carried out in a clean and safe manner		

TABLE 1 : Guidelines for introducing complementary foods

	STAGE 1 Introducing complementary foods	STAGE 2 Over 6 months	STAGE 3 9-12 months
Suitable Foods	Pureéd meat, peas & beans Pureéd fruit and vegetables Pureéd potato Gluten-free cereals e.g. baby rice - pureéd with breast milk, formula milk, boiled water or water from cooking vegetables	Food as previous column, but you can now include: Well cooked eggs Other breakfast cereals (containing gluten) Bread and pasta Cheese (pasteurised) e.g. grated Cheddar Yogurt Pasteurised cow’s milk can be used in small amounts in foods	Increase the variety of foods in the baby’s diet Most family foods are now suitable
Consistency	Pureéd and of a soft consistency without lumps. Start with a thin pureé and make thicker as baby learns to take food from a spoon	Minced or mashed to a less fine texture	Chunky mashed texture, moving to food chopped into bite-size pieces. Serve some finger foods that can be picked up for self-feeding
Suitable Drinks	Breast milk Formula milk Cooled, boiled water (if necessary)	Continue to give breast milk/formula milk Cooled boiled water (if necessary) Well-diluted unsweetened pure fruit juice at mealtimes. Dilute 1 measure of pure juice to 4 or 5 measures of cooled, boiled water	Continue to give breast/formula milk Cooled, boiled water (if necessary) Well-diluted, unsweetened pure fruit juice at mealtimes
Foods to be avoided	Gluten containing foods e.g. bread, pasta, wheat, rye, oats, barley & breakfast cereals Yogurts, fromage frais, cheese Peanuts Eggs	Peanuts Unpasteurised cheese (will state made with ‘raw milk’ on label) Undercooked eggs	Peanuts Unpasteurised cheese Undercooked eggs

SECTION TWO : CHILDREN FROM 1 TO 5 YEARS OLD

Offer a wide variety of foods

Variety means eating a wide selection of foods. Every food has some nutritional goodness to offer in the form of energy, protein, fat, vitamins or minerals.

The Food Pyramid

The Food Pyramid on pages 14 & 15 is a visual guide to a healthy diet. Detailed information on the recommended number of daily servings and portion sizes are included in **TABLE 3, (page 17)**

The Food Pyramid is made up of five food shelves:

- The wide bottom shelf contains foods that form the basis of all meals - the **bread, cereals and potato** group. These foods provide energy for the child to grow and play. Children need 4-6 or more servings of food from the bread, cereals and potato shelf each day.
- The next widest shelf is the **fruit and vegetable** shelf. These foods give vitamins and minerals for good health. 2-4 or more servings each day is the target for this shelf. Frozen fruit or vegetables are just as good as fresh. Remember, potatoes are not on this shelf.
- The next shelf is the **milk, cheese and yogurt** shelf. The foods on this shelf provide calcium for strong bones and teeth. Milk and milk products also give protein and energy. Children need 3 servings each day from this shelf. Butter and cream are *not* on this shelf - while these foods do come from milk, they are very poor sources of protein and calcium. Butter and cream belong to the small top shelf of the Food Pyramid.
- The fourth shelf has **meat, fish and alternatives** such as beans. These foods provide protein for growth and iron to help the body function well. 2 servings from this shelf is the target each day.
- The small top shelf of the Food Pyramid contains foods such as sweets, chocolate, biscuits, cakes, fizzy drinks and savoury snacks, like crisps. This shelf is small to show these foods should only be eaten in small amounts, occasionally. Filling up on top shelf foods spoils the child's appetite for more nutritious foods. This shelf also includes butter, oils and fats. While young children are growing very fast and need some fat in their diet to provide energy for their growth and development, too much fat can cause health problems. It is important that the foods in this shelf are used in moderation in the pre-school.

Suggestions to Give Variety

Breakfast

- Wholemeal or white bread, scones or toast with butter or margarine.
- Porridge or breakfast cereals with milk. Choose iron-fortified cereals. Choose types without sugar, honey or chocolate coating. Cereals with nut pieces are not suitable for young children because of the risk of choking. Read the list of ingredients carefully.
- Fruit or diluted unsweetened pure fruit juice. Dilute one measure pure juice to 4 or 5 measures water.
- Avoid tea for under fives.

Main meals

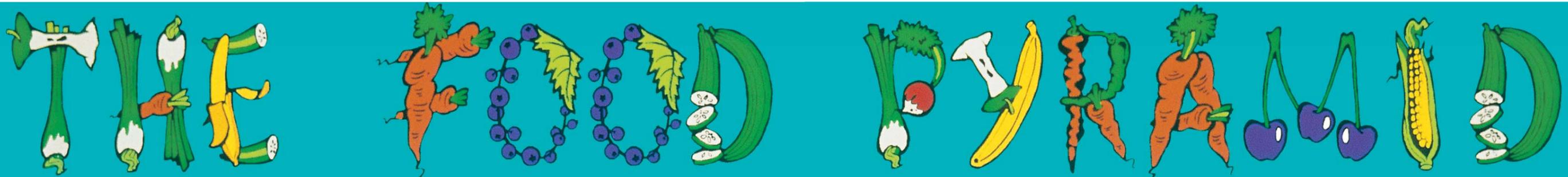
- Boiled potatoes, pasta, rice, bread or other foods from the bottom shelf of the Food Pyramid provide the foundation for the meal. Include a food from this shelf at every meal, every day. Wholemeal breads can be used for sandwiches – one slice wholemeal and one slice white bread makes a colourful sandwich for children.
- A variety of fresh or frozen vegetables will add colour and texture to the meal as well as providing important vitamins and minerals. Offer a vegetable or fruit at the main meal every day.
- Fresh fruit should be offered frequently. Use whole portions, half portions or fruit slices depending on the child's ability to handle the fruit pieces and their appetite.
- Offer a milky food such as yogurt, custard, cheese or a drink of milk.
- A dish or recipe containing peas, beans, lentils, soya products or quorn makes a protein-rich meal for vegetarian children. Other children will enjoy it too.
- Eggs can be used for meals also - scrambled, boiled, omelette or quiche. Ensure they are well cooked.
- Use lean meat in cooking. However, if there is any visible fat, remove this before cooking.
- Fish is good for children too. Oily fish such as sardines and mackerel are also a good source of vitamin D for building healthy bones. Make sure all bones are removed from the fish.
- Avoid adding salt in cooking and at the table.

IRON

Too little iron in the diet causes anaemia, which can affect the child's development. Good sources of iron are liver and red meat (beef, lamb or pork), chicken and sardines. Iron is also found in eggs, cooked lentils and beans, green vegetables, dried prunes, apricots, raisins and iron-fortified breakfast cereals. Iron from non-meat sources is harder for the body to use. Give foods or drinks that are high in vitamin C – for example orange segments or juice – at the same meal, to help iron absorption (see pages 21 & 22). Tea and coffee contain tannin which reduces the absorption of iron. These are not suitable drinks for young children.

A wide variety of foods from each of the four main shelves of the Food Pyramid should be included every day, so the child will receive the variety of nutrients needed for growth and good health. There are a variety of choices within a food group or shelf; for example, a child could choose bread instead of breakfast cereal, or potato instead of pasta. Encourage children to try different food tastes.

There are different food guidelines for children and adults. Adults are encouraged to eat more fibre and less fat, this results in a diet that is lower in energy and more filling. This advice is not suitable for very young children as their stomachs are small and high fibre foods will fill them too quickly. After two years of age, children can gradually eat lower fat foods, such as low-fat (semi-skimmed) milk and foods with more fibre, provided the child is a good eater and has a varied diet.

