



FOOD AND NUTRITION GUIDANCE

Allergies, Intolerances & Special Diets in an Early Years Setting

Catering for special dietary requirements

Childcare settings are required to obtain information about children's special dietary requirements, including food allergies and intolerances, before they attend. They also need to record and act on information provided about children's dietary needs.

Provision for cultural and specific dietary requirements

Children's cultural background has to be respected and any specific dietary requirements should be taken into account. Settings must ensure that they make appropriate provision for parental preferences including cultural and religious food sensitivities, for example the provision of halal and kosher food as appropriate.

It is important for children to learn and appreciate the diets of different cultures. Food customs may involve what foods are eaten, how foods are prepared and eaten. Periods of celebration and associated foods create an opportunity for activities in the setting. Always find out about each child and not make assumptions from their name, religion or appearance.

Some cultures have periods of fasting, though this does not apply to young children. However, the meals eaten at home may be different during the fasting period, such as the main meal eaten late at night or breakfast very early. Check with parents if the child's food intake at the childcare setting needs to be adjusted during this time.

When registering a child for childcare, find out about specific dietary requirements and document in the care plan, but remember this is different from likes and dislikes and children should be encouraged to try different foods regularly. Introducing new foods and flavours on your menu should be done one at a time so as not to confuse or overwhelm the child.

Below is a guide to some of the differences in food choice commonly observed by those from different religious and cultural groups. However, there are likely to be significant individual differences in food choices between people of the same religion and cultural group and it is important not to make assumptions about anyone's food preferences.



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Cultural and religious considerations

	Jewish	Sikh ¹	Muslim	Hindu ¹	Buddhist	Rastafarian ²	Vegan
Eggs	No Blood-spots	Yes	Yes	It varies	It varies	It varies	No
Milk/Yogurt	Not with meat	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	It varies	Calcium fortified from plant source only
Cheese	Not with meat	Yes	It varies	Yes	Yes	It varies	Vegan cheese only
Chicken	Kosher	It varies	Halal	It varies	No	It varies	No
Lamb/Mutton	Kosher	It varies	Halal	It varies	No	It varies	No
Beef/beef products	Kosher	No	Halal	No	No	It varies	No
Pork/pork products	No	Rarely	No	Rarely	No	No	No
Shellfish	No	It varies	It varies	It varies	No	No	No
Butter/Ghee	Kosher	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	It varies	No-use nut & vegan spreads
Lard	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Cereal foods	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nuts/Pulses	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fruit/Vegetables ³	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fasting ⁴	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

¹ Strict Hindus and Sikhs will not eat eggs, meat, fish and some fats



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² Some Rastafarians are vegan

³ Jains have restrictions on some vegetable foods. Check with the individuals

⁴ Fasting is unlikely to apply to young children

What are halal foods?

Halal is a term describing foods that it is lawful for Muslims to consume, according to Islamic dietary laws found in the Quran. Foods that are definitely halal include: milk, honey, fish, fresh or naturally frozen vegetables, fresh or dried fruits, legumes and many nuts (for example, peanuts, cashews, hazelnuts or walnuts), and grains such as wheat, rye, barley, rice and oats. Cows, sheep, goats, deer, chickens, ducks and game bird meats are halal as long as they are slaughtered according to Islamic rites. The halal slaughtering process (zabihah) consists of killing the animal quickly with a sharp knife while the name of Allah is muttered.

What are kosher foods?

Kosher foods are eaten by people of the Jewish faith. Kosher meat must be slaughtered in a prescribed manner, and certain foods – such as pork, rabbit or shellfish – cannot be included in the diet. Also, some people do not cook or eat dairy and meat products together. As with many religions and cultures, there are variations in Jewish definitions of kosher around the world and in different families, and it is important to check which foods are acceptable with an individual or their advocates.

Vegetarian diets

People may choose to follow a vegetarian diet for a variety of reasons, and the foods that they avoid may also be quite variable. It is important to find out what people do eat, as some people will say they are vegetarian, but will eat fish. A true vegetarian will not eat any meat or meat products, or fish or fish products, but will have eggs and milk products. It is possible to get all the energy and nutrients needed from a vegetarian diet, but it may be more difficult to obtain enough iron and zinc from a meat-free diet. Iron is found in cereal foods, soybean products, eggs, pulses such as beans and lentils, in dried fruit, some vegetables and in breakfast cereals. Zinc can be found in milk and dairy foods and also nuts, seeds and cereals. Advice on vegetarian diets can be sought from the vegetarian society



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Types of vegetarian diets:

- Lacto-ovo vegetarian – eat dairy products and eggs, do not eat red meat, offal, poultry and fish.
- Lacto-vegetarian – will eat milk-containing foods but not eggs. Do not eat meat, offal, poultry, fish and eggs
- Vegans – all animal products are avoided

Vegan diets

Vegans exclude all animal products from their diet, including milk and other dairy products. The basis of the diet is cereals and grains, starchy roots, vegetables, pulses, nuts, seeds, soya products and fruits. It is perfectly possible to get all the nutrients needed on a vegan diet, but care must be taken, and this is particularly true for women who are planning a pregnancy, are pregnant or breastfeeding as well as for infants and young children.

