Nutrition Matters

The Professional Nursery Kitchen

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Why I joined The Professional Nursery Kitchen

Jess, Nursery Manager, Gershwin Park Nursery

Expectations of the food we serve at nursery are growing. Parents are much more aware of nutrition, menu planning, quality of ingredients and allergens. With 80 children each day, managing a full commercial kitchen with detailed safety procedures was a real challenge. We always found it hard to cover the cook's absence and it used to put a lot of strain on me and the nursery team.

To meet parents' expectations, we decided to join The Professional Nursery Kitchen. Their professional chefs prepare fresh, healthy meals in a purpose-built kitchen using the best ingredients. The freshly prepared meals are then delivered to us chilled and ready to be cooked onsite. This works well because it takes away all the complexity of preparing in the nursery, but we still enjoy the benefit of cooking meals from fresh. We now serve fantastic nutritionist approved dishes that the children and their parents love.

We prepare meals just like you would at home

Although we have different methods and controls, our nursery food is pre-prepared in a very similar way as you would do at home. We cook each meal to a 'just done' state and quickly chill them down to 3˚C in less than 90 mins! The meals are then held under tightly controlled temperature conditions to ensure that they are safe and to maintain the nutritional and sensory quality of our ingredients.

Preparing meals and snacks in our professional kitchen provides nurseries with access to better ingredients, rigorous allergen control measures, advanced nutritional data, and technical oversight; all of which would be very difficult to achieve in an on-site nursery kitchen. And because we buy directly from large suppliers, the ingredients arrive with us much fresher than you would usually find in the supermarket.

Nutrition Matters
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A nutritious foundation

Julieta, Nursery Nutrition Consultant at The Professional Nursery Kitchen

Nutrition plays a pivotal role in the early years because the food that we give to children can influence their growth, learning, and future health. By providing nutritious food, we're creating a solid foundation for early years development. In fact, research has confirmed that healthy eating habits in the years before school influence a range of health and development outcomes in later life[1].

Good nutrition is vital for children aged under five, to:

- Ensure they get the right amount of energy (calories) and nutrients needed while they grow rapidly.
- Ensure they do not consume too much energy (calories), which may lead to children becoming overweight or obese.
- Ensure they have enough energy to play, explore and learn which improves cognitive development.
- Encourage them to eat a wide variety of foods and develop good dietary habits to take with them into later childhood and beyond.

A healthy balanced diet for children aged one to five is based on four food groups, which provide a range of essential nutrients that children need to grow and develop. In the 5532-a-day image, The British Nutrition Foundation shows the daily recommended portions of the four food groups.

We include over 35 different vegetables and 18 different fruits on our menu.

From whole milk, sugar-free yoghurt to cheesy pasta, our menu includes a wide variety of dairy.

Lamb, chicken, beef, and fish as well as plant-based proteins can be found on our menu.

A range of starchy foods can be found in our breakfast, lunch, and tea options.

5532-a-day

Perfect portions for little tums (1-4 years)

5 -a-day Starchy Foods (Potatoes, bread, rice & pasta)

½-1 slice bread
1-2 oat cakes
3-6 tbsp breakfast cereal
1-3 tbsp mashed potato
2-5 tbsp cooked pasta/rice

5 -a-day Fruit & Vegetables (Apples, oranges, broccoli & carrots)

2-6 carrot sticks
¼-1 banana
3-10 grapes (halved length-ways or ideally quartered)
½-2 tbsp peas
½-2 tbsp broccoli

3 -a-day Dairy Foods (Milk, cheese & yogurt)

1 beaker of milk (100-120ml)
1 pot of yogurt (125ml)
1 cheese triangle

2 -a-day* Protein Foods (Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins)

*3 portions if child is vegetarian

2-4 tbsp chickpeas, kidney beans, dhal, lentils or beans
2-4 tbsp cooked minced meat
¼-1 small fillet of fish

[1] Feinstein, L., Sabates, R., Sorhaindo, A., Rogers, I., Herrick, D., Northstone, K., Emmett, P. (2008) Dietary patterns related to attainment in school: the importance of early eating patterns. Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health. 62. 734-9.

Nourishing people and the planet

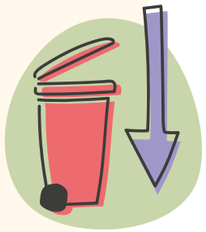
At the Professional Nursery Kitchen, we prepare and deliver fresh and nutritious food to nurseries. Our Food Innovation Team, which consists of development chefs, nutritionists, and our partner nurseries; ensure that our menus are tasty, full or variety and meet the specific nutritional and dietary needs of young children in different age groups.

By providing freshly prepared meals and snacks that are simply ready to serve or pop in the oven, it enables nurseries to serve healthy and exciting food consistently and safely. We even unpack our deliveries into the nursery's kitchen, to avoid any disruption and ensure that staff can focus on providing outstanding education and care.