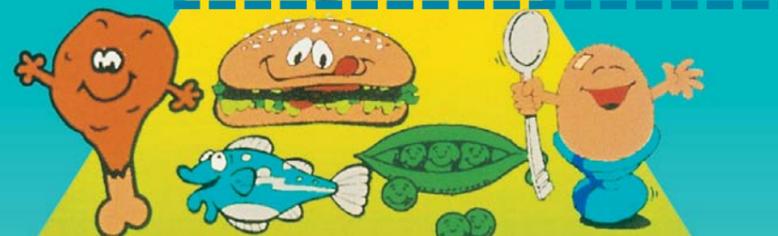


DRINK PLENTY OF WATER



SPARINGLY

VERY SMALL AMOUNTS



2

MEAT, CHICKEN, PEAS, FISH, BEANS, & ALTERNATIVES



3

MILK, CHEESE & YOGURT



4+

FRUIT, FRUIT JUICE & VEGETABLES



6+

BREAD, CEREALS, POTATOES, RICE & PASTA

The Food Pyramid servings above are suitable for children from 5 years of age. the guidelines recommended, according to the child's

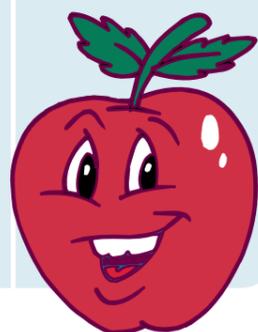
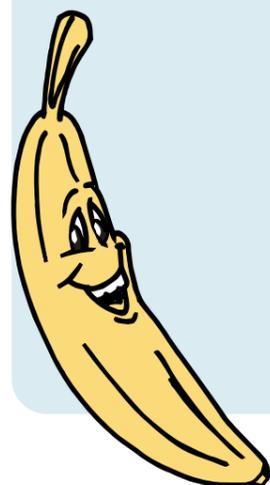
For younger children, start with smaller and fewer servings and increase up to own growth and appetite. See TABLE 3 (page 17)

Snacks

- Snacks are important to help meet the energy needs of children.
- Remember that sugary snacks and sugary drinks spoil the appetite and take the place of healthier more nutritious foods.
- Furthermore, sugary snacks and sugary drinks are not good for a child’s teeth. If they are given occasionally, offer with a meal - not between meals.
- In **TABLE 2, (page 16)** offer snacks from the JUICY, THIRSTY, SMOOTH, CRUNCHY and CHEWY snack choices to ensure a wide variety of foods in the child’s diet.
- Dried fruits (currants and raisins) used in recipes are a good alternative sweetener to sugar for the older children. They are not recommended as between meal snacks because of the sugar content and the risk of dental caries.
- Whole nuts and popcorn are not recommended as snacks for children under 5 years because of the risk of choking.
- For younger children, take care to remove pips and seeds from fruit to help prevent choking.

TABLE 2 - SNACKS

Juicy Snacks	Thirsty Snacks	Smooth Snacks	Crunchy Snacks	Chewy Snacks
Orange	Milk	Banana	Raw vegetable slices, sticks or wedges – try them with yogurt dip	Bread - rolls, baps, pitta, baguettes
Pineapple chunks	Home-made soup	Yogurt – natural or fruit	Apples	Scones – plain, fruit or wholemeal
Plum	Check Drinks’ TABLE 4+5, (pages 19 + 20)	Milk pudding	Toast	Cheese slices, cubes or strings
Pear		Home-made milkshake using yogurt, milk and fruit	Breakfast cereal (without sugar, honey or chocolate coating)	Cold meat slices
Tomato		Crackers (without salt on top)		
Seedless grapes				



Offer suitable sized portions

The table below outlines the recommended numbers of daily serving sizes for different age groups

TABLE 3 – RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF DAILY SERVINGS AND PORTION SIZE

FOOD SHELF	1-3 YEARS	3-5 YEARS	SERVING SIZE
Meat, Fish and Alternatives Shelf <i>Iron – to help healthy blood flow</i>	2 small servings	2 servings	An average sized pork or lamb chop or homemade beef burger 2 slices (60g) of lean roast/boiled/grilled/oven-baked meat or chicken/turkey Medium sized fillet of fish or 2 fish fingers 2 eggs 9 dessertspoons of baked beans, peas or lentils
Milk, Cheese and Yogurt Shelf <i>Dairy foods help bones to grow</i>	3 servings	3 servings	1 glass of milk (1/3 pint) 1 carton of yogurt 30g of hard cheese 2 cheese slices 1 bowl of milk pudding (100g)
Fruit and Vegetable Shelf <i>Fruit and veg to help you glow</i>	2-4 servings	4 or more servings	1 medium sized fruit (50g) e.g. apple, orange or banana 1/2 glass of pure unsweetened fruit juice, diluted well with water 3 dessertspoons of stewed or tinned fruit in own juices or fresh fruit salad 3 dessertspoons chopped raw, salad or cooked vegetables Small bowl of home-made vegetable soup
Breads, Cereals, and Potato Shelf <i>Plenty of these to GO! GO! GO!</i>	4 servings	4-6 or more servings	1 slice of bread (white or wholegrain) 1 small bread roll 1 small bowl of breakfast cereal 1 small scone (plain, wholemeal or fruit) 1 medium potato (60g) – boiled or baked 3 dessertspoons of boiled rice or pasta (80g)

These serving sizes are only a guide. Children’s appetites vary. If the child eats all the serving, offer some more food. For young children, start with smaller and fewer servings and increase up to the guidelines, according to the child’s own growth and appetite.

Offer healthy food choices and tooth-friendly drinks frequently

Children are not “little adults”

Children grow and develop at a fast rate and they need more energy for their size than adults do. Therefore, snacks between meals are important to help children to meet their energy needs for growth.

Young children need regular small meals and nutritious snacks daily, this may include up to 2-3 small meals and 2-3 snacks daily **TABLE 2, (page 16)**.

Drinks

- Fluids are important for children - up to 6 cups of fluid should be encouraged each day, such as water or diluted pure fruit juice.
- Water and milk are the most tooth-friendly drinks to have between meals. Encourage children to drink water if they are thirsty. Water quenches thirst and does not damage teeth.
- Water from a water softening system can contain high levels of sodium (salt) and should not be given to young children.
- Water for infants less than twelve months should be boiled and cooled before use. In some areas, the water may need to be boiled for older children also. All water from mains or group water supply is tested regularly. If you are concerned about your tap water, discuss it with the Environmental Health Officer in your health board.
- If sweet drinks are used occasionally, offer these drinks only with meals and in small amounts so children do not fill up with drinks rather than eating solid food.
- It is recommended that drinks be given by cup rather than from a feeding bottle over 12 months of age.
- Continued bottle-feeding after 1 year may lead to excess milk consumption, reduced capacity for solid foods and thus “faddy eating”. It may also contribute to dental problems such as “Nursing Bottle Syndrome”(see page 32).
- Constipation can be a result of a low fluid intake. Encourage up to 6 cups of fluid per day. Physical activity can help prevent constipation.

Check **TABLE 4 & TABLE 5, (pages 19 and 20)** for suitable drinks.



TABLE 4 : Milk drinks

Type of Drinks MILK	SUITABILITY
Breast milk	A mother should be encouraged to continue breastfeeding as long as she wishes. Breastfeeding with suitable complementary foods into the second year continues to benefit the baby and mother.
Infant or follow-on formula	Infant formula can continue to be used. Follow-on formula is a modified cow’s milk suitable for infants from about 6 months of age and marketed to discourage parents from feeding children cow’s milk as the main drink under 12 months of age. There should be no need for infant or follow-on formula after 12 months if children have a diet containing sufficient iron-rich foods.
Specialised infant formula	Formula such as soya formula or other specialised formula should only be used under strict medical supervision.
Whole cow’s milk	Whole cow’s milk is suitable as the main drink for most children from 12 months of age.
Low-fat (semi-skimmed) cow’s milk	Not suitable as the main drink for children under 2 years of age. Young children need some fat in their diet. Low-fat (semi-skimmed) milk can be introduced gradually after the age of 2 years, provided the child is a good eater and has a varied diet.
Skimmed (fat free) cow’s milk	Not suitable as the main drink for children under 5 years due to the low energy content.
Goat’s or sheep’s milk	Not suitable for children under 12 months of age due to inappropriate nutrient content. Although these drinks may be seen as less allergenic than cow’s milk or providing special nourishment, there is no scientific evidence to support these claims.
Flavoured Milk	Usually sweetened in some way and therefore best given with meals, rather than between meals. Do not offer under 12 months of age.
Soya drinks (other than infant formula)	Not suitable for children under 12 months. If children are given soya drinks, make sure it’s under medical supervision, that the drink has added calcium and is only given at mealtimes because of the high sugar content.