Vegans do not eat any foods of animal origin. This includes meat, fish and dairy foods, and also honey. Vegan diets may be low or lacking in a number of nutrients such as energy, protein, vitamins B2 and B12, calcium, zinc and iron.

These diets need careful planning and vitamin supplements will be necessary to complement the menu. The Vegan Society recommends that vegans take supplements of Vitamin B12, Vitamin D, calcium and iodine.

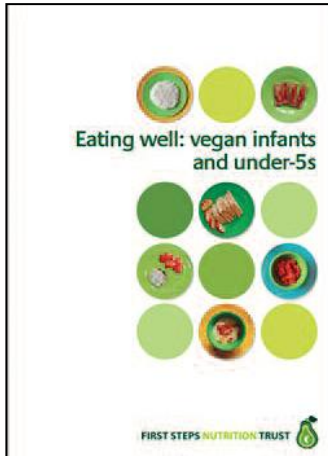
When preparing vegetarian or vegan meals it is important that food provided is not compromised in any way. For example, picking meat out of a dish already cooked is not appropriate. The vegetarian/vegan dish should be prepared first and the meat added later for other children.

Work in partnership with parents/carers to devise a suitable menu for the child including foods the child is familiar with at home, and which particular foods are to be avoided

e.g. gelatine and rennet. You may need to ask families to provide appropriate foods and seek advice from a dietitian.



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For more information:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/vegetarian-vegan-children

www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/vegetarian-vegan-children/

Practical and visual guide on providing meals for vegan children www.vegansociety.com/

Practical advice on Eating well for vegan infants and under 5s can be found at: www.firststepsnutrition.org/eat-well-early-years

The vegan society provide practical and visual guide on providing meals for vegan children www.vegansociety.com/

Provision of special diets for medical reasons

A special diet is one that cannot be selected freely from the main choices available.

The range of special diets for children include: a gluten-free diet for those diagnosed with Coeliac disease; a modified diet for children with diabetes; allergy free: peanut-free or milk-free diets; the texture of the food to be modified in a way that makes it easier to eat, e.g. pureed or mashed.

Childcare settings and their caterers should work closely with the families or support children with special dietary needs for medical reasons. It is important that such diets – including allergies- are handled sensitively and included in the food policy describing how these are managed and the procedures that are followed.

Food allergy involves the immune system and is a response to specific proteins found in foods. It can occur if a trace of the allergen in the food is eaten. Reactions are usually immediate and symptoms are wide ranging. Symptoms may include diarrhoea, swelling or the lips, tongue or throat. The most severe reaction can result in anaphylaxis – a severe and potentially life-threatening reaction. Food allergy is more common in infancy and early childhood than in adults. About 5-8% of infants are allergic to certain foods, but many children will grow out of their food allergies. The foods that most commonly cause problems in children are milk, eggs, soya, fish/shellfish, wheat, peanuts and tree nuts.



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Providing food allergen information













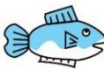

Understanding which allergens are present in every meal and snack you provide is an important step in providing food which is safe for children with food allergies and intolerances. Since 2014, all food businesses, including childcare settings have been required by law, to give details about the allergens in the food they provide. This should include allergen training and should have procedures in place to ensure consumers (i.e. children) are not put at risk. More information is available on the Food Standards Agency (FSA) website www.food.gov.uk - there are lot of downloadable resources available from the FSA.

The 14 allergens

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cereals containing gluten, namely: wheat (such as spelt and khorasan wheat), rye, barley, oats• Crustaceans for example prawns, crabs, lobster, crayfish• Eggs• Fish• Peanuts• Soybeans• Milk (including lactose)• Nuts; namely almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, cashews, pecan nuts, Brazil nuts, pistachio nuts, macadamia (or Queensland) nuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Celery (including celeriac)• Mustard• Sesame• Sulphur dioxide/sulphites, where added and at a level above 10mg/kg or 10mg/L in the finished product. This can be used as a preservative in dried fruit• Lupin, which includes lupin seeds and flour and can be found in types of bread, pastries and pasta• Molluscs like, mussels, whelks, oysters, snails and squid
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Useful table for caterers showing dishes and their allergen content:

Dish: Tuna salad								
Celery			Mollusc			Lupin		
Cereals containing gluten			Mustard		✓	Milk		✓
Crustaceans			Nuts			Soya		
Eggs		✓	Peanuts			Sulphur Dioxide		
Fish		✓	Sesame seeds					

Managing food allergies in your settings:

It is important to remember that children can have allergies to foods and ingredients not covered by this list above. These will not be emphasised on product ingredients lists. The same policy and procedure should be followed where a child has an allergy to a food not included on this list, to ensure appropriate and safe meals, snacks and drinks are provided for them:

Guidance for food preparation and catering for food allergens is covered by Food Safety Regulation information from the FSA.

