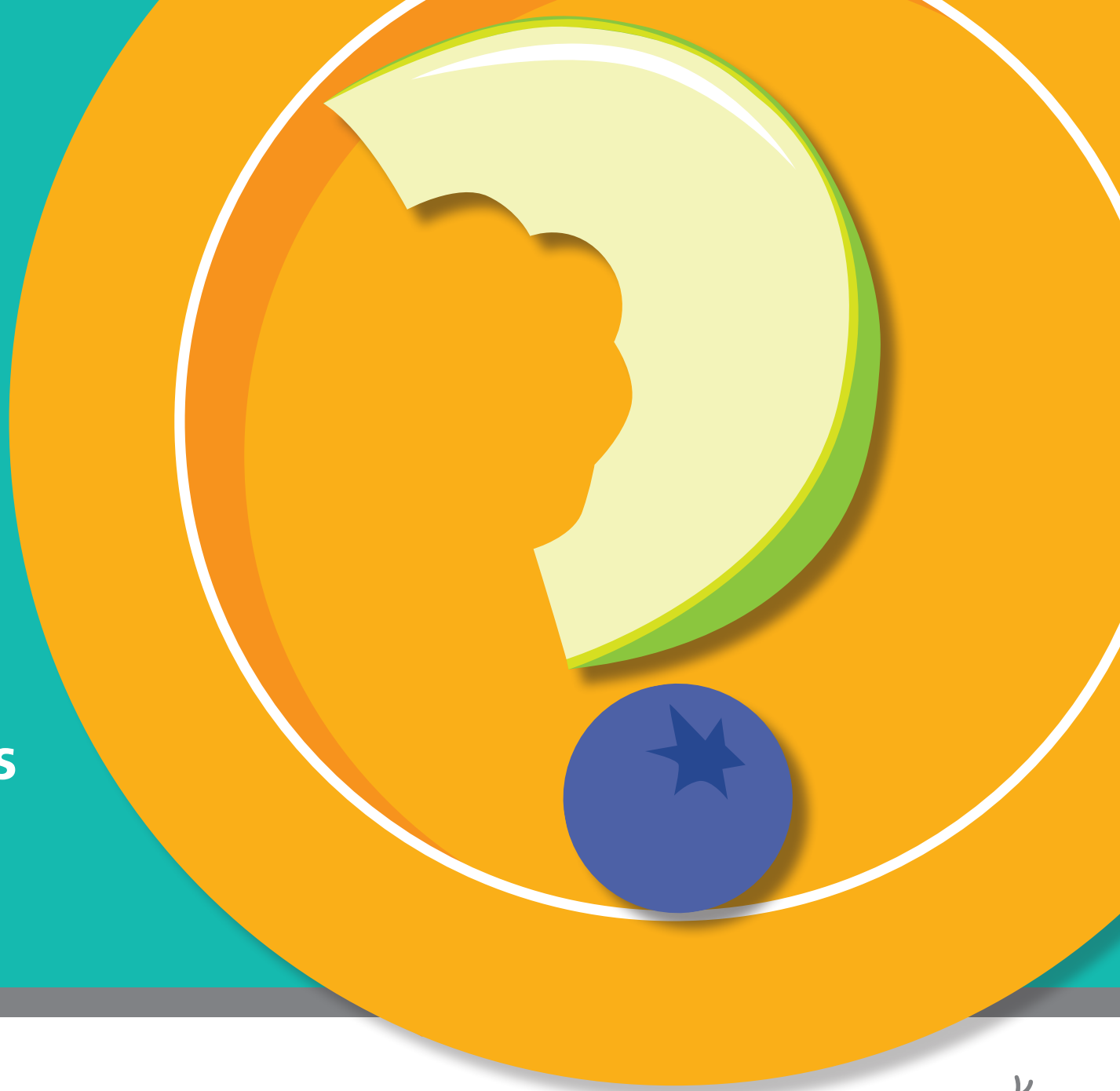


Free Healthy Nursery Meals

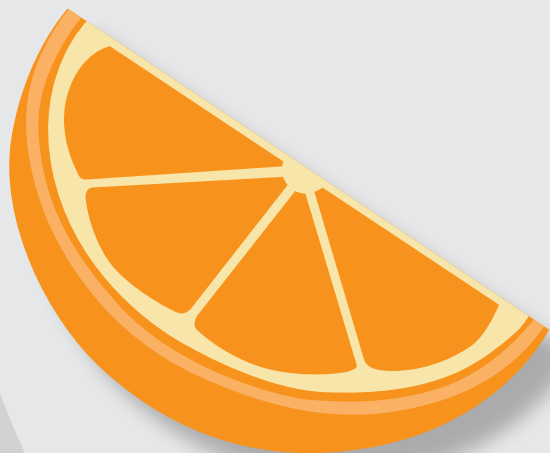
A guide for settings

September 2022



Contents

Introduction	3
Funding	4
1 Eating environments and positive meal times	5
Positive meal times	6
2 A healthy balanced day	7
Portion sizes	7
Breakfast	8
Lunch	8
Snacks	9
3 Sugar reduction	10
4 Milk or water only options	11
5 Packed lunches	12
6 Attendance patterns	13
7 Opportunities for learning	14
Useful resources	15



Introduction

In July 2019, Southwark Council introduced Free Healthy Nursery Meals (FHNM) for school nursery classes and maintained nursery schools.

Evidence shows that the best time for setting healthy behaviours, in order to prevent children becoming overweight or obese as adults, or developing poor eating habits, is during the early years¹. It is important to set healthy eating habits at a young age, so that these behaviours can continue into primary school and onwards. FHNM can also help support food security and reduce childcare costs for parents and carers during the cost of living crisis.

The aim of the Early Years Foundation Stage is to ensure every child gets the best possible start in life; experiences from birth to five have a major impact on future life chances. Snack and meal times are important for good health and nutrition for young children. When planned appropriately, they also offer rich opportunities for them to learn valuable social and self-care skills.