NOTE: Children should not be put to bed with a bottle as this can cause “Nursing Bottle Syndrome” (see page 32).

TABLE 5 : Non-milk drinks

Type of Drinks NON-MILK	SUITABILITY
Tap Water	Encourage water as a drink frequently during the day.
Bottled Water	Can contain high levels of some minerals such as sodium, which can be harmful to young children. If used, choose a bottled/mineral water with less than 20mg of sodium (Na) per litre. This will be on the label. Fizzy water in large amounts can harm teeth, as it is acidic.
Pure Unsweetened Fruit Juice	Useful source of vitamin C. Children should be encouraged to have a half glass with breakfast or their main meal to help the body absorb iron. Fruit juices contain natural sugars and are acidic, therefore, for dental health it is recommended that fruit juices are diluted (1 part juice to 4-5 parts water) and given with meals.
Fruit Drinks, Juice Drinks and Squashes	Should be avoided as they contain sugar and acid, both of which are harmful to teeth. <i>Sugar-free drinks and squashes</i> contain artificial sweeteners and are generally not recommended for infants and young children. If given, they should be diluted with plenty of water (1 part squash to 8 parts water) and used only in moderation.
Fizzy Drinks - Minerals	Should be avoided as they contain a lot of sugar and acid, both of which are harmful to teeth. <i>'Diet'</i> minerals contain artificial sweeteners instead of sugar and should also be avoided. Even without sugar, they are harmful to teeth because of their acidity.
Tea and Coffee	Not suitable drinks for young children as they contain tannin, which interferes with iron absorption. Caffeine is a stimulant and is not suitable for children.

Accommodate special food needs of individual children

If the child needs a special diet, it is the responsibility of the parent or guardian(s) to inform the Pre-school Manager of this, so that arrangements can be made to accommodate the child's requirements. Some special diet requirements such as gluten-free (coeliac), diabetic, nut-free or milk-free, can be quite complex. The parent should provide a copy of the diet sheet prepared for the child by a Dietitian. Lists of prepared foods are available to give information on products that are free of a particular item such as milk or gluten. Ask the parent for further details or information as needed.

If a food allergy is suspected, the parents should be encouraged to discuss this with their doctor. It is unwise to restrict children's food choices without professional assessment and individual information.

Peanut allergy

Peanut allergy is usually severe - sensitive individuals may even react to peanut dust. Care should be taken to prevent accidental consumption of food containing nuts or nut products or food that has come into contact with them. Preparing food for peanut allergy sufferers in a designated area may help. Peanut butter should be avoided and many prepared foods can contain nuts or nut flour. Careful checking of food labels is necessary. Children with severe food allergies are advised to carry identification.

It is recommended that children with a family history of asthma, eczema, hay fever or food allergy should avoid peanuts and peanut products until the age of 3 years. Whole nuts are not recommended for children under 5 because of the risk of choking.

Vegetarian diet

A vegetarian diet does not contain meat, poultry or fish. It does not include animal products such as beef or pork fat and gelatine. It can include milk and milk products and eggs. Cheese may be excluded if it contains animal rennet as the setting agent.

Discuss the particular food requirements with the child's parent. Some people may use the word vegetarian, but will actually eat fish and chicken. A well-planned and varied vegetarian diet is nutritionally adequate and allows normal growth and development. Children on a very restricted or limited diet may benefit from breast or formula milk over 1 year of age, as advised by their Doctor or Dietitian.

Nutrient-rich foods such as milk, cheese, yogurt and eggs can provide protein, vitamin A, calcium and zinc. Vegetable sources of protein, for example quorn, tofu and pulses (peas, beans and lentils), should be provided at each meal. See suggestions in the menu plans **TABLE 7, (page 26)**.

It is important to ensure that the child receives enough dietary iron from a meat-free diet. Good non-meat sources of iron are eggs, cooked lentils and beans, green vegetables, dried prunes, apricots, raisins and iron-fortified cereals. Iron is better absorbed if the child has foods or drinks that are high in vitamin C – for example citrus fruits or juices – at the same meal as eggs, beans, grains or other vegetable sources of iron and protein. Tea and coffee contain tannin and reduce the absorption of iron.

Increasing Iron Absorption



Vegan diet

A vegan diet contains no animal products at all. These diets need careful planning and vitamin supplementation. Parents of children on vegan diets should discuss their child’s nutritional needs with a Dietitian. This information can then be discussed with the Pre-School Manager accordingly.

Food customs of different cultures

Some ethnic communities may have different food customs from those the pre-school staff are used to. The food customs may involve what foods are eaten, how the foods are prepared, what combinations of foods are used or when particular foods are eaten. Periods of celebration and celebration foods may bring new events to the pre-school.

There may be periods of fasting, though very young children do not normally fast. However, the meals eaten at home may be different during fasting periods, such as a main meal late at night or breakfast very early. Check with parents if the child’s food intake at the pre-school needs to be adjusted during this time. Always consult with the parents of the child so that their individual food preferences and customs can be catered for.

Some food customs are listed in **TABLE 6, (page 23)**. This is not a comprehensive list and there may be differences in food choices between families of the same ethnic community. If the exact source of the food is not known, such as the source of the fat in a product, families following a particular practice may wish to avoid this food.

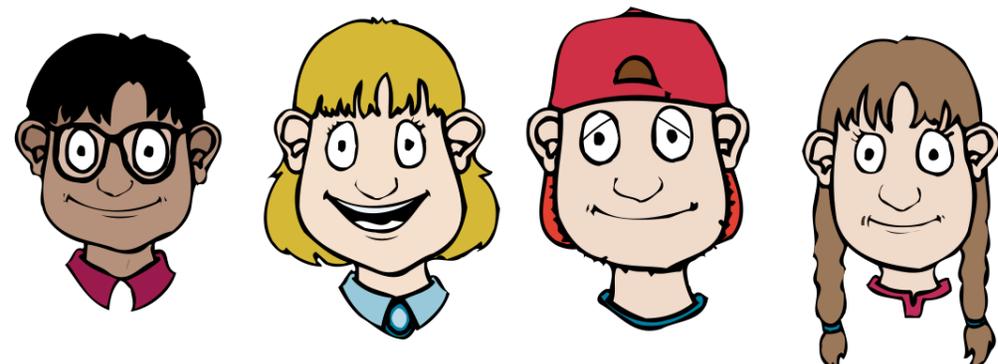


TABLE 6 : SOME FOOD CUSTOMS

FOOD	JEW	SIKH	MUSLIM	HINDU	BUDDHIST
Eggs	No bloodspots	Yes	Yes	Some	Some
Milk/Yogurt	Not with meat	Yes	Not with rennet	Not with rennet	Yes
Cheese	Not with meat	Some	Some	Some	Yes
Chicken	Kosher	Some	Halal	Some	No
Mutton/Lamb	Kosher	Yes	Halal	Some	No
Beef	Kosher	No	Halal	No	No
Pork	No	Rarely	No	Rarely	No
Fish	With scales, fins and back bone, no shellfish	Some	Halal	Some	No
Nuts, Pulses, Fruit & Vegetables	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: Multicultural Foods In Britain. Leeds Metropolitan University. Feb 1993. Teaching Pack and Video by June Copeman, Sarah Hirst, Pinki Sahota.

Plan healthy varied meals and snacks

Planning a menu in advance helps to ensure that children are offered nutritious varied meals. This section brings together the guidelines from the previous sections into menus. The aim is to:

- Include foods from each of the four main shelves of the Food Pyramid so the child will receive the variety of nutrients needed for growth and health.
- Include foods from the bread, cereal and potato shelf; the fruit and vegetable shelf; the milk, cheese and yogurt shelf; and the meat and alternatives shelf. Choose servings relevant to the child's age. **TABLE 3, (page 17)** for more information.
- Offer suitable foods and drinks frequently. Young children need 2-3 small meals and 2-3 snacks each day.
- Respect parents' wishes and accommodate any special dietary needs of the children. See pages 21-23.