We believe that food education is just as important as the food itself, which is why we want to inspire children to love nutritious food and understand where it comes from. This can be seen in our menus, which offer diverse cuisines to expose children to a wide variety of foods and help to establish healthy eating habits for life.

Our environmental values

We know that being kind to the planet will make the world a better place for children to grow up in, and we are committed to help make this a reality.



Reducing waste

All of our waste is sent to a local Materials Recycling Facility (MFR), where it is sorted into recycling groups and sent away to be used again. If recycling isn't possible, it is converted into fuel to make energy.

Recyclable packaging

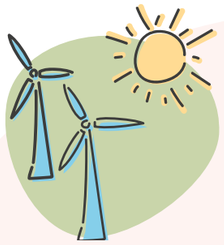
Our meals are delivered in aluminium trays which are 100% recyclable. Recycling aluminium uses 95% less energy than producing it and saves 9 tonnes of CO_2 for every tonne recycled. The insulation used in our Taster Boxes is made from sheep's wool, which keeps the sheep and farmers very happy. The film that seals our trays is not yet recyclable, but we are working on it!

Eco vehicles

Our entire fleet of refrigerated vans are Euro 6, which sets lower limits for emissions. We are also in the process of exchanging our other vehicles to fully electric and charged by renewable energy.

Reducing energy

Unsurprisingly, our kitchen needs a lot of refrigeration. That's why we fitted it with inverter driven compressors, which mean our refrigeration consumes approximately 25% less energy than conventional fridges.



Renewable energy

100% of the energy we use comes from renewable sources, either wind or solar.

Meet the team that make it all possible

Julieta – Nursery Nutrition Consultant

Having been in the food industry for over 20 years and seeing my own children go through nursery, I am passionate about ensuring children have the best start in life. The early years is the time to help children gain the dietary habits which will take them through the rest of their lives. My role is to support nurseries with nutrition, allergies, and menu planning. I spend a lot of time visiting nurseries and sharing their feedback with the kitchen team to ensure our recipes and menus are the best they can be.

Marnie – Development Chef & Food Innovation Team

I have worked my way up in the food industry for over 8 years, from working in kitchens to developing recipes for first class airline lounges to innovating products globally for Pret a Manger.
I love working in the food industry and having the privilege of my passion also being my job.
I always want to be a part of something that changes the way people think about their food, I want to encourage people to learn to love food and cooking as much as I do.

Louise – Nutritional Therapist

After focusing on adult health and lifestyle for much of my career, I felt compelled to explore how I could also make an impact on the future generation around the time my son was starting school. This led to me writing a book, 'How Food Shapes Your Child', which explains how to combine nutritional science with everyday practical steps and recipes to support both current and future health. It's fantastic to work with a team who are keen to learn about formative nutrition to ensure that they can offer the very best to all their customers.

Gosia – Commercial Manager

I joined TPNK at the very beginning. My role covers everything from the procurement of our fantastic ingredients to supporting the Food Innovation Team to turn their dream dishes into something we can prepare in our kitchen. I believe in maintaining good relationships with our specialist suppliers to ensure we always receive the very best ingredients. I hold qualifications in nutrition, food safety and HACCP.

Hannah – Head of the Food Innovation Team

Food excites me from cooking it to tasting it, creating, and learning about it, experimenting with different combinations, discovering new trends, new flavours, and new cuisines to finding new ingredients, eating out and eating in... I love it, it is what inspires me. I have developed my experience with a range of leading producers such as, Pret, M&S, Tesco, Waitrose and Sainsburys. With my own son now at nursery, applying my skills and experience to the early years is a fantastic opportunity.

Antonino – Production Manager

I am the Production Manager of our kitchen, responsible for the preparation and safety of our meals. This includes working closely with our laboratory to evidence the effectiveness of our controls. Several of my team have children in nurseries which serve our meals, my daughter included. My undergraduate degree is Agricultural Science, but I am also qualified in HACCP, Food Safety, BRC Auditing, Allergen Control and Nutritional Labelling.

Jonny – Managing Director

Having joined our family nursery business in 2010, I found that providing inspiring, safe, and consistent nursery meals was a constant challenge. After years of planning, in 2017 we built and opened The Professional Nursery Kitchen and prepared our first meal. Over the years, likeminded nurseries have joined our fantastic service as partners, and together we continually improve nursery meals and nutrition. My son, Max, attends a local nursery and enjoys our meals, which gives me an amazing insight into the dishes and snacks we prepare.

How we design a new dish

Our aim is to create meals that are both delicious and nutritious for young children

Our menus are primarily designed by following our strict set of development and sourcing principles.

We also follow Government guidance for food consumption in early years settings; known as the 'Eat Better, Start Better' guide.

