



Food and Nutrition Policy

Updated: September 2025

It is always the aim of My Little Explorers to ensure that the children in our care receive high-quality nutrition at snack and meal times. Our approach to food and nutrition is carefully designed to incorporate the forest school ethos with ensuring EYFS nutritional guidelines are met.

Healthy eating paired with physical activity is vital for proper growth and development, and we recognise our position to have a positive influence on the attitudes that children and their parents/guardians have towards food and a healthy lifestyle. We encourage children to eat healthily and teach them that healthy eating is not about denying foods that they enjoy, but is having a varied and balanced diet and enjoying lots of different foods.

Policy Statement

We regard snack and mealtimes as a social time for children. At all times, we aim to ensure the quality of food offered to children is of a high standard.

In addition to the food and drink provided, My Little Explorers will ensure that staff preparing food are appropriately trained and that consistent and high levels of food hygiene practices are maintained.

This policy has been developed in line with the EYFS nutritional guidance and adapted to suit the demands of our provision, the needs of the children and feedback from parents and/or carers and staff. From September 2025, the EYFS statutory framework will include a safeguarding and welfare requirement that asks providers to follow this nutrition guidance unless there is a valid reason not to. Our policy fully aligns with this requirement.

Record Keeping

Upon joining the setting, each child's individual dietary needs, preferences and any allergies are requested on the enrolment information. This information is discussed with the child's family, and regular consultation is held to ensure the information held is correct.

Information about children's individual dietary needs and allergies is clearly displayed, and all educators, staff, students and volunteers are fully informed.

Food Hygiene and Training

To ensure that food prepared is done so in the best possible conditions, all or most of our staff are required to obtain a Safe Food Hygiene certificate prior to, or within the first three months of employment.

To maintain high levels of hygiene in food preparation areas, we will:

- Provide staff with procedures for food preparation
- Ensure that food preparation areas are kept clean
- Ensure that appropriate clothing, such as aprons and gloves, are worn by those preparing food where necessary
- Check all food purchased for expiry dates and quality
- Store foods so that items with longer shelf life are placed behind those with shorter shelf life
- Check all food at the time of use to ensure that it is still in date
- Food that has been opened is labelled with the date opened and date for disposal (in accordance with the instructions on the packaging)
- Note the temperatures of the foods post-heating
- Notify Ofsted of an outbreak of food poisoning - Within 14 days

During campfire cooking activities, a minimum of one practitioner with a Level 2 Outdoor Food and Hygiene qualification is always present.

My Little Explorers Forest Nursery was awarded a Food Hygiene Rating of 5 (Very Good) by Test Valley Borough Council in 2024.

Food Provision and Menu Planning

Our menus are designed to provide children with a balanced diet covering the 4 main food groups: starchy foods, fruits and vegetables, dairy and alternatives, and protein foods. Food provided is nutritious, varied and of high quality.

Weekly Menu Planning

Menus are planned on a weekly basis to ensure nutritional balance across all meals and snacks. Each week includes:

- A minimum of 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per child per day across all meals and snacks
- Adequate protein sources from meat, fish, eggs, beans, and pulses
- Wholegrain or high-fibre starchy foods, where appropriate
- Dairy products or suitable alternatives for calcium and protein
- At least two vegetarian meals per week to support both nutrition and sustainability

Age-Appropriate Nutrition

- **Babies (0-12 months):** Weaning foods introduced per Department of Health guidance. Pureed and finger foods are offered to support development. No added salt or sugar. Small, appetite-appropriate portions.
- **Toddlers (12-24 months):** Foods are cut to prevent choking and mashed/chopped appropriately. Portion sizes are approximately 1/3 of adult portions. Whole milk provided.
- **Children (2-5 years):** Portion sizes are approximately 1/2 of adult portions, adjusted for individual appetite. Semi-skimmed milk offered. Self-serving is encouraged for independence.

Salt and Sugar Guidelines

In line with EYFS nutritional guidance, we strictly limit salt and sugar intake:

- **Salt:** No salt is added during food preparation.
- **Sugar:** No sugar is added during food preparation. Foods high in sugar are limited to once weekly in small portions (approximately 1/4 of the normal serving size)
- **Saturated Fat:** Foods high in saturated fat are limited and balanced with healthier alternatives

Children in forest school settings are naturally more active due to the outdoor-focused ethos that encourages climbing, exploring, and constant physical engagement with nature. Given this higher activity level and energy expenditure, these children are not completely restricted from foods with higher salt, sugar, and saturated fat content, as their bodies require adequate fuel to sustain their energetic outdoor learning experiences.