Children's food needs for different daycare periods

Children spend varying amounts of time in Pre-School Services and so they are there for a different number of meals. *Food should be offered to young children at least every 3 hours.*

Children in full day care (more than 5 hours) -

Offer at least two meals and two snacks, for example – breakfast, snack, lunch and snack. One meal should be a hot meal. If children are there for a long day, an evening meal may also need to be provided. If a main meal is not provided for some reason, ensure that parents know this so they can offer suitable meals at home.

Do not assume that the child has had breakfast. Work together with parents to ensure that children have breakfast either at home or at pre-school and also that they had an evening meal either at pre-school or at home. This is important to ensure that the child is not over or underfed.

Children in day care for up to 5 hours maximum per session –

Offer at least two meals and one snack, for example – breakfast, snack and lunch. It is not necessary to have a hot meal, however the meal should include at least 1 serving from each of the four main shelves of the Food Pyramid. See **TABLE 3, (page 17)**.

Children in day care up to 3.5 hours per session -

Offer one meal and one snack – for example, snack and lunch. This group may also include after-school care.

CHECK TABLES 2, 4 & 5 (PAGES 16,19 & 20 RESPECTIVELY) FOR HEALTHY SNACKS AND DRINKS CHOICES AND USE THE FOOD PYRAMID (PAGES 14 & 15) AS A GUIDE FOR SERVING SIZES, FOR DIFFERENT AGES, FOR ALL MEALS.

Children who attend the pre-school for other short periods generally do not have a meal. However, choose nutritious snacks, for these children, from the suggestions on **TABLE 2, (page 16)**.

When planning the menus, in addition to nutritious food choices, also consider the cooking method, colour, tastes and textures.

Cooking methods

Use a variety of cooking methods for the main dishes. Boil, stew, roast, oven-bake, steam, poach or casserole rather than fry. Frying adds a lot of extra fat to the food so, therefore, try not to fry more than once a week. Most foods suitable for frying can also be oven-baked.

Use monounsaturated oils (rapeseed/canola/olive) or polyunsaturated oils (sunflower/safflower) in cooking and offer a choice of monounsaturated or polyunsaturated margarine or spread.

Colours, Textures, Tastes and Finger Foods

Food can be made to look more attractive to children by serving a combination of colours. Try dividing the food into three or four defined areas of colour on a plate.

A combination of different textures is appealing to children. They will appreciate a variety of smooth, crunchy, chewy foods **TABLE 2, (page 16)**.

Children should be encouraged to try different food tastes on a regular basis. However, children may not accept meals containing too many different or new flavours, so try and introduce new tastes, one at a time.

Finger foods, for example slices of toast or bread, vegetable sticks and fruit chunks, can be provided to encourage young children to feed themselves and try new foods.

Salt

Avoid adding salt in cooking and at the table. Restrict the use of packet soups, stock cubes, packet sauces and other processed foods as they often have a high salt content. High levels of salt are difficult for the child's body to handle and can cause health problems.

Sample menu

A sample one-week menu is outlined in **TABLE 7, (page 26)**, to offer guidance in providing nutritious food for children in the various pre-school service day care periods. Encourage parents to suggest healthy dishes to include in your menus.

A blank menu is provided to encourage the development of menus in accordance with guidance provided throughout this document. This blank menu plan can be photocopied for each week's menu. **TABLE 8, (page 27)**.

Budget

Healthy eating does not need to cost more money. Less processed foods are generally less expensive than processed foods. Planning meals, buying fruit and vegetables in season and paying attention to portion size can result in cost-effective meals.

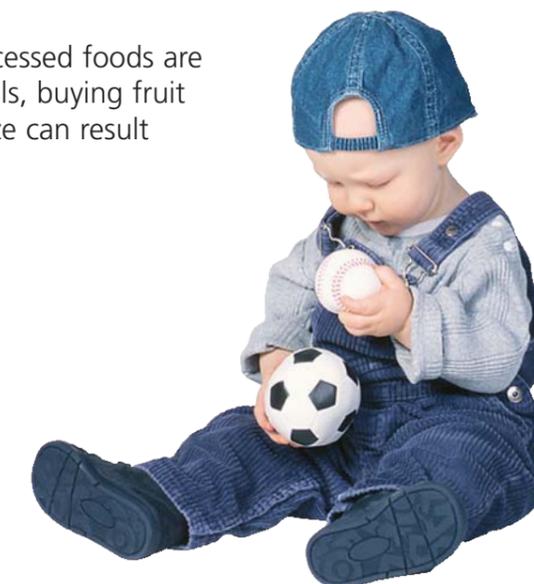


TABLE 7 : Sample 5 Day Menu

MEAL TIMES	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI
Breakfast	Diluted pure unsweetened orange juice, Cornflakes with milk, Brown or white bread with butter/margarine, jam/marmalade	Diluted pure unsweetened orange juice, Puffed rice cereal with milk, Brown or white bread with butter/margarine, jam/marmalade	Diluted pure unsweetened orange juice, Porridge with milk, Brown or white bread with butter/margarine, jam/marmalade	Diluted pure unsweetened orange juice, Shredded wheat cereal with milk, Brown or white bread with butter/margarine, jam/marmalade	Diluted pure unsweetened orange juice, Wholegrain wheat cereal with milk, Brown or white bread with butter/margarine, jam/marmalade
Mid Morning 10.00am	Milk, Brown bread with butter/margarine	Milk, Apple chunks	Milk, Banana	Milk, Kiwi Slices	Milk, Tea brack or brown bread with sliced bananas
Lunch 12.00 - 1.00pm	Lean mince meat and vegetables made into Bolognese sauce, Spaghetti/potatoes, Custard with peach slices in natural juice, Water to drink	Scrambled eggs, Broccoli, Mashed potato, Chopped banana with mandarin pieces, Water to drink	Lentil and vegetable lasagne, Apple crumble, Water to drink	Home-made beef burgers (grilled) Peas, Oven chips Mandarin Water to drink	Grilled/ oven baked fish, Carrots, Boiled rice, Semolina with sultanas, Water to drink
Mid Afternoon 3.00pm	Milk, Pear slices or Carrot sticks	Milk, Scone with butter/margarine	Milk, Brown Roll with butter/margarine	Milk, Fruit Yogurt	Milk, Cheese chunks with crackers
Evening Meal 5.00pm	Tuna and tomato in brown/white sandwich, Banana, Milk or water	Macaroni cheese, Mandarin orange, Milk or water	Pizza with tomato and cheese, Pear, Milk or water	Ham with wholemeal bread, Pineapple pieces, Milk or water	Baked beans with brown or white toast, Tomato slices or apple Milk or water



TABLE 8 : 5 Day Menu Plan

MEAL TIMES	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI
Breakfast					
Mid Morning 10.00am					
Lunch 12.00 - 1.00pm					
Mid Afternoon 3.00pm					
Evening Meal 5.00pm					



Main meal suggestions:

- Homemade beef burgers (grilled or oven-baked), oven chips and vegetable or salad.
- Pork pieces in a casserole with pineapple and rice.
- Beef casserole with carrots and potatoes.
- Savoury mince with peas and mashed potatoes/pasta shapes.
- Roast chicken with carrots/parsnips and roast potatoes.
- Grilled fish pieces (without batter) with sweetcorn and rice.
- Mince, lentils or chickpeas with stir fried vegetables and rice.
- Chicken pieces in a casserole served with broccoli and potatoes.
- Lasagne made with minced beef, chicken, lamb, fish or beans/lentils and vegetables.
- Lamb casserole with carrots and turnips and potatoes.
- Mince, lentil or bean shepherd's pie with vegetable or salad.
- Tuna chunks with sweetcorn and carrots in a cheese sauce with pasta.
- Fish in white sauce served with rice and green beans.
- Salad with chunks of cooked fish or chicken, grated carrot, lettuce, chopped tomato, and cooked pasta.
- Winter vegetable casserole with carrots, turnips and potatoes, topped with grated cheese and breadcrumbs.
- Fish chunks, cauliflower and baked potato in a tomato sauce served in the baked potato shell.
- Chicken risotto served with a green vegetable.
- Mince made into a meat loaf served with mashed potatoes/pasta shapes and carrots.
- Stir-fried vegetables (mainly pulses) with rice/egg noodles.
- Macaroni and cheese served with sliced tomato or green vegetable.
- Wholemeal cheese and egg quiche with cooked green vegetable or salad.
- Vegetable burger with carrots & mashed potato.
- Cauliflower cheese with peas and boiled potato.
- Thick home-made soup - lentil, vegetable, chicken, served with a bread roll and cheese, follow with some whole or sliced fruit.

