

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS): Food Brought in from Home - Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Does the nutrition guidance apply to food brought from home?

A: Working alongside parents and/or carers is essential to ensuring children are provided with healthy, balanced and nutritious food in the setting and at home.

While there is no requirement for parents and/or carers to follow the new nutrition guidance, you may wish to share it with them to ensure they understand the requirements that should be followed in the setting.

The nutrition guidance highlights the importance of ongoing discussions with parents and/or carers, including seeking feedback on food provided to ensure that meals provided meet the individual needs of each child. And highlights that children with special dietary requirements may need specific foods excluded or included.

Q: Who is responsible for the food children bring from home?

A: Parents are responsible for the food they provide, but providers must show they have taken reasonable steps to support families and share the EYFS nutrition guidance.

Since September 2025 the requirements in the EYFS around safer eating have been strengthened. In addition to the existing requirement of providers obtaining information about any special dietary requirements a child has, at each mealtime and snack time providers must be clear about who is responsible for checking that the food being provided meets all the requirements for each child. As well as checking the food in relation to dietary requirements this also extends to ensuring the food is prepared in such a way to prevent choking based on each child's individual stage of development. This relates to all food served to children, whether that be by the setting or from home.

Q: What should parents include in a healthy packed lunch?

A: The EYFS nutrition guidance sets out what foods should be provided, limited or avoided. It also links to recipe suggestions, some of which could be served in a packed lunch.

Q: What if a child is a fussy eater or only likes certain foods?

A: The more children try new foods, the wider the range of nutrients they will get from their meals. Have children eat together in your setting. This encourages them to try foods that they might not try at home. For example, children who won't touch broccoli at home might happily try some if they see their peers eating it.

The NHS has advice on [fussy eaters](#) including tips that you can pass on to parents and/or carers. Gentle encouragement and repeated exposure often help children accept a wider range of foods.

Q: What happens if a parent sends food that doesn't meet the guidance?

A: Working alongside parents and/or carers is essential to ensuring children are provided with healthy, balanced and nutritious food in the setting and at home.

While there is no requirement for parents and/or carers to follow the new nutrition guidance, you may wish to share it with them to ensure they understand the requirements that should be followed in the setting.

Additionally, the guidance includes a section on communicating with parents and carers covering: the role of the key person, developing a food and nutrition policy and food brought in from home. This will support you to effectively work with parents and/or carers to ensure that food brought from home is healthy, balanced and nutritious.

During inspections, Ofsted will consider the effort the setting is making regarding the food and nutrition policy rather than looking for specific food options that are provided. If a provider is making no effort to educate parents and/or carers in respect of healthy choices, this would be discussed to understand why, and it may be that settings are taking insufficient action to support children's wellbeing. Ofsted understand that despite the effort settings put in to support families in making healthy eating choices, there are numerous reasons that this may not be possible, and that this could be a longer-term journey that setting leaders and educators are on with them.

Q: Can settings ban allergens such as nuts?

A: It is not necessary to ban an allergen or certain foods from an early years setting because you have a child attending your setting with an allergy. Banning an allergen is a complex process and should only be done when all other control measures have been exhausted and it is the only remaining way to make an environment safe.

Banning certain foods will make it harder for some children to eat the wide range of nutrients they require for a healthy balanced diet. Following the requirements in the safer eating section of the EYFS will help early years providers ensure that children are not accidentally exposed to allergens.

Q: What if a child has allergies or a medical diet?

A: In September 2025, we introduced changes to the safeguarding requirements of the EYFS. This includes a new "safer eating" section. Within the safer eating section are a number of requirements related to allergies, including:

- Before a child is admitted to the setting the provider must obtain information about any special dietary requirements, preferences, food

allergies and intolerances that the child has, and any special health requirements.

- This information must be shared with all staff involved in the preparing and handling of food.
- At each mealtime and snack time providers must be clear about who is responsible for checking that the food being provided meets all the requirements for each child.
- Providers must have ongoing discussions with parents and/or carers and, where appropriate, health professionals to develop allergy action plans for managing any known allergies and intolerances. This information must be kept up to date by the provider and shared with all staff.
- Providers must ensure that all staff are aware of the symptoms and treatments for allergies and anaphylaxis, the differences between allergies and intolerances and that children can develop allergies at any time, especially during the introduction of solid foods which is sometimes called complementary feeding or weaning.

The requirement within the EYFS states that providers must have regard to the EYFS nutrition guidance. This means they must take it into account and should follow it unless there is good reason not to. This allows flexibility in instances where implementing these standards may be more difficult, for example when providing food for a child with specific dietary needs.

Q: Will Ofsted penalize providers if parents do not follow the guidance?

A: Ofsted will consider the effort the setting is making regarding the food and nutrition policy rather than looking for specific what food options parents and/or carers are providing. If a provider is making no effort to educate parents and/or carers in respect of healthy choices this would be discussed to understand why, and it may be that settings are taking insufficient action to support children's wellbeing. Ofsted understand that despite the effort settings put in to support families make healthy eating choices, some families maybe harder to bring on board or support, and that this could be a longer-term journey that setting leaders and practitioners are on with them.

Providers must have regard to the new nutrition guidance. This will mean the new guidance should be taken into account by providers and only departed from where there is a good reason. As providers must already provide healthy, balanced and nutritious food, the Department believe this should be a relatively minor change that would not place any significant burdens on providers, especially as they would be able to depart from it where appropriate.