Together, these guides ensure that our food is high quality and flavoursome, while our menus enable nurseries to achieve the recommended daily intake of calories and nutrition for children.

We provide summer and winter menus which reflect the seasons.

- ✔ Low salt
- ✔ No refined sugar
- ✔ High welfare meat
- ✔ Free range eggs
- ✔ Sustainable fish (MSC)
- ✔ Wholemeal flour and grains
- ✔ Beans and pulses to increase nutrients
- ✔ Oily fish at least once in the menu
- ✔ Exciting plant based dishes
- ✔ Visible ingredients supported with hidden nutrition
- ✔ Achieve 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day

Delivering high quality and ethical meals and snacks

Sustainable fish

All our fish comes from MSC (Marine Stewardship Council) certified suppliers to ensure the fish we enjoy is sustainably caught in a way that minimises environmental impacts.

Food origins

All our ingredients are fully traceable from the source of origin to ensure the highest standards of quality and freshness.

Charity partners

We proudly partner with charities who promote healthy eating values and those that distribute food to people who need it most.

Animal welfare

We are working towards an enhanced accreditation to demonstrate that all our meat comes from farms which conform to higher animal welfare regulations.

Mild Turkey Tikka

"Tikka turkey is a firm fav at our nursery."

Laura, Nursery Manager

This is one of the most popular dishes among our nursery partners. Turkey, which is very high in lean protein and essential amino acids, is an excellent source of tryptophan, which helps to create the neurotransmitter serotonin.

This dish also provides a good source of B vitamins (B3, B6 and B12) which contribute to energy conversion, the health of the nervous system and cell protection.

Ingredients

- 280g Minced turkey
- 115g Peas
- 160g Cauliflower florets
- 120g Chopped tomatoes
- 2 tsp Tomato paste
- 140g Mixed diced peppers
- 115g Diced white onion
- 80ml Coconut milk
- ½ tsp Tikka spice
- ½ tsp Mild madras curry powder
- ½ tsp Ground turmeric
- 2 ½ tsp Sunflower oil
- ½ tsp Vegetable stock
- 2 tsp Gluten free plain white flour
- 100ml Water

Method

- Add the oil to a frying pan and brown off the turkey until it's cooked through. While cooking, be sure to break down the turkey to prevent it from clumping together.
- Add the onions and cook until they begin to soften.
- Add the cauliflower, then tikka spice, turmeric, and madras curry powder and cook out until the meat and vegetables are well coated in the spices.
- Add tomato puree, chopped tomatoes, vegetable stock, water, peppers, peas, and coconut milk.
- Bring the pan back to the boil.
- Place gluten free flour into a bowl and mix with cold water using a 2:1 ratio. Stir the mixture into the pan to thicken the sauce.
- Simmer for five minutes and serve with your favourite sides e.g., rice or naan bread.

Serves approximately two adults and two children depending on age and appetite.

Always ensure that you're serving the correct portion size for the child's age. Learn more on pg. 12 & 13

Helping children to develop a taste for healthy food for life

Julieta, Nursery Nutrition Consultant at The Professional Nursery Kitchen

Evolution has given Infants an innate preference for things that taste sweet, as it helps identify highly calorific foods. Children then develop a reluctance to taste unfamiliar foods as they approach the age of two. 'Food neophobia' protected children from ingesting harmful substances when they became more mobile and able to explore their environment independently. This gave a child the best chance of survival when food was scarce and it wasn't a problem later because the family diet consisted of fresh fruit, vegetables and some meat or fish.[2]

Now, more than half of all the food bought by families in the UK is 'ultra-processed', extremely high in saturated fat, salt, and sugar. Our evolutionary background means the availability of these foods make it more difficult to develop a liking for more healthy food such as vegetables, which often have a bitter taste. As a result, a third of children are now overweight or obese before they start school.[3]

Worst of all, this sets their food preferences for the rest of their lives.

So, it couldn't be more important to help children develop a taste for healthy food. Of course, this isn't always that simple but there are several techniques and best practices that you can follow to help make this easier for you and fun for the child.

Introduce new foods slowly

If children are unsure about trying new foods, try to make the food familiar first. Children need to be familiar with a food with all their senses. So, seeing it, smelling it, and touching it may all be needed before a child is willing to have a bite or even a lick.

Involve children in the process

Allowing children to understand the process of what goes into a dish and seeing these different ingredients can help familiarise a child with a wider range of food. Plus, children love to help with cooking.

Keep mealtimes calm, happy and relaxed

If you are more relaxed around mealtimes, children will be too. Sitting together at a table, modelling a healthy attitude towards eating and trying a wide range of foods can have a big impact on how children will perceive eating and mealtimes in general.