*Use lean meat with fat trimmed off or skimmed off after cooling.
Offer extra vegetables such as a bowl of quartered tomatoes,
carrot sticks or cucumber chunks.*

Checklist for Menu Planning

The aim of the checklist is to:

- assist the Pre-school Manager in providing a healthy, varied diet for pre-school children;
- increase the number of healthy food choice options on the checklist that are available.

Read and tick what is being completed at present within the establishment.

PRACTICE	YES	NO
1. Are 2-3 small meals and 2-3 snacks offered daily?		
2. Do main meals include a food from each of the four main shelves of the Food Pyramid? • Bread, cereals, potatoes, pasta and rice • Fruit and vegetables • Milk, cheese and yogurt • Meat, fish and alternatives		
3. Does food look pleasing on the plate – different colours, presentation?		
4. Are a variety of different tastes and textures of foods offered?		
5. Are parents given the opportunity to provide suggestions for the menu?		
6. Are copies of the menu made available to the parents and/or displayed in the pre-school in a prominent area?		
7. Do children with special dietary requirements receive the correct foods, for example, in the case of food allergy?		
8. Are religious and/or cultural food requests observed?		
9. Is one person responsible for food and nutrition issues?		
10. Are food safety guidelines followed at every stage of food provision?		

If you answer No to any of the above questions, it may be a good idea to review your practice. Refer to Contacts List, as appropriate, for more information, see page 43

SECTION THREE – IMPORTANT ISSUES

Help children learn to eat

The pre-school years are a great time to help children form positive attitudes towards food and physical activity and to develop good eating habits. Ongoing encouragement is necessary to promote a positive body image.

During the weaning stages, infants are introduced to new tastes and textures. They will handle the food as a way of learning about it and may tip it out of the bowl, smear it around the high chair tray and play with it in other ways. This is all part of the learning experience.

Children may want to and should be encouraged to eat most food and drink by himself or herself as they develop eating skills. Children aged 2-5 years should be allowed to serve themselves, under supervision, during meals as this may encourage them to try different kinds of foods.

Child-sized utensils, crockery, tables and chairs may also make it easier for children to feed themselves and learn to eat independently. However, all young children should be supervised while eating and assisted or encouraged as needed. A feeding cup is recommended for children over 12 months rather than a bottle.

Carers should involve older children in helping to prepare food, and in helping to set and clear tables. Use mealtimes as an opportunity to talk about food and where food comes from. Encourage good table manners. Children can learn from the carer about table manners and can practice their speaking and listening skills. Avoid distractions such as television. If a carer eats at the same time as the children, it is important that they set a good example and be a role model by following healthy eating guidelines, sitting at the table to eat and promoting a positive attitude to healthy food.

Make the eating area colourful and bright. Give children sufficient time to eat. Do not force children to eat.

Food refusal and fussy eating

Many children go through phases of refusing to eat certain foods or foods that are served in certain ways. Sometimes they will eat very little at some meals. This is often a way of showing independence and is very common in children under the age of five.

Children can refuse food for a variety of reasons and these can include:

- Poor appetite
- Disliking the particular food
- Illness
- Limited food appeal
- Emotional upset
- Manipulative behaviour

Children's health will not suffer if they do not eat a healthy, varied diet for a short while. If you think a food fad is becoming a problem, then discuss this with the parents. The parents can talk to their Doctor, Public Health Nurse, Practice Nurse or Dietitian.

DO

- ✓ Serve meals at regular times so children know when to expect food.
- ✓ Make mealtimes fun.
- ✓ Children often follow the example of adults so carers should sit and eat with the children where possible.
- ✓ Keep the Food Pyramid on the wall of the eating room in the pre-school and regularly include new foods from the shelves. Introduce new foods in small portions and on several occasions.
- ✓ Watch for high intakes of snacks or drinks especially milk, juice or squash and reduce if interfering with appetite.
- ✓ Remember that children have only little tummies and fill up easily. Keep portions small and offer more as needed.
- ✓ Watch for an "off" day becoming an "off" week. Children's appetites are not constant. If you are concerned it may be important to write down what a child eats during the week and report back to parents/guardians.
- ✓ Make food look interesting - colours, taste and textures are very important.
- ✓ Be prepared to offer the food in another form, for example, pasta with the sauce beside it rather than on top of it.
- ✓ Allow the child to eat with other "good" eaters whenever possible.
- ✓ Praise when food is eaten.
- ✓ The child should feed him/herself, if possible. Also offer finger foods.
- ✓ Take time over meals and talk to children about different foods. Give them time to eat without being rushed.
- ✓ When it is obvious that no more food is going to be eaten, remove the food.

DON'T

- ✗ Don't force a child to eat or to clear their plate of food.
- ✗ Don't get upset with the child.
- ✗ Don't criticise the child in front of other children.
- ✗ Don't bribe with sweet foods or other foods you know the child will eat as this gives a wrong message.

Foster good dental health

It is important to care for children's teeth from the very start. Both tooth decay and tooth erosion are common in young children. Prolonged use of a bottle can result in 'Nursing Bottle Syndrome', where the teeth decay from the prolonged contact with the milk or juice in the bottle. Introduce a cup or beaker from about 6 months and aim to stop bottle feeding from 12 months of age.

Tooth decay in first teeth can be very painful and can affect the development of permanent teeth. Tooth decay is linked with the **frequency** and the amount of sugar contained in the foods taken. These foods include table sugar, sweets, honey, cakes, chocolate, biscuits, bars, soft drinks and squashes.

If sugary foods and drinks are provided, it is important that they should be given with meals rather than between meals. Many snack foods contain sugar and can cause tooth decay so it is important to choose wisely. Refer to **TABLE 2, (page 16)** for healthy snack choices.

Tooth erosion is a wearing away of the enamel. It is caused by high consumption of acidic foods, fizzy drinks and undiluted fruit juice. Children who drink fizzy drinks or fruit squashes once or more a day are twice as likely to suffer from tooth erosion as children who consume these drinks less often. Using a straw for these drinks can reduce the damage as the drink goes towards the back of the mouth. However, limiting these drinks is a better solution.

Children should be encouraged to use their teeth to chew. Give foods such as raw apples, carrots, crusts, toast and other foods in a form that encourages chewing.

Tips for healthy teeth and gums

DO

- ✓ Reduce the frequency and the amount of contact that sugary foods and drinks have with teeth and offer with meals - not between meals.
- ✓ Encourage calcium rich foods, for example, milk, cheese and yogurt. These foods will protect and help to build strong teeth.
- ✓ Give milk and water as between meal drinks, these are the most tooth-friendly drinks.
- ✓ Dilute pure unsweetened fruit juice to a ratio of 1 part juice to 4-5 parts water and offer with meals.
- ✓ Encourage a feeding cup, that doesn't have a teat, from 6 months of age. This is important, particularly for children who take high sugar drinks, for example, soya infant formula.
- ✓ It is recommended that bottle-feeding should be stopped from the age of 12 months.
- ✓ Frequent use of paediatric medicines containing sugar can promote tooth decay – use sugar-free alternatives.
- ✓ Contact a dental practitioner for additional information on dental hygiene.
- ✓ Play games and tell stories that encourage children to see visits to the dentist as normal checks for their oral health, not as frightening or painful.