Some settings highlight a child with an allergy by using a different coloured plate or specially marked placement. Whilst this could potentially cause the child to feel different, there is evidence from settings that this has not been the case, and it means that all staff are aware of the allergy whichever room they work in.



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Examples of specific allergies

Peanut Allergy

Peanut allergy usually produces a severe reaction. Care must be taken to prevent accidental consumption of food containing peanut products or food that has come into contact with them. Preparing food for peanut allergy sufferers in a designated area may help. Peanut butter must be avoided and many prepared foods can contain peanuts, peanut oil or peanut flour. Careful checking of food labels is necessary. People with peanut allergy should avoid peanuts and food containing peanuts.

There are many lists of products containing peanuts but as a general guide you should check the ingredients list of:

Baked products, like cakes and biscuits; Cereals; Oriental dishes; Crackers; Ice creams; Health bars; Pastry

Children with severe food allergies are advised to carry identification. Children with a peanut allergy should have been seen by a Dietitian.

Cows' milk protein allergy (CMPA)

Cows' milk protein allergy is rare but is the most common form of food allergy in childhood, particularly under 1 years of age and generally resolves in the first 3 years of life. An infant's immune system can react to proteins in milk and in some cases the reaction is immediate.

Milk and other dairy foods provide a substantial amount of **calcium and riboflavin** in the diets of children. Infants and children up to 2 years who do not have milk or dairy products should continue on the infant formula recommended to them by a doctor or dietitian.

Alternatives: Ready-made soya, hemp, oat, coconut or other milk alternatives may be used as a main milk drink after two years of age, but the choice may depend on the individual child's nutritional status.

Alternative milks can also be used in cooking from 6 months for children who exclude all dairy products from their diet.



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The Food Standards Agency does not recommend giving rice milk to children under 5 years old.

Only use milk alternatives that have been fortified with calcium and which are unsweetened. Note: Organic products do not always have added calcium.

A milk free diet may also be necessary for children who are lactose intolerant; when an infant or child has difficulty digesting lactose, the sugar naturally occurring in milk and all milk-based foods. Lactose intolerance in infants and children is rare, but some level of lactose intolerance is commonly found in some Asian and African populations, and is caused by a deficiency of lactase, the enzyme required to digest lactose. Lactose intolerance causes unpleasant digestive symptoms including diarrhoea. Food intolerances do not involve the immune system and tend to occur more slowly. Symptoms may depend on the amount of food that has been eaten, and are generally not as severe as a food allergic reaction

Other medical conditions

Coeliac disease

Coeliac disease is an autoimmune disease which effects a small number of children. If a child has a diagnosis of coeliac disease this means they must follow a gluten-free diet. Gluten is the protein found in wheat, rye and barley. All foods which contain these cereals must be avoided. Most children with coeliac disease can tolerate gluten free oats, however, problems can occur if oats are processed in the same place and can become contaminated with gluten. Gluten is commonly found in foods such as bread, breakfast cereals, biscuits, pasta and cakes but also some sauces, ready meals and sausages.

Gluten-free alternatives

There are a good variety of gluten-free foods and ingredients available.

These will be labelled 'gluten free'. Many products will now carry the crossed grain symbol for gluten free product certification, which is a registered trademark.

Advice on foods to choose, foods to avoid and menu adaptations will need to be provided by the parent/carer and, where necessary, a dietitian. Coeliac UK also provide help and advice as well as information on shopping for gluten free foods.



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NB. play-dough is made from flour as are home-made play material often used in childcare settings and pasta shapes and are sometimes used for collages. It is important that children with Coeliac Disease are supervised when using these materials to stop small children putting these in their mouth.

Diabetes

Type 1 diabetes is a serious condition that requires constant management through diet and administering insulin. Children with Type 1 diabetes will require understanding of how different foods affect blood glucose levels. If you are responsible for the care of a child with type 1 diabetes, you should have contact with the local diabetes team who may be able to provide training on diet management. Parents will have all the information on what their child is able to eat and when.

Encouraging integration

Children from an early age want to feel part of the group and not be excluded, so involve children in planning menus. If children are able to make suggestions for the menu it will give them a sense of pride and may also encourage them to eat. Try also to make food provided for special diets similar to the main menus, e.g. soya milk for custard or white sauce can enable the child on a milk-free diet to enjoy custard or fish pie alongside other children. It may be possible to make up a batch of the alternative food and freeze individual portions to save time later on. It is also important that whatever food needs to be excluded is replaced with a food from the same food group, wherever possible, so that the nutritional content of the meal is not affected. Children with special needs, including additional learning needs and disabilities should be included in snack and meal-times with other children. Children with more complex needs may require specific texture modification or more help and support to eat.