Praise even the tiniest achievement

Even if a child has just tasted a tiny amount of food for the first time, it is so important to encourage them by praising this effort. Use positive praise rather than using bribes such as, 'eat your vegetables and then you can have dessert'.

Children's palates and experiences with food are constantly shifting and evolving.

It can take 15-20 exposures before a child accepts a new taste.

Make healthy foods fun and positive

The way we talk about different foods can have a huge impact on a child. Often, we talk more positively about less healthy 'treat foods' than fruit and vegetables. Using words such as 'yummy' and 'delicious' when discussing a new food can make it seem like a more appealing option.

[2] Paul Dazeley, Carmel Houston-Price, Appetite 84 (2015)
[3] The National Child Measurement Programme 2012

Tips to support fussy eaters

Do	Reason
Develop a daily routine of three meals and two to three snacks around a toddler's sleeping pattern.	Toddlers don't eat well if they become over hungry or very tired.
Offer two courses at meals: one savoury course followed by a sweet course.	This gives two opportunities for the toddler to take in the calories and nutrients needed and offers a wider variety of foods. It also makes the meal more interesting.
Praise toddlers when they eat well.	Toddlers respond positively to praise.
Make positive comments about the food.	Parents and carers are strong role models. If you make positive comments about foods, toddlers will be more willing to try them.
Arrange mealtimes so that children eat together.	Some toddlers eat better when they are with their own age group.
Give small portions. If these are finished, give praise, and offer more.	Toddlers can be overwhelmed by large portions and lose their appetite.
Offer finger foods as often as possible.	Toddlers enjoy having the control of feeding themselves with finger foods.
Eat in a calm, relaxed environment without distractions.	Toddlers concentrate on one thing at a time. Distractions make it more difficult to concentrate on eating.
Finish the meal within about 20-30 minutes and accept that after this the toddler is not going to eat any more.	Carrying the meal on for too long is unlikely to result in the toddler eating much more. It is better to wait for the next snack or meal and offer nutritious foods then.
Learn to recognise the signs that a child has had enough and remove the uneaten food without comment.	Toddlers are saying they have had enough food when they; keep their mouth shut, turn their head away, hold food in their mouth or spit food out.
Take away uneaten food without comment.	Accept that the toddler has eaten enough.
Involve toddlers in messy play as often as possible.	Toddlers will be more likely to touch food and feed themselves if they are happy with sticky hands and messy faces.
Make a list of all the food a child does eat over a week and then review it.	If there are foods from all the food groups and some variety within each group, then you can reassure yourself that the problem may not be as bad as you thought.

Don't	Reason
Rush meals.	Some toddlers eat slowly and rushing a toddler to eat can reduce their appetite.
Pressure a toddler to eat more when they have indicated to you, they have had enough.	Toddlers should be allowed to eat to their appetite and parents and carers should respect this.
Take away a refused meal and offer a completely different one in its place.	A toddler will soon take advantage of this. In the long run, it is better to offer healthy meals accepting that a child will prefer some foods more than others.
Offer the sweet course as a reward.	You will make the sweet course seem more desirable.
Offer large drinks of milk, squash, or fruit juice within an hour of the meal.	Large drinks will reduce your toddler's appetite. Give water instead.
Offer snacks just before a meal.	The snacks will stop them feeling hungry.
Give a snack very soon after a meal if they haven't eaten well at the meal.	Many parents and carers do this because they feel a child should eat something. However, it is best to have a set meal pattern and wait until the next snack or meal before offering food again.
Assume that because they have refused a food, they will never eat it again.	Tastes change with time. Some toddlers need to be offered a new food more than ten times before they feel confident to try it.
Feel guilty if one meal turns into a disaster.	Put it behind you and approach the next meal positively.

Raising the sugar alarm

Sugar. It's often in the press, we all know that we should be cautious with how much we eat, but what do we really know about what it does to us?

The problem with sugar is that it is confusing. There are many versions of sugars and contradictory advice about which versions are more acceptable for our health. For example, fruit often gets grouped in with all sugars and this makes people afraid of fruits and dried fruits, which are bursting with vitamins and minerals which support health.

There's also the media, many headlines scaremonger with bold health claims about sugar. While there are some truths in some of those headlines, we must look beyond the sensationalised news, understand, and contextualise the real issue with sugar.

Sugar is a leading factor in obesity, and we cannot ignore the fact that we have been living in an obesity pandemic, long before the Covid pandemic. Obesity is one of the most important public health concerns globally. Childhood obesity has increased tenfold in in the last four decades, and this trend is continuing. As a result, we are now starting to see the co-morbidities of childhood obesity. In the UK today there are 3432 children living with Type 2 Diabetes. 20 years ago, there was 1. Unfortunately, there are many more examples, including children having joint problems from excess weight, and suffering with high cholesterol.