DON'T

- ✗ Do not give sweet drinks in baby's bottle – this can result in tooth decay.
- ✗ Do not dip the bottle teat in anything.
- ✗ Do not put food such as rusks in baby's bottles.
- ✗ Children should not be put to bed with a bottle as this can cause 'Nursing Bottle Syndrome'
- ✗ If a child uses a soother, do not dip it into sugar or sugary drinks (honey, jams or syrup) to encourage the child to use it.
- ✗ If giving sugary foods and drinks occasionally, try to give with or straight after meals, not between meals.
- ✗ Avoid acidic drinks, **TABLE 5, (page 20)** on drinks.
- ✗ Avoid sugary snacks, **TABLE 2, (page 16)** on snacks.

Reducing the intake of soft drinks would have a major impact on the sugar content of children's diets and on children's dental health.

Prepare food in a clean and safe way

It is essential that food provided to pre-school children is stored, prepared and presented in a safe and hygienic environment. Extra care is needed for infants and young children as they may have a lower resistance to food poisoning. Food poisoning can be a serious illness for infants and young children.

Bacteria and viruses cause food poisoning. You cannot tell by looking at food, smelling it or tasting it if the food contains these germs. These germs multiply very quickly at room temperature. Keep cold foods in the fridge or freezer and keep hot foods very hot while waiting to serve.

Some raw foods contain bacteria. Thorough cooking will kill these. However, germs can be transferred from raw foods to other foods by hands, chopping boards, cloths or utensils. Use separate boards and utensils and wash thoroughly between uses. Wash hands frequently. In some cases children may bring food from home to eat while they are in childcare. It is helpful if the childcare setting has its own food & nutrition policy. This can be given to parents in helping them in choosing and preparing food they send from home.

Further information in relation to food safety and hygiene may be obtained from the environmental health department of the local health board. The Food Safety Authority of Ireland has produced several useful publications in relation to food safety and hygiene in storing food, food preparation and when shopping. Courses are also available.

Food Purchase

- Buy food that is clean and undamaged.
- Buy food from a reputable source where it is stored in a clean and safe manner.
- Read the labels on foods. The ingredients are listed by order of weight with the largest amount first. Check for added sugar and salt as well as animal products and nuts if you wish to avoid these.
- Note the 'use by' or 'best before' date. Eat it, cook it, freeze it or throw it out by the date.
- Once the food is opened, use it as a fresh food. The 'use by' date applies to unopened food.
- Keep cold foods cold on the way home from shopping or check that delivery trucks do so.

Food Storage

- Do not leave perishable food at room temperature for more than two hours. Perishable food brought from home, including sandwiches, should be kept in a fridge or cool place below 5°C.
- Insulated cool boxes, or a cool box with cool packs, should be used for carrying food when taking children on trips or outings.
- Cool leftovers as quickly as possible. Cover and, when steam has evaporated, put in the fridge. Avoid putting large quantities of warm food in the fridge as it raises the temperature of the whole fridge.
- Cover foods in the fridge.
- Eggs should be kept in the fridge, separate from other foods.
- Raw meat and raw fish should be stored on a different and a lower refrigerator shelf to other foods. Check the raw food is not dripping.
- Food stocks should be rotated and food beyond its 'use by' date discarded.
- Do not leave food in cans or packaging once opened, empty into another container for storage.
- Do not re-freeze foods.
- Wash fridge frequently.

Kitchen Hygiene

- Work surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned with disinfectant after each meal preparation.
- People who are unwell should not prepare food for others.
- Cover cuts and sores with waterproof dressings.
- Tea towels and dishcloths should be boil-washed daily.
- Carers should always wash their hands with soap and water before preparing food, between handling raw and cooked foods, before helping children to eat and after toileting children or changing nappies or blowing their nose.
- It is also important that children are taught basic hygiene themselves, for example, not eating food that has fallen on the floor, washing their hands with soap and water before meals and after going to the toilet.
- Uneaten food should be removed from the table and disposed of. Any milk remaining in a baby's bottle after one hour should be disposed of.

Food Preparation

- Separate chopping boards should be used for raw meat and fish, for cooked foods and for raw fruit and vegetables.
- Fruit and vegetables should be washed well and peeled. Root vegetables such as carrots and parsnips should always be peeled and topped and tailed.
- Discard the skins and cuttings from food preparation to prevent contamination of the prepared product.
- Do not leave food around the kitchen uncovered.
- Eggs given to babies or toddlers should be cooked until both the yolk and the white are solid.
- Do not use unpasteurised milk or milk-based products, such as cheese and yogurt, made from unpasteurised milk. If a parent brings in goat's/sheep's milk for their child, check with the parent if the milk needs to be boiled.
- If you are serving food from a can or a jar and the child is unlikely to eat all the contents, spoon a portion into a separate dish or container before serving it to the child. Store any unused portions according to the manufacturer's instructions. If food is served straight from the jar and the child does not finish it, the remainder should be thrown away.
- Thaw frozen food completely before cooking unless instructions state "cook from frozen". Thaw in the fridge rather than at room temperature.

Re-heating Food

- If food is to be eaten warm, it should be re-heated until piping hot and then cooled down before serving. Re-heat food only once.
- Avoid keeping food hot for long periods.
- Stir foods, if possible, during re-heating to ensure all parts are heated.
- Do not heat a baby's bottle in a microwave as hot spots can occur and burn the baby's mouth.

Safety

- Never leave children or infants alone while they are eating in case they choke.
- Children must be supervised while in high chairs.
- High chairs must have a safety harness.

Firstly, always cook food thoroughly

Only use clean water

Once thawed, cook food immediately

Don't forget to re-heat cooked food thoroughly

Store as directed on the label

Avoid contact between raw food and cooked food

Frequently wash your hands

Ensure that you keep kitchen surfaces very clean

Take care that hot food is very hot and cold food very cold

Your food should be protected from insects, rodents and pets



SECTION FOUR – HEALTHY EATING POLICY

Develop a healthy eating policy

Ideas about healthy eating can vary between individual childcare workers and between individual parents. The best way to ensure there is agreement is to have a written healthy eating policy for the pre-school. A policy is a written list of things you have agreed on and intend to do.

An agreed written policy also helps to ensure that the food sent with children by their parents to the pre-school complies with the healthy eating requirements in the Childcare Act. The pre-school manager is responsible for all the food eaten within the pre-school setting.

The pre-school may already have ways of doing things or an 'unwritten policy'. The advantage of writing down the points is that it gives everyone a chance to discuss and agree the guidelines. It also provides information to new parents and staff about your approach to healthy eating. Policies can change and need to be reviewed annually.

Involve parents in the discussions on developing a food and nutrition policy. Let them know you are writing a policy and ask for their views. Share drafts of the policy with them. It is important to include some parents in the group developing the policy.

Ensure all staff are willing to work within the policy. Provide training as needed to ensure staff are confident implementing the policy. Monitor the policy on a regular basis. Address any aspects that are not being followed.

When the policy is written, provide a copy for all parents and staff. Give new parents and new staff a copy when they arrive and check that they understand how the policy relates to them. Post the policy and weekly menus in a visible location, maybe where children's coats are hung. Parents can see what food is provided at the pre-school and this helps them to plan what foods to give at home. Parents can also offer suggestions for menu items.

A sample policy is shown in **TABLE 9, (page 38)**. Discuss with pre-school staff and with parents which of these statements apply to your pre-school and add others that might be more suitable. Additional help can be sought from your Community Nutrition and Dietetic Service and/or Pre-school Inspection Team. Their contact details are listed on **pages 43 and 44**.



