



Nutrition and Mealtimes

July 2025-June 2026

EYFS: 3.55 3.56

At Acorn Childcare Centre we believe that mealtimes should be happy, social occasions for children and staff alike. We promote shared, enjoyable positive interactions at these times.

We are committed to offering children healthy, nutritious and balanced meals and snacks, which meet individual needs and requirements. The Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition guide September 2025 gives us a clear expectation of how we must work in partnership with our families to ensure that all children:

- Get the right amounts of nutrients and energy they need while they are growing rapidly, which is especially important for children who might not have access to healthy food at home. This can help prevent children from becoming overweight or obese
- Develop positive eating habits early on. Children's early experiences with food can shape future eating habits. This can impact children's long-term health including maintaining a healthy weight, and good oral health.

The early years are a crucial time to reduce health inequalities and set the foundations for lifelong good health.

Information on our food and drink provision

We ensure that:

- A balanced and healthy breakfast, tea and mid-morning snack are provided for children attending a full day at the nursery
- Menus are planned and in line with example menu and guidance produced by the department for education, these are rotated regularly and reflect cultural diversity and variation. These are displayed for children and parents to view
- The nursery provides parents with daily written records or verbal feedback of feeding routines for all children
- We provide nutritious food at all snack and mealtimes, avoiding large quantities of fat, sugar, salt and artificial additives, preservatives and colourings
- Only milk and water are provided as drinks to promote oral health. Fresh drinking water is always available and accessible. It is frequently offered to children and babies. In hot weather staff will encourage children to drink more water to keep them hydrated

- Quantities offered take account of the ages of the children being catered for in line with recommended portion sizes for babies and young children.

Management of food allergies and dietary needs

- All allergens are highlighted on the menus to show the contents of each meal
- We consider seating to avoid cross contamination of food from child to child. Where appropriate, an adult will sit with children during meals to ensure safety and minimise risks. Where appropriate, age/stage discussions will also take place with all children about allergies and potential risks to make them aware of the dangers of sharing certain foods
- Staff show sensitivity in providing for children's diets and allergies. They do not use a child's diet or allergy as a label for the child, or make a child feel singled out because of her/his diet or allergy

Provision for cultural and dietary preferences

- Individual dietary requirements are respected. We gather information from parents regarding their children's dietary needs, including any special dietary requirements, preferences and food allergies that a child has and any special health requirements, before a child starts or joins the nursery. Where appropriate, we will carry out a risk assessment in the case of allergies and work alongside parents to put into place an individual dietary plan for their child
- We provide foods from the diet of each of the children's cultural backgrounds, providing children with familiar foods and introducing them to new ones.
- Cultural differences in eating habits are respected
- Any child who shows signs of distress at being faced with a meal he/she does not like will have his/her food removed without any fuss. If a child does not finish his/her first course, he/she will still be given a helping of dessert
- Children not on special diets are encouraged to eat a small piece of everything
- Children who refuse to eat at the mealtimes are offered food later in the day

The mealtime environment and social aspects of mealtimes

- Staff set a good example and eat with the children and show good table manners. Meal and snack times are organised so that they are social occasions in which children and staff participate in small groups. During meals and snack times children are encouraged to use their manners and say 'please' and 'thank you' and conversation is encouraged
- Staff use meal and snack times to help children to develop independence through making choices, serving food and drink, and feeding themselves
- Staff support children to make healthy choices and understand the need for healthy eating
- Children are given time to eat at their own pace and not rushed
- We promote positive attitudes to healthy eating through play opportunities and discussions
- No child is ever left alone when eating/drinking to minimise the risk of choking

Celebrations and special occasions

- As part of our ongoing commitment to nurture a healthy and nutritious environment here at Acorn, we will no longer accept birthday cakes or food orientated treat to be provided as gifts for the rest of the children within the setting.

Food safety and hygiene

- All staff who prepare and handle food are competent to do so and receive training in food hygiene which is recommended updating every three years
- In the very unlikely event of any food poisoning affecting two or more children on the premises, whether this may arise from food offered at the nursery, we will inform Ofsted as soon as reasonably practical and in all cases within 14 days. We will also inform the relevant health agencies and follow any advice given.

Learning about food

Here at Acorn Childcare Centre, we recognise the importance of learning about food and the shared experiences of cooking and baking, practitioners will take every opportunity to do age-appropriate cooking activities with the children. Food education supports cognitive, social and emotional education. Early experiences with food can influence long term health and establish healthy eating patterns. Learning about food in the early years is not just about nutrition; it's about building a foundation for healthy habits, cognitive and social-emotional development, and overall well-being.

- Food-related activities, like cooking or gardening, can improve fine motor skills, problem-solving abilities, and creativity.
- Learning about where food comes from, how it's grown, and how it's prepared can enhance children's understanding of the world.
- Sensory experiences with food can also aid in speech and language development and increase self-confidence.

Sustainability

- Educating children about sustainability through the context of food and nutrition helps them understand the environmental impact of food production while encouraging actions like reducing waste and eating seasonally. It equips them with life skills, including meal planning and critical thinking, to make informed, ethical, and health-conscious decisions that support both local and global communities. This knowledge prepares children to address future challenges, contribute to sustainable practices, and act as responsible citizens.
- From birth to 5 years old, the early years foundation stage (EYFS) framework ensures that all children develop an understanding of the world and the natural environment.

For more information on food safety and hygiene, bringing food in from home and our policy on commercial baby food and drink please refer to our Health and Safety policy and our Healthy lunch box policy.

For baby feeding guidance please refer to our weaning and feeding policy

- All menus are available on the Acorn website:

<https://www.acornchildcarecentre.co.uk/page/?title=Meal+Times&pid=24>

This policy was adopted on	Signed on behalf of the nursery	Date for review
<i>April 2024 Reviewed July 2025 – SK & SW</i>	<i>Lorna Hodgett</i>	<i>June 2026</i>