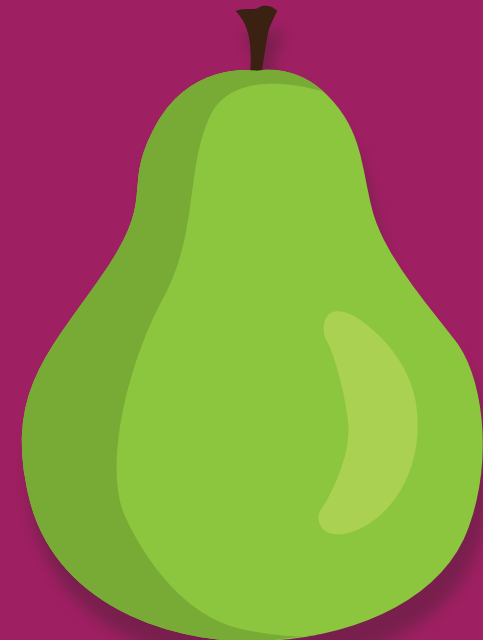
Delivering programmes that address nutritional inequalities and provide an equality of opportunity such as the FHNM programme, are now more important than ever in giving children the best start in Life.

¹ *Nutrition Matters for the Early Years report*

² *This guide includes information from a number of national guidance documents with contributions from Evelina London's Community Children's Nutrition and Dietetics and recommendations from Cookwise, an independent organisation that have been reviewing school food provision across the borough.*

This guide² provides an overview of the seven key components of FHNM:

- 1 Eating environments and positive meal times
- 2 A healthy balanced day, including portion size
- 3 Sugar reduction
- 4 Water and milk only
- 5 Packed lunches
- 6 Attendance patterns
- 7 Opportunities for learning



Introduction cont

Funding

FHNM is funded at (i) £1.40 per meal in school based nursery classes, or (ii) £1.78 per meal in maintained nurseries. The number of meals per child is calculated based on their funded hours, as follows.