TABLE 9 - SAMPLE PRE-SCHOOL HEALTHY EATING POLICY

- Mothers will be supported to continue breastfeeding their children.
- Infants will be held upright while bottle feeding. No bottles will be propped.
- Formula milk feeds for infants will be provided by parents and ready to use. Staff will not make up formula feeds.
- A weekly menu will provide the children with varied foods. This menu will be on display in advance. Recipes and food ingredients are available to parents.
- Parents are encouraged to offer menu suggestions or comments on the nutrition policy.
- All children will have suitable food available depending on their age, development and needs, using the recommended servings table as a guide.
- Breakfast will be available each morning. Parents are responsible to inform the pre-school if their child needs breakfast on arrival.
- Full fat milk will be served with morning and afternoon snacks. A low-fat or semi-skimmed milk option will be available at parents' request for children over 2 years of age, who eat a varied diet.
- Water will be available at all times.
- Fizzy drinks and fruit squash will not be provided.
- Diluted pure unsweetened fruit juice will be served with main meals.
- Children will have access to bread or fruit if they are hungry between scheduled meal and snack times.
- Children will be allowed to have dessert if they do not eat their main course.
- Parents will be advised if their child is not eating well.
- Parents of children on special diets will be asked to provide as much information as possible about suitable foods. In some cases, parents may be asked to provide food themselves.
- Carers will sit with the children when they eat and encourage good eating habits.
- Children will sit when eating or having a drink.
- Withholding food will not be used as a form of punishment.
- Parents are asked not to send sweets, crisps and other snack foods to the pre-school.
- Birthday party food should be discussed in advance with the staff.
- All food in the pre-school will be stored, prepared and served using good food safety practices.
- Staff will receive training in relation to healthy eating and food safety.
- Children will be encouraged to play outside every day, weather permitting, to ensure they receive sunlight which helps their bodies to make vitamin D.
- This policy will be displayed in the reception area. It will be reviewed annually.

Food for special occasions

Food is often part of a celebration, for example a birthday cake. There is nothing wrong with occasional sweet foods. However, in a large childcare setting there may be so many special events that sweet treats are available nearly everyday.

Encourage parents to keep sweet treats for home celebrations and in the pre-school to mark the occasion with decorations, party games and non-food treats such as face painting rather than sweets, crisps and fizzy drinks.

Holidays, festivals and religious occasions of various cultures can provide an opportunity to introduce children to various cultures. These events can be marked by special foods but also by other activities.

Rewards and treats

Rewards are often given to children as a means of reinforcing good behaviour or if they have done well at a task. Aim to use other types of rewards rather than food rewards, such as sweets.

Ideas for rewards

- Smile
- Praise
- Pat on the back
- Choosing a story to be read
- Being the 'leader' in an activity
- Having first choice in something
- Star or sticker
- A rubber stamp on the back of the hand
- A paper crown
- A badge
- A clap from the other children

Outside catering companies

Some pre-schools may get their meals from outside catering companies. If this is your situation, discuss these guidelines with the company. A catering company should be able to meet these guidelines and provide varied, nutritious meals suitable for children of different ages. They should provide a menu cycle in advance. The food should be prepared and delivered in accordance with food safety guidelines. They should provide any necessary information and training on how to prepare the food for serving, such as re-heating directions.

Learn through food

Food is an important part of life. Pre-school can provide an opportunity to learn about food, where it comes from, how it grows, general good health, and food cultures. Learning how to choose and enjoy many different nutritious foods in early childhood can provide the foundation for a lifetime of healthy food choices.

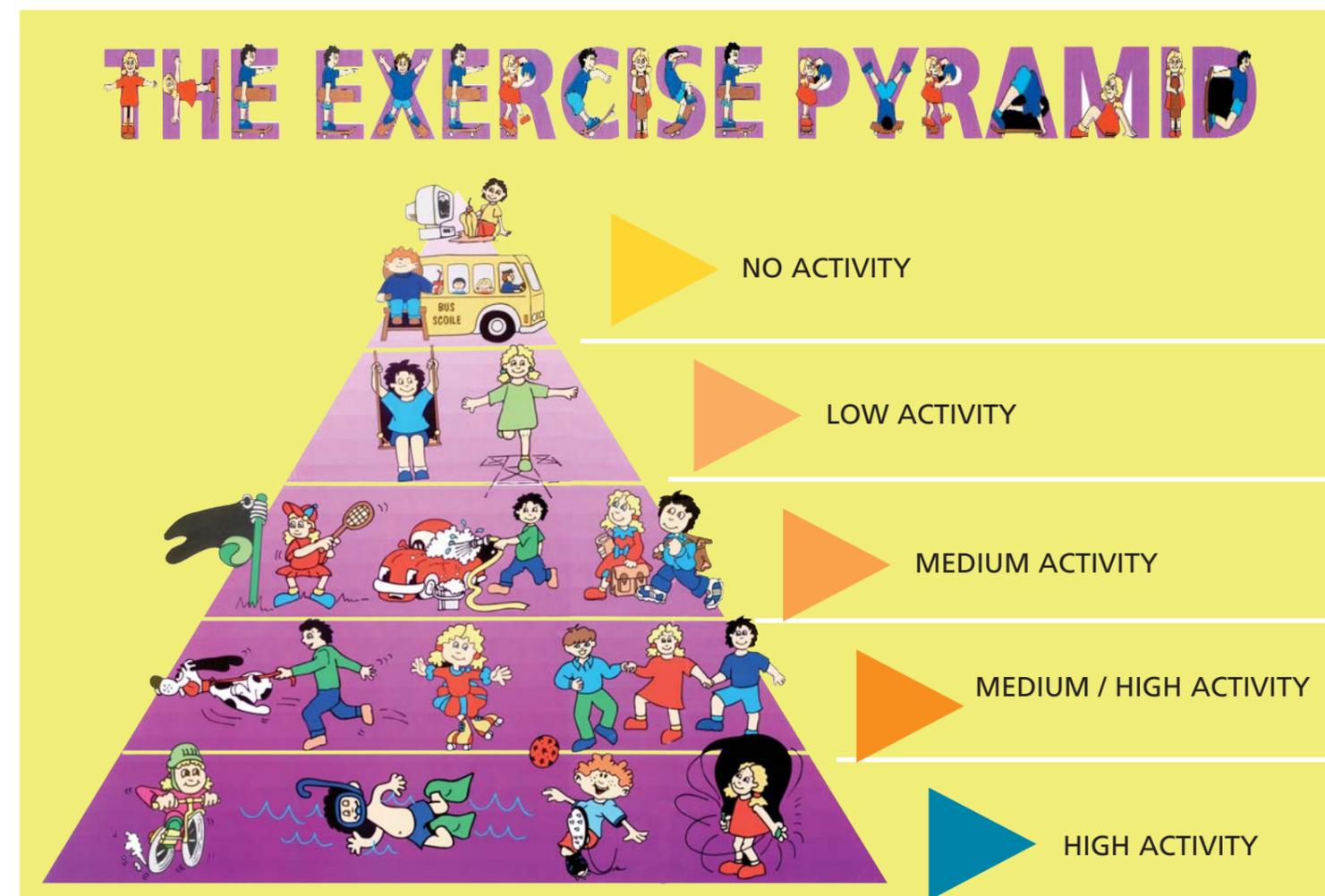
Food related activities

- Participate in National Healthy Eating Campaigns. Check dates and theme with your Community Nutrition and Dietetic Service. Contact details on page 43.
- Make pictures with food, for example, using dried pasta and pulses, rice and seeds.
- Cut out food pictures from magazines for collages. The colourful pictures could then be displayed in the pre-school. This could be combined with a tasting session of various fruits and vegetables.
- Make food prints using halved small potatoes, carrots, apples or parsnips.
- Make a seed ball for the birds.
- Have a pretend play café or shop.
- Grow mustard seeds, cress or sprout seeds.
- Make papier maché fruit and vegetables.
- Get the children to draw pictures of characters – “The Garden Gang” - with names like Kieran Kiwi, Olivia Orange or Bart Broccoli playing in the garden. Organise a display of raw fruit and vegetables and ask children to identify using fun names.
- Sing food-related songs and rhymes, for example, ‘Ten juicy apples sitting on a wall...’.
- Play food smells game for example, vinegar, orange or onion.
- Play food-tasting game where the children have to guess what foods they taste without seeing what they are eating.
- Let children help to prepare food, depending on age and ability. Remember to encourage both boys and girls to be involved.
- Play ‘Happy Families’ card games with ‘families’ of foods from each shelf of the Food Pyramid.
- Ask the children to think of the many ways in which we use milk, cheese and yogurt each day. This may include milk on cereal, milk on its own as a drink, milk and yogurt in a home-made milkshake, cheese on toast, cheese strings/slices/triangles on their own, cheese on crackers, yogurt on fruit and so on. Explain that these foods are rich in calcium, which is good for bone health.
- Ask the children to name all the foods they associate with the word SNACK. You can talk through with the children which choices are healthy and which are not-so-healthy. This game can be used to highlight the topic of dental health with young children.