The biggest issue is this: Sugar is everywhere, mostly in places where you wouldn't expect it to be. This is largely due to the way that our food industry has changed globally (in the west anyway) to more convenient and economical large-scale food production.

The argument of, "It didn't do me any harm." doesn't really fit anymore as due to the changing nature of our food we are not comparing like for like. The diet we had even 40 years ago is remarkably different to the one today. From the 1970s onwards, sugar has crept into more products in our food supply, our portions have got bigger, and our palates have got more and more accustomed to the sweetness of our food. In the last 20 years, we have seen more significant changes with the increase in artificial sweeteners and artificial additives to create the new classification of foods; Ultra Processed Foods. Highly palatable and very convenient but alas, nutrient devoid.

When it comes to children and sugar, it's worth considering that most adult eating habits, patterns, and negative eating behaviours relate to food consumed in childhood.

Our taste preferences begin to take shape when we are in the womb. If we are exposed to a lot of sugar and processed foods at this stage, we are likely (but not definitely) to prefer these foods once weaning. Weaning is a particularly important developmental stage for our eating preferences and habits to take shape. In our professional opinion, one of the most damaging things that we can do for palate development is to introduce sugar too early. Once sugar has been introduced it is very hard to reduce but prior to introduction, the palate is clean, willing, and receptive to natural flavours. When sugar gets involved, it supresses the natural taste experiences and due to the very nature of sugar, once we've have had it, we want more and more of it.

Because we understand all of this (and more) at The Professional Nursery Kitchen, we are taking great strides in changing our menu, as part of our continual improvement to work towards completely removing all free sugars. While our main menu has always been sugar-free, we are moving towards extending this to being sugar free in our dessert options, too.

We aim to be the very first childcare catering company to achieve the Sugarwise Platinum certification, showing that we take children's health and nutrition incredibly seriously and understand that pudding doesn't have to be a traditional piece of cake.

Our menu development team are coming up with a range of puddings which actually support a child's health (remember, sugary cakes are largely empty calories), using ingredients which support the immune system, gut diversity and importantly, are not too sweet. Using natural, whole ingredients we are encouraging healthy palate development and not one that expects too much sugar. This means that all ages in nursery can enjoy a little of everything on our menu.

We have a responsibility to feed children in our care and to make decisions for them when they are too young to have a voice over their food choice. The food choices we make for them can actually have an impact on their future health and their future relationship with food, when we remember that most adult eating habits, patterns and negative eating behaviours relate to food consumed in childhood.

For more information on the Sugarwise certification (school standard) and the important work which Sugarwise does globally, visit: sugarwise.org.

Our sugar-free, whole milk yoghurt range is flavoured with fruit puree, only.

We have a wide range of fresh cut and whole fruits available on our menus, daily.

Guide to portion sizes

The nutritional content a child will gain from food or drink will depend on the portion size that is offered. It is important to remember that the amount of food a young child eats varies from day to day and meal to meal, and that providing too much can have as many negative effects as providing too little.[4] A survey of 850 nurseries found that very few were confident with the portion size they should be offering young children.[5]

The Professional Nursery Kitchen produces two sizes of dish, large and medium. We recommend that a large is portioned between 8-10 children, while a medium is portioned between 3-4, depending on age, appetite, and activity level.

It's best practice to allow children to serve themselves a portion they are confident with from a correctly portioned serving dish.

In the table below, you will see the number of grams each portion should contain.

	Large Tray		Small Tray	
	10 Portions	8 Portions	4 Portions	3 Portions
Breakfast	120g	150g	129g	172g
Snack	75g	94g	81g	108g
Lunch	200g	250g	215g	287g
Dessert	75g	94g	81g	108g
Snack	75g	94g	81g	108g
Tea	120g	150g	108g	143g

[4]More JA, Emmett PM. Evidenced-based, practical food portion sizes for preschool children and how they fit into a well-balanced, nutritionally adequate diet. J Hum Nutr Diet. 2015 Apr;28(2):135-54. doi: 10.1111/jhn.12228. Epub 2014 Mar 24.
[5]Neelson. Nutritional practices of nurseries in England. Comparison with national guidelines. Appetite. 2015 Feb 1; 85: 22-29

British Nutrition Foundation

5532-a-day

Your child needs a variety of foods from the 4 main food groups.

Each day offer about:

- 5 portions of starchy foods
- 5 (or more) portions of fruit & vegetables
- 3 portions of dairy foods
- 2 portions of protein foods (or 3 if vegetarian)

These foods can be offered as meals and snacks. This handy chart gives examples of portion sizes as a guide, but these will vary for children of different ages and appetites. Children's food preferences and appetites vary from day to day so let your child decide how much to eat and keep offering new foods alongside familiar favourites. Fats and oils contain essential nutrients and small amounts can be included in childrens' diets – use spreads sparingly and small amounts of oil in cooking. Children under 5 should have a daily supplement of vitamins A, C and D – ask your GP, health visitor or pharmacist for more information. Foods like chocolate, biscuits and cakes and higher salt snack foods like crisps or corn snacks are not needed in the diet and so shouldn't be a regular part of children's everyday foods. Small portions can be offered occasionally.

