

HEALTHY EATING AND NUTRITION POLICY

UPDATED FOR SEPTEMBER 2024 GUIDANCE

At Ash & Claire Childminding, we promote healthy eating and a balanced diet as a key part of supporting children's physical development and overall well-being. We follow government guidance and work closely with parents to help children make positive food choices.

We understand that some children are still learning to try new foods, and that families have different routines and budgets. This policy outlines our expectations, how we'll support children and families, and what a healthy lunchbox might look like.

POLICY AIMS

- To promote healthy eating habits from an early age.
- To support parents and carers with advice, not judgement.
- To create a consistent message about food in our setting.
- To ensure children receive balanced meals and snacks that meet their nutritional needs.

NUTRITION FOR CHILDREN

Good nutrition is vital in the early years as children grow rapidly and develop lifelong habits. A balanced diet helps children maintain energy, concentrate during play and learning, and support their immune system and general well-being.

We follow the Eatwell Guide and current Department for Education and NHS guidance on nutrition in the early years. While exact needs vary, children aged 1–4 years generally require:

- **Energy:** from starchy foods such as bread, rice, potatoes and pasta (preferably wholegrain where possible).
- **Protein:** 2 portions a day of meat, fish, eggs, beans or alternatives.
- **Fruit and Vegetables:** at least 5 portions a day in a variety of colours and types.
- **Dairy:** 3 portions a day of milk, cheese, or yoghurt.
- **Healthy Fats:** from sources like oily fish, nuts (if age-appropriate), seeds, and vegetable oils.
- **Fluids:** 6–8 cups of water daily. Milk may be included as one of the drinks.

Young children also need:

- Iron-rich foods to prevent anaemia.

- Vitamin D, which may be supplemented as per NHS advice.
- A varied and colourful diet to support vitamin and mineral intake.

A Day on a Plate for a Typical 2–4 Year Old:

- **Breakfast:** Porridge with milk and banana, or toast with scrambled egg and a glass of milk
- **Snack:** A handful of grapes (cut) and some cheese cubes
- **Lunch:** Ham and cheese sandwich on wholemeal bread, cucumber sticks, a yoghurt, and water
- **Snack:** Breadsticks with hummus or a plain scone
- **Dinner:** Pasta with tomato and vegetable sauce and grated cheese, followed by apple slices

WHAT WE PROVIDE

We will provide:

- Occasionally healthy snacks throughout the day (e.g., fruit, vegetable sticks, oatcakes, rice cakes, breadsticks, etc.) although parents should be providing this.
- Water is available at all times. Milk may be offered in line with parental requests.

- Treats (e.g., cake, biscuits, ice cream) occasionally as part of special occasions or rewards, but only after the child has eaten their healthy lunch items, such as fruit, veg or their main meal.

We believe in moderation, not restriction. We encourage children to enjoy all food groups and understand that treats are part of life, just not all the time!

Our snack times are relaxed and social, giving children the opportunity to explore food and practice independence.

Children are supported to sit together until each meal is finished, fostering a calm and communal atmosphere where they can learn from one another, see each other's food, talk and more.

We aim to make mealtimes enjoyable, calm, and inclusive.

We also recognise that children may find it difficult to try new foods, especially if they are experiencing sensory sensitivities or are on the autism spectrum. For these children, we will work in partnership with parents, offering gradual exposure, food play, and positive reinforcement. If a child only eats a limited diet, we will never force or shame them, and instead celebrate small steps forward.

WHAT PARENTS PROVIDE

We ask parents to provide packed lunches (and optionally breakfast and/or dinner/tea) that support our healthy eating ethos.

We understand that every child is different, and some children may have strong preferences or sensory sensitivities. We will always support these children with empathy and flexibility.

A healthy packed lunch might include:

- **A main:** sandwich/wrap/pitta with protein (ham, chicken, tuna, cheese, egg, hummus)
Could also be pasta, or similar meals that only need toasting or put in a microwave (We do not cook here)
- **Vegetables:** carrot sticks, cucumber, cherry tomatoes, sweetcorn
- **Fruit:** banana, apple slices, grapes (cut lengthways), raisins
- **A dairy item:** yoghurt, cheese cubes, or a milk-based pudding
- **A healthy snack:** crackers, breadsticks, mini malt loaf
- **A small treat (optional):** a biscuit, mini cake, or similar only after the child has eaten their healthy lunch items, such as fruit, veg or their main meal.

- **A drink:** Water only please.
Squash and fizzy drinks should be kept for home.

Please avoid:

- Sweets, large chocolate bars, large bags of crisps
- Energy drinks, sports drinks, fizzy pop
- High-sugar snacks and large portions of cake

If you're ever unsure about what to include, we are happy to help with ideas, sample lunchboxes, and real examples. We know food can be a stressful subject and we want to support, not judge.

We suggest adding an ice pack in warmer months. If something needs to be reheated (like pasta), please send it in a microwaveable container.

ALLERGIES AND FOOD SAFETY

Please label your child's lunchbox clearly. We may have children with allergies in our setting. If this applies to your child, we will work with you to reduce risk and promote inclusion. Packed lunches must not contain nuts or products with nut warnings.

All food should be stored in a lunchbox with an ice pack if needed. We will store food safely and supervise all eating.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN TO EAT WELL

- We sit and eat together, modelling good habits and using positive language around food.
- Children are supported to sit together until each meal is finished.
- We never force children to eat. We encourage them to try, and praise effort, not just success.
- We talk about food in a relaxed and curious way—using stories, role-play, and real experiences.
- If children refuse lunch, we will offer again later or provide a small healthy alternative so they are not hungry.
- Children will be encouraged to finish their healthy items before being offered a treat or dessert item.

We understand that building a positive relationship with food takes time.

For children who struggle with texture, temperature, colour or variety, we take a gentle, supportive approach.

We will always let parents know if we are concerned, and we will work together to build confidence around food.

ADDITIONAL MEALS

Parents may provide breakfast or tea/dinner in addition to packed lunch. These should also be balanced, but we understand this may vary depending on

family routines. Let us know your preferences so we can work with you.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

We recommend the following links for inspiration and official guidance:

- [Change4Life Healthy Lunchbox Ideas](#)
- [Food Standards Agency: Eatwell Guide](#)
- [NHS: What to feed young children](#)

We also have examples of good lunchboxes and snack ideas at our setting. Please ask if you'd like help!

If your child is receiving support from a dietitian or has specific dietary needs due to medical, cultural or religious reasons, we are happy to adapt what we provide and help make sure your child is safe and included.

We're happy to suggest low-cost, healthy options for families who are budgeting—we believe every child deserves to eat well without pressure.

FOOD CATEGORIES

Healthy Everyday Foods

- Fresh fruit and vegetables
- Wholegrain bread, wraps, pittas
- Brown rice, pasta, noodles
- Lean protein (ham, chicken, turkey, tuna, egg, tofu, beans)

- Dairy (cheese, yoghurt, milk-based puddings)
- Water and milk

Healthy Snack Options

- Breadsticks, oatcakes, crackers, rice cakes
- Dried fruit in moderation
- Mini malt loaf
- Vegetable crisps or air-popped popcorn

Occasional Treats

- Biscuits
- Mini cakes or fairy cakes
- Ice cream or frozen yoghurt
- Small chocolate bar

Foods to Avoid in Packed Lunches

- Sweets and chewing gum
- Energy drinks and fizzy drinks
- Crisps (large packets or multipack size)
- Large chocolate bars or multiple sweet items
- Cakes or desserts with added cream or frosting

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