For school based nursery classes:

- If a child is eligible for 30 hours of funding, the school will be allocated to £7.00 a week (equivalent of 5 meals per week)
- If a child is eligible for 15 hours of funding, the school will be allocated to £4.20 a week (equivalent of 3 meals per week)

For maintained nurseries:

- If a child is eligible for 30 hours of funding, the school will be allocated to £8.90 a week (equivalent of 5 meals per week)
- If a child is eligible for 15 hours of funding, the school will be allocated to £5.34 a week (equivalent of 3 meals per week)

A 91% attendance rule is applied to the funding. This is based on average sickness, absences and those who choose to opt out. Two payments will be made per financial year; one in the summer term and one in the autumn term, and will be based on the most recent January census.

It is the responsibility of each school to decide how this funding is used for lunches, breakfasts or to provide healthy snacks throughout the day. This is to best suit the needs of children, attendance patterns and onsite facilities.

Ideally, the funding is to be used for healthy lunches or healthy breakfasts. Should a child not be able to attend for either, the funding can be used to provide a healthy mid-morning, or mid-afternoon snack-meal.



1 Eating environments and positive meal times

A positive eating environment plays an important role in promoting healthy eating habits and successful meal times.

Creating the right environment should be a collaboration with children, staff and parents to ensure everyone has a say in making mealtimes a positive experience for all children.

Top tips for creating positive eating environments for young children:

- Provide family style eating, set clear routines with hand washing and encourage children to set the table
- Use size appropriate plates, cutlery and cups
- Create inviting places to sit and eat, that support conversations
- Encourage positive role modelling, with adults and children eating together
- Display age appropriate healthy eating resources

Further information on creating inviting eating environments may be found in the [Eat Better Start Better guide](#)

1 Eating environments and positive meal times cont

Positive meal times

Learning to eat a wide range of food is a gradual process for many young children, and some may need to be exposed to a new food up to 10 to 15 times before readily accepting it³. Food refusal is a normal part of child development and will often peak at around 2 years of age⁴.

Early years settings play a very important role in helping children to explore new foods during mealtimes and in the learning environment.

A number of factors can affect a child's mealtime behaviour, including:

- Negative feeding experiences during infancy and early childhood
- Previously experiencing medical problems associated with feeding such as reflux or allergies
- Chronic physical issues such as iron deficiency anaemia, constipation or dental problems.

Top tips for creating a positive mealtime⁵:

- Avoid pressurising a child to eat, it is always better for a child to eat because they want to
- Avoid using food as a reward, as it makes some foods seem more desirable than others
- Make sure that there is enough time for children 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.

³ Eat Better, Start Better guide

⁴ If a child is perceived to have poor growth, low body weight or is eating less than 10 foods, you should discuss this with parents and carers, who in turn can seek support from their Health Visitor or GP to consider if a referral for a nutritional assessment is needed

⁵ Eat Better, Start Better guide

2 A healthy balanced day

For young children, a healthy balanced diet should include:

- **Starchy food:** 4 portions per day
- **Fruit and vegetables:** 5 portions per day
- **Dairy and alternatives:** 3 portions per day
- **Protein:** 2-3 portions per day

Portion sizes

Young children have relatively high-energy requirements for their size and have only small stomachs.

To make sure young children get the energy and nutrients they need throughout the day it is important that they eat little and often (three snack times throughout the day is recommended by First Steps Nutrition⁶). Good communication with carers and parents is therefore important to help you work in partnership to make sure the needs of the children are met.

Be mindful that the appetites of children during the early years can be very variable so there is no 'perfect' portion size. **First Steps Nutrition** have produced a guide for portion sizes for young children. The guide has visual representation of portions on fixed plate sizes, referring to this will support plating up.



⁶ First Steps Nutrition, *Eating well: Snacks for 1-4 years*



2 A healthy balanced day cont

Breakfast

Breakfast is an important meal of the day, whether it is eaten at home or at nursery.

A healthy breakfast should include:

- One portion of starchy carbohydrate e.g. breakfast cereals or bread
- A portion of fruit or vegetables
- A portion of dairy or dairy alternative e.g. milk with cereal or a low sugar yogurt

Sugar-coated and chocolate-flavoured cereals should be avoided. Try to keep to less than 5% sugar (5g per 100g dry weight) cereals.

More helpful information and examples of breakfast plans can be found in the [Eat Better Start Better guide](#).

Lunch

A two-course lunch should comply with the following guidelines and the Southwark Council dessert policy (*Appendix 1*). If the main school lunches meet these guidelines then a good option would be to serve smaller portions in the nursery class.