5-a-day Starchy Foods

(Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates)

Examples of portion sizes:

5-a-day Fruit & Vegetables

Examples of portion sizes:

3-a-day Dairy Foods

(Milk, cheese, yogurt and non dairy alternatives)

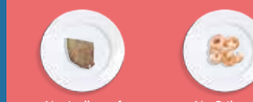
Examples of portion sizes:

2-a-day Protein Foods

*3 portions if child is vegetarian

(Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins)

Examples of portion sizes:



Developed by the British Nutrition Foundation. Originally funded by Danone Nutricia Early Years Nutrition and updated using an educational grant from the Early Years Nutrition Partnership. Food images in toddler portion sizes provided by the Infant and Toddle Forum.

Food allergies and intolerances

Antonino, Production & Technical Manager at The Professional Nursery Kitchen

It is estimated that around 1 in every 14 children under the age of 3 has at least one food allergy.

A food allergy is caused when your immune system mistakenly treats proteins found in food as a threat. When this happens, several chemicals are released, causing an allergic reaction. Allergic reactions from food range from the mild to very serious, with symptoms including rashes, swelling, or vomiting. More serious cases of food allergies can result in anaphylaxis, which can be life threatening.

Oral allergy syndrome (pollen-food syndrome)

Some people experience itchiness in their mouth and throat, sometimes with mild swelling, immediately after eating fresh fruit or vegetables. This is known as oral allergy syndrome.

Oral allergy syndrome is caused by allergy antibodies mistaking certain proteins in fresh fruits, nuts or vegetables for pollen.

Oral allergy syndrome generally doesn't cause severe symptoms, and it's possible to deactivate the allergens by thoroughly cooking any fruit and vegetables.

50% of our dishes contain no allergens whatsoever

All of our dishes have detailed reports, which highlight every ingredient and allergen, and this information is also clearly printed on each dish.

Food intolerances

A food intolerance is not the same as a food allergy. Children with a food intolerance may have symptoms such as diarrhoea, bloating and stomach cramps, however no allergic reaction takes place.

Important differences between a food allergy and a food intolerance include:

- **The symptoms of a food intolerance usually occur several hours after eating the food**
- **You need to eat a larger amount of food to trigger an intolerance than an allergy**
- **A food intolerance is never life threatening, unlike an allergy**

All nursery schools must comply with the food information regulations, which require providers to have the correct information about the allergenic ingredients in the food they provide.

Providing nutritious meals consistently and safely

Our kitchen and procedures have been designed to avoid cross contamination and to keep children safe. We have separate fridges and refrigerated preparation rooms for different food types, our team wear special uniforms in different areas and use specific equipment so that food does not come into contact with any contaminants from other ingredients. And with our robust, verified cleaning techniques, our processes exceed industry best practice.

Holistic food safety

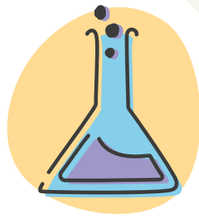
Food safety requirements have been identified, and effective procedures have been implemented across the entire business. This includes our premises and facilities, operations, training, maintenance and sanitation, personal hygiene, transportation, product information, consumer awareness and allergies.

HACCP plan

Our HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) plan keeps our food safe from biological, chemical, and physical food safety hazards. An independent review has verified our plan to guarantee the highest standards of food safety.

UKAS accredited lab

Our shelf life and microbiological testing is completed by a UKAS accredited laboratory to ensure absolute confidence in results.



Safe procurement

To ensure all our suppliers share our food safety values, we only source from suppliers who are SALSA or BRC accredited. However, we also have a robust qualification process in place for non-accredited suppliers, in case of emergencies.

SALSA accredited

We opt to be independently audited and accredited by SALSA (Safe and Local Supplier Approval). The 105-point food safety inspection is recognised as exceeding the minimum food safety standards required by law. SALSA accreditation also ensures that our HACCP plan is accurate and that our holistic food safety procedures are effective and being continuously improved.

Delivering consistency

We use refrigerated vans very similar to those used by supermarkets, only better! Our vans have been built to our own specifications to ensure safe delivery of our meals, snacks, and laundry. The temperature in our vans is continuously monitored, but we also take a temperature reading on delivery and leave this for the nursery to record in their temperature monitoring folder. This way, we can be certain that the cold chain has been maintained right up to the point of consumption.