Physical Activity is important too

- Active children have a better appetite. A child that is inactive and has a poor appetite may not get all the nutrients he or she needs in a small amount of food.
- Playing outside in summer sunshine helps children to get vitamin D for healthy bones and teeth. Limit exposure in strong sunlight and use hats and sunscreen as necessary.
- Physical activity builds up muscle strength and fitness and develops skills of balance, co-ordination and climbing.
- Active children are more likely to be active adults. An active lifestyle reduces the risk of ill health as an adult.
- Healthy eating and regular physical activity help make a healthy body.
- Timetable periods of physical activity every day throughout the year.

Aim for at least 1 hour of physical activity most days of the week. Some or all of this activity should take place in the pre-school.



Plenty of play and physical activity are essential for children's health.
Aim for at least 1 hour most days of the week.

Conclusion

Good nutrition and healthy eating habits build a healthy foundation for children. These Food and Nutrition Guidelines can assist in providing healthy food in the pre-school as well as developing positive attitudes to eating and physical activity as part of a healthy lifestyle.

Further assistance and information is available from the Community Nutrition and Dietetic Service in each Health Board area, as listed on page 43.

SECTION FIVE – FURTHER INFORMATION

Community Nutrition and Dietetic Services

1. **Western Health Board**, West City Centre, Seamus Quirke Rd, Co Galway. Ph: 091 548335
2. **North Western Health Board**, Health Promotion Service, Main Street, Ballyshannon, Co Donegal. Ph: 071 9852000
3. **North Eastern Health Board**, Health Promotion Department, Railway Street, Navan, Co Meath. Ph: 046 9076400
4. **South Eastern Health Board**, Health Promotion Department, Dean Street, Co Kilkenny. Ph: 056 7761400
5. **Mid-Western Health Board**, Health Promotion Centre, Parkview House, Pery Street, Co Limerick. Ph: 061 483215
6. **Midland Health Board**, 28 Pearse St, Mullingar, Co Westmeath. Ph: 044 84950
7. **Southern Health Board**, Health Promotion Dept., Eye, Ear & Throat Hospital, Western Rd, Co Cork. Ph: 021 4921642
8. **East Coast Area Health Board**, Health Promotion Department, Block B, Civic Centre, Main Street, Bray, Co Wicklow. Ph: 01 2744295/4296
9. **South Western Area Health Board**, Health Promotion Dept, 3rd Floor, 52 Broomhill Road, Tallaght, Dublin 24. Ph: 01 4632800
10. **Northern Area Health Board**, Health Promotion Service, Park House, 3rd Floor, 119-197 North Circular Road, Dublin 7. Ph: 01 8823400

PRE-SCHOOL INSPECTION TEAMS

SOUTH EASTERN HEALTH BOARD PRE-SCHOOL SERVICES

Kilkenny

Community Care Centre, James Green, Kilkenny Ph: 056 7784600

Tipperary

Community Care Centre, Western Road, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary Ph: 052 77000

Waterford

Community Care Centre, Cork Road, Waterford Ph: 051 842800

Wexford

Community Care Centre, Grogan's Road, Wexford Ph: 053 23522

NORTH WESTERN HEALTH BOARD PRE-SCHOOL SERVICES

Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan

Pre-School Services, North Western Health Board, Markievicz House, Sligo
Ph: 071 9155100 Ext: 5346 or Ext: 5286

Donegal

Pre-School Services, North Western Health Board, County Clinic, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal
Ph: 074 9123669.

NORTH EASTERN HEALTH BOARD PRE-SCHOOL SERVICES

Meath

Pre-School Office, Family Resource Centre, NEHB, Commons Road, Navan, Co. Meath
Ph: 046 9073178

Louth

Pre-School Office, North Eastern Health Board, The Ramparts, Dundalk, Co. Louth
Ph: 042 9389170

Cavan/Monaghan

Pre-School Office, Monaghan Local Health Care Centre, North Eastern Health Board, Rooskey, Co. Monaghan
Ph: 046 30466

WESTERN HEALTH BOARD PRE-SCHOOL SERVICES

Galway

Early Child Care Services, 9b Liosbán Industrial Estate, Tuam Road, Co. Galway
Ph: 091 771928

Mayo

Early Child Care Services, 2nd Floor, Mill Lane, Bridge Street, Castlebar, Co. Mayo
Ph: 094 9034776

Roscommon

Early Child Care Services, Abbeytown House, Abbey Street, Co. Roscommon
Ph: 090 6626732

SOUTHERN HEALTH BOARD PRE-SCHOOL SERVICES

Southern Health Board Pre-School Office,

Floor 2, Abbeycourt House, Georges Quay, Cork
Ph: 021 4923826

North Lee Community Services Area Pre-School Inspection Team

Southern Health Board, Floor 2, Abbeycourt House, George's Quay, Cork.
Ph: 021 4923975/4923884
Fax: 021 4923953

South Lee Community Services Area Pre-School Inspection Team

Southern Health Board, Floor 2, Abbeycourt House, George's Quay, Cork.
Ph: 021 4923975/4923884
Fax: 021 4923953

North Cork Community Services Area Pre-School Inspection Team

Southern Health Board, Gouldshill House, Mallow, Co. Cork.
Ph: 022 30200
Fax: 022 30211

West Cork Community Services Area Pre-School Inspection Team

Southern Health Board, Coolnagarrane, Skibbereen, Co. Cork
Ph: 028 40490
Fax: 028 40511

Kerry Community Services Area Pre-School Inspection Team

Southern Health Board, Quayside House, Princes Street, Tralee, Co. Kerry
Ph: 066 7184509
Fax: 066 7184512

MIDLAND HEALTH BOARD PRE-SCHOOL SERVICES

Laois/Offaly

Pre-School Services Office, Midland Health Board, Harbour Street, Tullamore, Co. Offaly
Ph: 0506 28108

Longford/Westmeath

Pre-School Services Office, St. Lomans Hospital, Springfield, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath
Ph: 044 84460

MID-WESTERN HEALTH BOARD PRE-SCHOOL SERVICES

North Tipperary Pre-School Inspection & Information Services,

Annbrook, Limerick Road, Nenagh, Co Tipperary
Ph: 067 38308

Clare Pre-School Inspection & Information Services,

River House, Gort Road, Ennis, Co Clare
Ph: 065 6863902
Fax: 065 6863983

Limerick Pre-School Inspection & Information Services,

87 O'Connell Street, Limerick
Ph: 061 483591

ERHA PRE-SCHOOL SERVICES

EASTERN REGION DUBLIN, KILDARE AND WICKLOW

Pre-School Officer Area 1 & 10

Loughlinstown Health Centre, Loughlinstown Drive, Co Dublin
Ph: 01 2822122
Fax: 01 2821594

Pre-School Officer Area 2 & Dublin South City

The Maltings Business Park, 54-55 Marrowbone Lane, Dublin 8
Ph: 01 4544733
Fax: 01 4544827

Pre-School Officer Dublin South West & Dublin West

Community Services, Cherry Orchard Hospital, Ballyfermot, Dublin 10
Ph: 01 6206323
Fax: 01 6206358

Pre-School Officer Area 6

Rathdown Road, Dublin 7
Ph: 01 8825198
Fax: 01 8825168

Pre-School Officer Area 7

Rathdown Road, Dublin 7
Ph: 01 8825197
Fax: 01 8825167

Pre-School Officer Area 8

The Cottage, 2 Church Road
Ph: 01 8402835
Fax: 01 8901636

Pre-School Officer Kildare & West Wicklow

Poplar House, Poplar Square, Naas, Co Kildare
Ph: 045 873241
Fax: 045 879225

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OTHER CONTACTS

Safefood: Food Safety Promotion Board, Eastgate, Little Island, Cork, Ph: 021 2304100

Food Safety Authority of Ireland, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin, Ph: 01 8171301

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The Paediatric Interest Group, Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute

The Food Unit, Department of Health and Children

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