

03 Food safety and nutrition procedures

03.5 Healthy Eating

Snack and mealtimes are an important part of the day. Eating represents a social time for children and adults and helps children to learn about healthy eating

Food and drink provision

We follow the government guidance “ Early Years Foundation Stage Nutrition Guidance May 2025’ and have used the guidance to devise our seasonal menus which change twice a year. In accordance with the welfare requirements, the children should have access to drinking water throughout the day, we therefore ask that parents send in a named water bottle for their child, which we keep re-filled. There is also a jug of water available.

The children are offered snacks in the morning and afternoon consisting of fruit or raw vegetables; a form of carbohydrate (e.g. toast, bagels or crackers); and a drink of either milk or water.

Young children have high energy and nutrient requirements, but only have small stomachs, so they need to eat little and often. The recommendation is that children need to have three meals (breakfast, lunch and tea) and two or three snacks daily.

We organize our snack as a “rolling snack” where snacks are available for children to choose over an extended period of time. This is to minimize any interruptions to their learning and also give them more choice. The children sit at the table to have snack with a practitioner which allows snack time to become a social experience with a small number of children. We know that children will eat at different speeds and so this also allows enough time to eat their meals and snacks, so that those who eat more slowly do not miss out, either on food or on play or other activities.

The eating environment and social aspects of meal times

At Croft Corner we see food and eating as a learning opportunity and the children are encouraged to try everything. However, we never expect them to leave an empty plate or use food as a reward or punishment so as to develop a healthy relationship with food. We also help them to judge when they have had enough or feel full.

The preschoolers are encouraged to self-serve and be part of a “family service” where they help to serve themselves and clear their plates away after they have finished. A member of staff sits with each table to encourage the social skills. It also provides a great opportunity to talk about the food and how to keep ourselves healthy.

During snack time, we encourage them to prepare the snack themselves e.g chopping bananas and spreading the spread on crackers. This helps them to grow in independence. We also let them pour their own drinks which develops their fine motor skills and coordination.

Communication with parents

We aim to be able to share our knowledge and experience of how to ensure that children eat well with parents and carers. We aim to include parents in discussions around the food we provide.

For example:-

- We provide information for parents and carers on the routine for meals and snacks in your setting through this policy to help them plan their child's routine at home
- We give daily parents and carers regular feedback on how well, and what, their children are eating the baby and toddler rooms and when requested by parents of preschoolers
- We display our menus for meals and snacks for parents and carers to see on the parent App.
- Our cook is always available to discuss the menu with parents
- We do a smiley face chart when a new menu is introduced so we can include the children when planning menus and activities involving food, and when talking to families about food.
- we operate a strict No Nuts policy, as we periodically have children who have severe allergies. We therefore request that no "nut products" are included in any food which is sent into nursery.

Celebrations and special occasions

We know that it is important that children are given the opportunity to celebrate special occasions and cultural events, and food and drink is often used to mark these occasions. However many foods and drinks served at celebrations can be high in saturated fat, sugar and salt, and therefore have limited nutritional value for young children. Children with allergies also cannot have the cake.

As there are a lot of children in nursery, there can be so many special occasions, such as birthdays, that children may be eating these foods very frequently. We therefore ask that we

think about celebrating these events in different ways to reduce the amount of high fat, sugar and salt foods children eat at these times.

We always sing Happy Birthday to the children and if you did want to bring something in then we would ask that you bring in healthier food or non-food items such as stickers instead of cakes or sweets for birthdays and other celebrations.

Encouraging fussy eaters to eat well

Young children can be fussy about what they eat, or how they eat. Fussy eating and fear of new foods (food neophobia) are part of development and affect between 10% and 20% of children under five. Fear of new foods in children typically starts between 18 months and two years old and it is thought to be a natural behaviour. A child who appears to be fussy about their food but is growing well is probably eating a sufficient balance of foods and getting enough energy and nutrients. Severe selective eating is rare and generally starts from early feeding difficulties or significant health problems.

Fussy eating and fear of new foods can both be helped using similar techniques. If a family is worried about their child's food intake, we can make a plan with them to encourage their child to eat well. It is important that the approach is consistent and essential that all those involved at mealtimes agree and follow the same strategies.

At Croft Corner we use a number of simple strategies to manage fussy eating. These are:-

- By sitting fussy eaters with good eaters at mealtimes, children will adopt the food preferences of their peers if they eat together regularly.
- Encourage staff to eat with children where possible, and talk enthusiastically about the taste and texture of the food both at meal times and at other opportunities.
- We give children regular and repeated chances to taste new foods, as this increases their liking for and eating of new foods. The child must actually taste the food to change their preferences, and it can take as many as 10 to 15 tastings before they accept it.
- If children are resistant to trying new foods, offer them small tastes and make sure the child maintains control of the situation. For example, you should give them the opportunity to spit out the food into a tissue if they really do not like it.
- Praise children for trying new foods.

- Favourite foods should not be used as a reward to encourage children to eat foods they do not like. Foods used in this way simply become even more valued, and it is generally recommended that food should never be used as a reward or punishment.
- We never force children to finish everything on their plate. Children who are made to eat everything they are served learn to dislike the foods they are pressured to eat, and these aversions may last into adulthood.
- Give children small servings at first, with the opportunity to have second helpings if they finish the first serving, as they may find larger portions off-putting
- Staff recognise the signs that a child has had enough and remove uneaten food without comment.
- Staff work in partnership with parents/carers to support them with children who are showing signs of 'food preference or aversion' and sign post them to further advice, for example, How to Manage Simple Faddy Eating in Toddlers (Infant & Toddler Forum) <https://infantandtoddlerforum.org/health-and-childcare-professionals/factsheets/> and <https://www.nhs.uk/baby/weaning-and-feeding/fussy-eaters/>

Learning about and through food

Learning about food is integrated into our educational programme and can be linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum. For example:-

- Personal, social and emotional development:- Meal times offer children experiences to taste different foods, overcome dislikes and learn how to share.
- Physical development. Fine and gross motor skills can be developed through activities such as gardening, using knives and forks, preparing food, Mealtimes can be used to help children to make healthy food choices.
- Communication and language. Sitting around a table eating food together is a good way to teach conversation
- Literacy. Many stories involve food and are used to teach about ingredients, where food comes from and about food for special occasions and from different cultures. Language can be developed and senses explored through discussing and describing the taste, texture, size, look and smell of food.
- Mathematics. Activities such as counting out spoons and pieces of fruit when setting the table or at snack time can be used to support numeracy skills.

- Understanding the world:- food tasting activities teach children about ingredients, the seasons and where food comes from including food from different cultures, growing fruit and vegetables teaches children about where food comes from, about life cycles,
- Expressive arts and design. Art activities can engage children with food and alert them to colours and shapes.

Protecting children's health

We recognize that we have a responsibility to protect children's health including helping children to maintain a healthy weight as they grow, and encouraging breastfeeding and good dental practices. The progress check at two years of age, allows us to be part of protecting children's health. We welcome you breastfeeding your child at nursery. We will work with you if you have any concerns about your child's health and we can signpost you for further expert support.

Evaluation and review of the setting's approach to food and drink provision

We recognize that it is important to evaluate and reflect on everything we do within our setting, including your approach to food and drink provision. We will therefore:-

- Use the government guidance Early Years Foundation stage Nutrition Guidance to evaluate your food and drink provision, particularly when planning new menus
- Get feedback from parents, carers and children
- Keep up to date with current good practice on meeting the welfare requirements for food and drink
- Regularly review staff training and development plans for food safety, hygiene and nutrition.