Exploring veganism in the early years

Louise Mercieca, Nutritional Therapist

There has been a rise in the number of families switching to a vegan diet, and there's certainly plenty of reasons why this seems a good idea for both the environment and our health. Vegans tend to consume more fibre and less saturated fats, both of which support cardiovascular health. Plant based diets are also less likely to lead to metabolic conditions such as Type 2 Diabetes, and vegans tend to have lower body weight.

But what overall impact does a restrictive diet have on very young children? When making any decision about a diet or lifestyle choice it must be entered into with all the facts and considerations. Choosing a vegan diet isn't a decision to take lightly, especially if making that decision on behalf of a child.

What foods are removed on a vegan diet?

- **Meat & any meat by-products (gelatine, lard etc)**
- **Fish & fish derived products**
- **Eggs & any dressings, cakes, bakes or foods containing eggs**
- **Honey & all products containing honey**
- **Dairy produce, milk, cheese, butter, ice cream, yogurts etc**
- **Certain additives including but not exclusively E120, E441, E479, E542, E901, E966**
- **Some forms of Omega 3 Fatty Acids (fish based)**
- **Sweets & chocolate - many sweets contain gelatine**

The vegan diet is quite restrictive, and to follow a nutritionally balanced diet whilst being a strict vegan can be tough, but it's not entirely impossible. It's well documented that there are many health benefits to a vegan diet but most, if not all these studies have been based on adults.

Early years vegan diets

With many young children and adolescents now on a vegan diet, we are seeing some causes for concern in relation to nutritional deficiencies during this time of rapid childhood development. Researchers at UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, steered a study into formative nutrition and vegan diets and reported that: -

"Children following vegan diets were on average 3cm shorter, had 4-6% lower bone mineral content and were more than three times more likely to be deficient in vitamin B-12 than the omnivores."

A different peer reviewed journal in Pub Med on Vegan diets in young children states: -

"A vegan diet can be potentially critical for young children with risks of inadequate supply in terms of protein quality and energy as well as long-chain fatty acids, iron, zinc, vitamin D, iodine, calcium, and particularly vitamin B12. Deficiencies in these nutrients can lead to severe and sometimes irreversible developmental disorders."

Early childhood is a time of vast nutritional need due to the rapid pace of physical and cognitive development that takes place. We should never under-estimate the role that food plays in this development. Diets containing but not exclusively animal-derived foods, contain all the essential amino acids required for childhood development. Excluding these from the diet necessitates the need to supplement with key nutrients that would otherwise be entirely missing from the child's diet.

Supplements

Supplementing a diet may be easier said than done. Some children can't chew a chewy supplement (if they are very young), there may be issues over the coating of the supplements, and good quality ones can be very expensive. Nevertheless, supplementation is essential as nutritional deficiencies can have life-long consequences. If you are embarking on a vegan lifestyle for your family, please do embrace the full variety of natural plant-based options available and try to steer clear of over-processed vegan alternatives containing artificial ingredients.

12 essential nutrients found in animal foods and the vegan alternative

Nutrient	Role in body	Food sources	Vegan alternative
Vitamin B3	Needed by the cells in the body to enable them to produce & use energy.	Meat, fish, poultry	Fortified products. Marmite Nutritional Yeast **Supplementation is often necessary**
Vitamin B12	Helps to make DNA, is involved in red blood cell formation, nerve function, cell metabolism. Is needed to make acetylcholine, a chemical involved in memory, & helps prevent megaloblastic anaemia.	Dairy products, meat, poultry, eggs, sardines & tuna	Fortified products (some plant milks, nutritional yeasts) **Supplementation is often necessary**
Vitamin D	Involved in bone-health as helps to regulate calcium & phosphate. Is an immune system modulator & helps to regulate & balance mood.	Sunlight! Eggs, oily fish	Sunlight, fortified foods, vitamin D enhanced mushrooms. **Supplementation is often necessary**
Iodine	Stimulating to brain tissue and makes thyroid hormones.	Seafood, eggs, dairy, seaweed	Fortified foods, wholegrains **Supplementation is often necessary**
Iron	Crucial for making red blood cells which oxygenate the body.	Red meat	Fortified foods, lentils, chickpeas nuts & seeds, dried fruit, beans & tofu
Calcium	Needed to support bone development but also involved in brain signalling and movement.	Milk, dairy products	Green leafy veg, some fortified products **Supplementation is often necessary**
Selenium	Involved in Thyroid function & metabolism and is needed to make special proteins (antioxidant enzymes) which help to prevent cellular damage.	Seafood, organ meats, dairy products, eggs	Brazil nuts, some cereals and grains
Zinc	Many different enzymes need zinc to support immune function & to build polyunsaturated fatty acids, crucial for brain formation & function.	Meat, fish, cheese	Wheatgerm **Supplementation is often necessary**
Lysine	Needed to support bone health & help the body to absorb calcium.	Red meat, poultry, fish	Quinoa, lentils & beans, tempeh
Tryptophan	Important for mood regulation & natural sleep rhythm.	Red meat, poultry, dairy products, eggs	Tofu, oats, nuts & seeds
Methionine	Helps the body with detoxification & supports strong hair, skin, & nails.	Meat, poultry, fish, dairy products	Oats, sunflower seeds, hemp
Omega 3 Fatty Acids	Involved in brain growth & development, additionally needed to make eicosanoids which help to keep inflammation down in the body. There are 4 fats that make up 40% of a brain. Two of these DHA and EPA are mainly found in seafood (marine) & some meats as dietary sources. ALA can be found in plant oil, nuts, & seeds – the body needs enough ALA to convert to other fatty acids. DGLA is uncommon & found in trace amounts in animal products.	Fish, seafood, egg yolks, fat from dairy products	DHA and EPA need to be supplemented via an algae-derived supplement. There are no vegan dietary sources other than seaweed & algae ALA – nuts, seeds, (falx chai) – ALA intake is essential for vegans **Supplementation is often necessary**