Main course guidelines

Over a week's menu there should be:

- Three different starchy foods, provide wholegrain starchy foods for at least one breakfast, lunch and tea each week
- At least one portion of fruit or vegetables with every meal, with a variety across the week
- A portion of protein each day. This could be beans, pulses, fish, eggs or meat (red meat or poultry) to provide a variety across the week
- A meat free day once a week, using alternatives such as pulses or beans
- One portion of sustainable oily fish (salmon, sardines, pilchards) at least once every 3 weeks
- Limit fried starchy foods to a maximum of once a week. Limit meat processed products to no more than once a week

[Public Health England](#) have a range of example menus for early years settings that meet the above guidance.



2 A healthy balanced day cont

Snacks

- Balance the most commonly served snack of milk and fruit by serving raw vegetables several times a week, provide a starchy food as part of at least one snack each day
- To make fruit and vegetable snacks appealing and easy to eat, cut them up and present in a way to help children make positive choices
- Extensive, simple ideas for 100kcal nutritionally balanced light snacks can be found in [Eating well: snacks 1-4 year olds, p16-32, First Steps Nutrition](#)
- More substantial snack-meals are only to be served to those children who do not stay for lunch (see chapter 6)
- Substantial snack-meals must not contain high fat, high salt, high sugar foods or processed meat, e.g. pastries, sausage rolls, biscuits, cake, processed fruits

Top tips for a sustainable menu

- Have fewer meat dishes. Include more pulses, beans and lentils
- Use sustainable fish
- Avoid processed food. Use seasonal, and where possible, local produce
- Use dairy alternatives sometimes
- Aim for snacks to be fruit and vegetable based



3 Sugar reduction

Starchy foods, such as potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and yam are the best sources of energy for young children, as they contain other important nutrients.

Children do not need sugary foods such as sweets, biscuits, cakes or fizzy drinks for energy.

More helpful information and examples can be found in the [Eat Better Start Better guide](#).

Southwark Council's nursery dessert policy (*Appendix 1*) and water-only schools policy (*Appendix 2*) further support the reduction of sugar.



Top tips for reducing sugar consumption:

Choose:

- Fruit canned in juice rather than added sugar or syrup
- Yogurt or fromage frais that are low in sugar (e.g. Greek yogurt, plain natural yogurt)

- Choose reduced salt and sugar baked beans

Offer:

- Dried fruit at meal times only as chewing it releases sugar which can stick to children's teeth and cause tooth decay. Serving dried fruit with other foods helps to reduce the risks
- A choice of milk or water only during the day.

Try:

- Celebrating birthdays with fun activities or games, or by encouraging parents to choose a book instead of bringing in sweet treats.



4 Milk or water only options

It is a welfare requirement of the Early Years Foundation Stage that fresh drinking water is available and accessible for all children throughout the day. Children should be able to help themselves to water where possible⁷.

Children should be prompted frequently to drink water as this is often not a consideration for busy learners.

The benefits of choosing water or milk

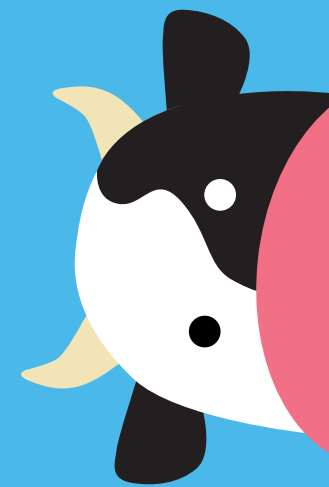
- Tap water is free at source and by using reusable bottles you can help reduce the amount of single-use plastics
- It is better for children's teeth and helping to maintain a healthy weight. Sugary drinks can contribute to many preventable health conditions.

Southwark's water-only schools policy was launched by the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, on 1st March 2020. Find more information in our water-only schools policy (*Appendix 2*).



The Mayor of London's [water only toolkit](#) provides further information.

⁷ Eat Better, Start Better guide



5 Packed lunches

We hope that the Free Healthy Nursery Meals funding will help you reduce the number of packed lunches being eaten in the nursery class, by enabling you to provide healthy meals or snacks.