Q: Can staff remove food that does not meet the guidance?

A: Since September 2025 the requirements in the EYFS around safer eating have been strengthened. In addition to the existing requirement of providers obtaining information about any special dietary requirements a child has, at each mealtime and snack time providers must be clear about who is responsible for checking that the

food being provided meets all the requirements for each child. As well as checking the food in relation to dietary requirements this also extends to ensuring the food is prepared in such a way to prevent choking based on each child's individual stage of development. This relates to all food served to children, whether that be by the setting or from home.

However, the Department does not expect staff to police or confiscate food as long as it is safe for the child to eat. Children must not be denied food or made to go hungry. Concerns should be discussed with parents and carers.

Q: How can providers support families who struggle with the cost of healthy food?

A: The Department recognises financial pressures on families. Providers should signpost families to schemes such as [Healthy Start](#).

Q: Can providers charge families extra or use local schemes to help?

A: Providers may work with local authorities or community organisations to offer healthy snacks or meals. Any costs must be clearly agreed with parents and reflect the child's best interests.

Q: How should providers communicate with parents about food?

A: The EYFS nutrition guidance has a section on communicating with parents and/or carers. Here it outlines the role of the key person and the importance of ongoing conversations with parents and/or carers. It also outlines how to develop a food and nutrition policy which will help settings share their approach to food provision with parents and/or carers.

Q: How can families be supported to understand sugar, balance and nutrition?

A: Providers may want to share the EYFS nutrition guidance with parents. Providers could also signpost to the [NHS Start for Life](#) website.

Q: Can parents still bring food for birthdays or celebrations?

A: Yes, parents may still bring in food for birthdays or celebrations. However many families like to celebrate by bringing in cake or sweets which can mean that some children are eating these unhealthy foods several times a week. Providers should encourage healthier or non-food alternatives, such as fruit platters or stickers instead of cakes and sweets. Any shared food must be checked for allergens and handled safely.

Q: How can providers respect cultural, dietary or medical needs while promoting healthy eating?

A: Providers must have regard to the guidance but may adapt their approach where necessary to meet cultural, religious or medical requirements. Inclusion and respect for families' beliefs should always be maintained.

Q: How can children with SEN, ARFID or restricted diets be supported?

A: The requirement within the EYFS states that providers must have regard to the guidance. This means they must take it into account and should follow it **unless there is good reason not to**. This allows flexibility in instances where implementing these standards may be more difficult, for example when providing food for a child with specific dietary or medical needs.

Q: What if schools and early years settings apply different standards?

A: The government encourages all schools to promote healthy eating and provide healthy, tasty and nutritious food and drink. Compliance with the School Food Standards is mandatory for maintained schools, academies and free schools including reception year. Departmental advice and guidance is available on gov.uk.

The standards define the foods and drinks that must be provided, which foods are restricted, and those which must not be provided. They apply to food and drink provided to pupils on school premises and during an extended school day (up to 6pm), including, breakfast clubs, tuck shops, mid-morning break, vending and after school clubs.

For reception year pupils, schools must also follow the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework and must have regard to the EYFS nutrition guidance. This means that for reception year pupils, schools should follow the EYFS nutrition guidance unless there is good reason not to. This allows flexibility in instances where implementing the EYFS nutrition guidance may be more difficult, for example, for reception year pupils in schools where they must follow the school food standards.

Q: What training or support will staff receive?

A: The Government will not provide additional funding or training as a result of the EYFS nutrition change. There is an existing requirement in the EYFS which states: *'Where children are provided with meals, snacks and drinks, these must be healthy, balanced and nutritious'*. The new nutrition guidance will support providers to meet this requirement.

We recognise the importance of training and other structured support for enabling educators to effectively implement the guidance in practice. We will continue to consider what more we can do to support the sector to provide healthy, balanced and nutritious food.

Q: How will the Department ensure consistency with Ofsted inspections?

A: Ofsted is responsible for the registration, regulation and inspection of childcare provision in England. Ofsted, as a regulator, has a responsibility to check that providers meet the EYFS requirements. As Ofsted is an independent non-ministerial government department, we are unable to comment on its processes.

Q. How are we expected to store pack-lunches safely?

A. Within the early years nutrition guidance there is a section on best practices for packing lunches and other food brought in from home which can be communicated with parents. It is up to each individual setting to decide how they wish to store the food brought in from home. If the setting is clear with parents how the food will be stored, it is then for parents to decide what food they wish to send in and how they wish to pack it.

Q. My setting does not have the facilities to reheat food brought in from home. How can we make sure we are serving hot meals to children if they are bringing in pack lunches?

A. The EYFS nutrition guidance does not expect the meals served to children to be hot meals. The guidance states that: 'You are not expected to cook 3 hot meals a day. You may wish to provide a cold breakfast for example wholegrain cereals which are low in salt and sugar, such as shredded whole wheat cereal or wheat biscuits. Or you could provide a cold lunch or tea for example wholemeal sandwiches or wraps.'

Q. I do not allow packed lunches at all as parents do not adhere to safety and nutrition advice.

A. The EYFS nutrition guidance encourages providers to share the guidance with parents to help them to understand the food and drink guidelines that early years settings are expected to follow. The guidance also sets that out that it is good practice to have a food and nutrition policy that will help settings share their approach to food provision with parents and carers. It recommends some points to include such as food safety and the setting's policy on food brought in from home. Providers should not need to prevent packed lunches from being an accessible alternative for parents.