Homemade baked beans with mini jacket potatoes

This dish is vegan friendly and packed full of nutrients! The humble potato is a great source of vitamins C and B6 which help reduce tiredness and fatigue, while cannellini beans and veggies add antioxidants and protein. Cannellini beans also contain magnesium which helps relaxation and boosts production of neurotransmitters. Additionally, magnesium helps the body to absorb calcium, which is essential for healthy teeth, gums, and bones.

Ingredients

- 345g Cannellini beans in water
- 135ml Water
- 90g Diced white onion
- 90g Diced carrot
- 90 g Chopped tomatoes
- 90g Mixed diced peppers
- 2 tsp Tomato paste
- 1 ½ tsp Vegetable stock
- ½ tsp Garlic puree
- ½ tsp Smoked paprika
- A dash of sunflower oil
- Ground black pepper to season
- 360g Salad potatoes

Serves approximately two adults and two children depending on age and appetite

Method

- Pre-heat your oven to 180°C.
- Wash the potatoes and place into a baking tray. Once the oven has reached 180°C, place the potatoes into the oven for 35-40 minutes.
- Add a dash of sunflower oil to a pan and bring to a medium heat before adding the onions and carrots. Cook until soft.
- Add the garlic, tomato paste, smoked paprika and season with a little ground black pepper. Cook out for 5 minutes.
- Add water and vegetable stock, and simmer for 10 minutes.
- Add chopped tomatoes and drained cannellini beans. Mix well and bring to the boil for 15 minutes.
- Add mixed peppers and simmer for 5 minutes.
- Remove the mini jackets from the oven and carefully cut open to cool. Place the baked beans with the jackets onto a plate or bowl and serve.

Prevention of choking for under 5s

Choking is one of the most serious, yet often overlooked hazards that a child can encounter at nursery. It is something that every Early Years Educator must be continually aware of and particularly consider before each meal.

Each day around 40 under 5's are rushed into hospital after choking on something or swallowing something dangerous.

Foods which create a perfect plug include sausage, grapes, cherry tomatoes, popcorn, bananas, and carrots. Young children have not yet learned how to separate eating and breathing and often lack a cough mechanism strong enough to clear an obstruction. If cut incorrectly, these objects can form spherical or cylindrical plugs which can block a child's airway and be difficult to clear.

The Professional Nursery Kitchen cater specifically for the early years. By understanding the heightened risk of choking we avoid inherently risky ingredients or cut them in a way to minimise the choking risk.

St Johns Ambulance Choking Advice: Choking child - what you need to do

1 Cough it out

Encourage them to cough it out. If that doesn't work, try to slap it out.

2 Slap it out

If coughing doesn't work:

- **Help the child bend forward and use the heel of your hand to give up to five sharp back blows between their shoulder blades.**
- **Check their mouth to see if there's anything in there. If there is, get them to pick it out themselves.**

3 Squeeze it out

If the back blows don't work, try giving them up to five abdominal thrusts:

- **To do this, stand behind the child, making sure they are bending well forward.**
- **Link your hands between their tummy button and the bottom of their chest, with your lower hand clenched in a fist.**
- **Then pull sharply inwards and upwards.**

!! If they're still choking call 999 or 112 for an ambulance.

Once you've called an ambulance, continue steps 2 'Slap it out' and 3 'Squeeze it out' until what's in there has cleared, help arrives, or they become unresponsive.

If they become unresponsive at any stage, open their airway, and check their breathing. If they're not breathing, start CPR - cardiopulmonary resuscitation to try to release whatever's stuck in there. Follow the instructions for someone who's unresponsive and not breathing.

"Providing healthy meals and snacks at nursery no longer distracts us from the care and education of the children."

Katie, Nursery Manager,
Broomfield Road Nursery School

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