We recommend the use of a packed lunch policy for the nursery class to ensure that all children are receiving a healthy balanced meal, even when their parents choose to provide a packed lunch option.

First Steps Nutrition have developed a useful [packed lunch guide](#) for children aged 1-4 years old. This includes a number of budget friendly, healthy recipes that can be shared with parents.

What should go into a packed lunch?

- One or two portions of starchy food, such as a sandwich or pasta. Wholegrains should be chosen sometimes
- One portion of protein such as egg, chicken or hummus
- At least one portion of fruit
- At least one portion of vegetables
- One portion of dairy or dairy alternatives, e.g. low sugar yogurt, cheese or milk to drink.



Right are suggestions of healthy packed lunches from the First Steps Nutrition packed lunches guide.

Top: Egg roll, cucumber and tomato, and yoghurt and blueberries

Bottom: Rice and peas, jerk chicken, sweetcorn, tomatoes and mango.

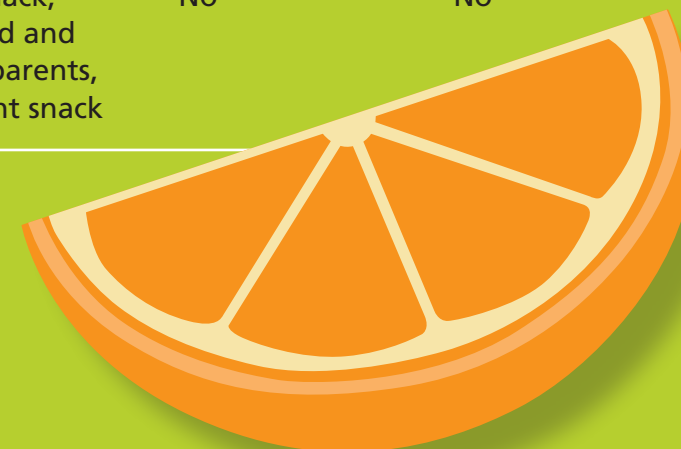
A packed lunch policy template can be found [here](#).



6 Attendance patterns

Ideally, the FHNM funding is to be used for healthy lunches or healthy breakfasts. Should a child not be able to attend for either, the funding can be used to provide a healthy mid morning, or mid afternoon snack-meal.

Attendance Pattern on a given day	Breakfast	Mid-morning snack	2 course lunch	Mid afternoon snack
Full day including breakfast	Yes	Light snack	Yes	Light snack
Full day, breakfast at home and staying for lunch	No	Light snack	Yes	Light snack
Half day including breakfast and staying for lunch	Yes	Light snack	Yes	No
Half day including breakfast leaving before for lunch	Yes	Substantial snack, communicated and agreed with parents, otherwise light snack	No	No
Half day, breakfast at home and staying for lunch	No	Light snack	Yes	No
Half day, breakfast at home, leaving before for lunch	No	Substantial snack, communicated and agreed with parents, otherwise light snack	No	No



7 Opportunities for learning

Learning happens everywhere and the routines around food are no exception. Whether breakfast, snack or lunch, the sharing of food is much more than just a refuelling exercise and provides opportunities across all **areas of learning**.

Depending on the needs of your children and the aims of your curriculum these times may be planned to exploit opportunities for speaking, listening, building relationships, self-regulation, cultures and communities and fine motor control as well as many more key skills.

The starting point should always be the needs of the children in your provision, the **statutory framework for the early years foundation stage** and your curriculum aims that focus on the skills, knowledge and abilities that you want children to have when they move onto the next stage of their education.

Ask yourself these questions

- What are the needs of my children and the key skills I want them to learn?
- How can the routines around food help me to provide opportunities for developing these key skills?
- What is the impact of the food routines that are in place and do they meet our learning aims?

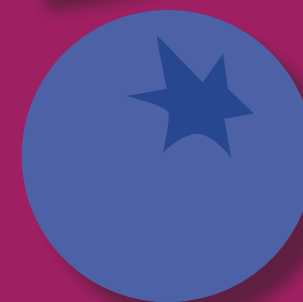
*If you need help a useful tool for auditing the quality of food routines is the **Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)** and further guidance may be found in the **Eat Better Start Better Guide**.*

***The Early Years Team** are also available to offer advice about finding learning opportunities.*



Useful resources

- **Public Health England guidance and example menus for early years settings:** the recipes meet the Early Years Foundation Stage welfare requirement, in providing 'healthy, balanced and nutritious' meals for children
- **Eat Better Start Better** voluntary food and drink guidelines for early years settings in England
- **First Steps Nutrition** provide great resources for early years settings on:
 - Portion sizes
 - Snacks
 - Packed lunches
 - Vegan diets
 - Cost effective recipes and getting the most out of Healthy Start vouchers
 - Sustainable menus
- **Evelina London Community Children's Nutrition and Dietetics Service** can provide support for children with special needs in Lambeth & Southwark.
- **The Food Standards Agency** provides clear guidance for schools on managing allergies, as well as child friendly posters that can be displayed.
- **Healthy Start vouchers** can be used to buy healthy foods. The cards are for anyone who is pregnant or caring for children under 4 years and on a low income. Healthy Start cards work just like a debit card and can be used to purchase plain cows' milk, fresh, frozen or tinned fruit and vegetables, fresh, dried or tinned pulses, and infant formula.
- The Southwark Free Vitamin D scheme provides pregnant women and people, new mums and children under four with free vitamin supplements. Low levels of vitamin D in babies and children can lead to rickets, which affects the way bones develop and grow. These free vitamins can be accessed by visiting the following **pharmacies**.



Appendix 1: Nursery dessert policy (October 2019)

The Southwark nursery dessert policy

This policy is applicable to all maintained nurseries and nursery classes within primary schools in Southwark, participating in the Council's Free Healthy Nursery Meals (FHNM) programme.

Nursery lunches (main course and second course) should complement each other to ensure balance and variety, and to provide 30% of a child's daily nutritional requirements.



Nursery lunches are required to meet all of the following criteria:

- Each lunch to include a main course and a second course. A second course can be either a 'starter' or a 'dessert'.
- Only one second course dish to be made available at lunch (with the exception of a food allergen alternative option).
- Second courses served over a week to include:
 - **Three times a week** - fruit (such as seasonal fruit salad) with a dairy-based accompaniment such as natural yoghurt with no added sugar.
 - **Once a week** – low salt savoury crackers or breadsticks served with fruit or vegetables and a dairy item such as cheese.
 - **Once a week** – fruit based pudding or cake, containing minimal free sugars and a content of at least 50% fruit or vegetables when measured by weight of the raw ingredients (e.g. fruit crumble, fruit pie, fruit sponge, fruit cobbler).
- Dairy options with fruit could include natural or Greek yoghurt with no added sugar, or low sugar varieties of fromage frais, custard, rice pudding or semolina.
- No confectionery, chocolate and chocolate-coated products to be served.

In addition to the policy requirements above, the second course of nursery lunches should also meet the following:

- Canned fruit should be canned in juice and not syrup.
- Whole milk yoghurt and cheese should be used.
- Use fresh or dried fruit to sweeten dishes instead of sugar/alongside reduced sugar.
- If providing ice cream, choose dairy ice cream as it contains more calcium than non-dairy ice cream, and limit to once a week with fruit-based desserts at meal times.
- Avoid artificial sweeteners when choosing or preparing desserts, puddings and cakes.
- Vary the desserts you offer with lunch each week.
- Ensure age appropriate portion sizes (see Appendix B for links to portion size guidance).

Appendix 1B: Recipe and portion size guidance

Example menus for early years settings in England, Part 2: Recipes (HM Government) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/example-menus-for-early-years-settings-in-england>

Eat better, start better – a practical guide (Action for Children) – Page 25 <https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Eat-Better-Start-Better1.pdf>

The table to the right has been extracted from the “Eat Better, Start Better” practical guide and demonstrates dessert menu suggestions and typical portion sizes in practice. Portion sizes are typical example portion sizes for children aged one to four years, and are not suitable for children under one year old.



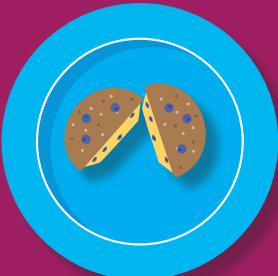
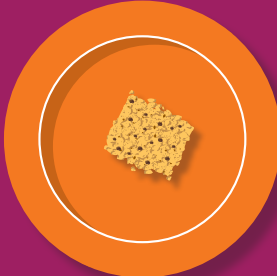


Type of dessert	Typical portion sizes (as served cooked)	Typical portion sizes in practice, images not actual size	
Hot fruit-based desserts	Apple and Rhubarb crumble (60g) with custard (60g) Crunchy summer crumble (60g) and yoghurt (60g)		
Cakes or biscuits containing fruit	Blueberry muffin (35-40g) Banana and raisin flapjack (35-40g)		
Cold desserts	Seasonal fruit salad (40g) Winter fruit salad (40g) with vanilla sauce (60g)		

Plate size is 20cm, Bowl size is 15cm

Appendix 2: Water only schools policy (Refreshed September 2022)

A water only school is one where the only drink available to students is water (and milk at least once per day).

Policy requirements

1. The only drinks to be available to primary school and nursery class children are:
 - Plain water
 - Plain reduced fat milk (including semi skimmed, lactose free and soya milk).
2. If a child has a medical condition that requires them to drink sugary drinks then this is treated as an exception to this policy and must be approved by the school leadership team.
3. Other drinks must not be made available from school canteens, caterers and in house teams must follow this policy, removing drinks other than water or milk from their offer. Free drinking water provided must be from water fountains and jugs on tables and not for sale in plastic bottles.
4. Pupils must have free access to drinking water throughout the day and be encouraged to drink it (see *Appendix 1* for recommendations).

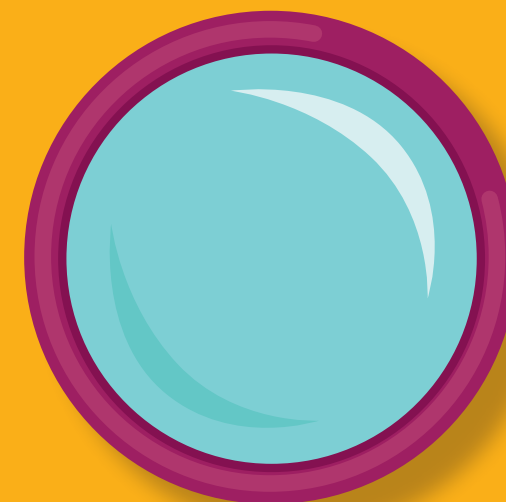
5. The water-only policy is to be applied to all breakfast and afterschool clubs, as well as extra-curricular events such as class parties, sports days and school fetes.
6. Teachers should be water-only role models and regularly drink water in front of their students to highlight the importance of hydration. Staff must not be seen to be drinking sugary or fizzy drinks by children.
7. Parents must not bring drinks other than water to the playground before and after school. Families must not pack drinks in lunch boxes (water is provided at lunch).
8. Banners and posters around the school should promote water consumption (*Appendix 2*). Schools can further promote healthy drink choices by participating in the annual Fizz Free February campaign.

This policy support schools to meet the school food standards, The Requirements for School Food Regulations 2014.

This policy meets the voluntary food and drink guidelines for early years settings in England. More information about these guidelines can be found in the '**Eat better, start better**' guide.

Policy scope and implementation

This policy will be mandatory for all primary schools in Southwark, including nursery classes and maintained nurseries from the start of the autumn term, September 2022.



Appendix 2B:

- Pour water into beakers at the table for very young children, water jugs are heavy!
- Offer refills
- Do not ask children to collect water from a central location, children tend to drink less if they have to fetch the water
- Make sure there are enough water jugs and beakers to be placed on each dining room table.
- All children should be actively encouraged to drink water during lunchtime and at break times throughout the day

Appendix 2C: Better Health – HealthierFamilies

GLA water only toolkit

Examples of water-only posters that could be put up in schools to promote drinking water:



More resources are available online: <https://www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/>



Revised September 2022
First issued September 2021