However, in line with the EYFS guidance, these foods are limited to once a week and given in small quantities. Foods described as 'low fat' are not used, nor will any food containing nuts or nut products.

We do not offer desserts; however, after each meal, children will have access to fruit and/or plain yoghurt if they wish. Children under 2 will be given fromage frais.

My Little Explorers aim to introduce new menus at least twice a year to include seasonal produce and give the children the chance to try different foods.

Drinks and Hydration

Water Access

Children are asked to bring a water bottle in with them. The bottles stay with the children in a designated box, which they have access to throughout the day. Staff inform children that they can ask for more water at any point during the day and actively remind children to drink water throughout the day.

Given the active, outdoor nature of forest school activities, staff pay particular attention to ensuring adequate hydration, especially during warmer weather.

Water intake is monitored, and children are encouraged to drink regularly, particularly:

- Before and after physical activities
- During warm weather
- At regular intervals throughout the day (minimum every 30 minutes)

Other Drinks

Children have access to milk at snack times and dairy-free options. Dairy milk is provided through The Nursery Milk Scheme.

- Whole milk is provided for children under 2 years
- Semi-skimmed milk is provided for children over 2 years
- No fruit juices or sugary drinks are provided
- Dairy-free alternatives are available for children with allergies or intolerances

Mealtimes

We organise meal and snack times so that the children can foster independence. Mealtimes are considered social times where children sit amongst peers and discussions about the food are initiated, encouraging socialising and learning opportunities.

Assistance is given for children under 12 months. Children are given cutlery to encourage independence during mealtimes.

Mealtime Structure

- Breakfast (if applicable): 7:45-8:45 am
- Morning snack: 10:00 - 10:30 am
- Lunch: 12:00-1:00 pm
- Afternoon snack: 2:00-2:30 pm
- Tea: 16:00-16:30 pm

Staff sit with children during meals to model positive eating behaviours and engage in conversation about food, encouraging children to try new foods and develop healthy eating habits.

Cooking with the Children

Throughout spring and summer, older children have opportunities to prepare lunch over the campfire. Children actively participate in food preparation and cooking when safely possible. This creates valuable learning experiences about ingredients and their origins, particularly when harvesting from nearby areas such as elderflower, blackberries, or wild garlic.

Children gather around the campfire for meals and are encouraged to collaborate in cleaning their bowls, plates, and utensils afterward.

Food Brought in from Home

Families may wish to provide food from home, and some children may need to bring their own meals and snacks for medical or cultural reasons.

Parents and/or carers are informed of the food and nutrition policy and asked to consider our commitment to providing healthy, balanced and nutritious food when preparing and providing food from home.

Guidelines for packed lunches include:

- Include at least one portion of fruit or vegetables
- Avoid foods high in salt, sugar, and saturated fat
- Include a source of protein
- Include a starchy food (preferably wholegrain)
- No nuts or nut products
- No sweets or chocolate

Sustainability

At My Little Explorers, we are committed to sustainability by minimising food waste and promoting healthy, balanced meals. We offer small portions to reduce waste, with leftover food available for staff, and limit red meat to once every three weeks. At least two vegetarian meals are provided each week, supporting both nutrition and sustainability. Food is also incorporated into learning through cooking, stories, and singing, helping children appreciate the value of healthy eating.

To further reduce our environmental impact, we separate food waste into compostable bags and engage children in food production through activities like growing vegetables and herbs. These hands-on experiences not only teach children where food comes from but also encourage a deeper connection to nature and sustainable practices.

Celebrations and Special Occasions

If a child wishes to celebrate their birthday in the setting, parents and/or carers are welcome to provide a birthday treat for the child and their peers to enjoy. As there are multiple birthdays in the setting, we recommend that foods high in sugar and preservatives be avoided. We recommend bringing in fruit platters or non-edible options like reading the child's favourite story from home around the campfire, stickers or bubbles.

As part of our forest school provision, on special occasions, such as leavers' celebrations or seasonal stay-and-play sessions, we may provide a snack to toast on the campfire that contains increased levels of salt or sugar. In line with the EYFS nutritional guidelines, these types of snacks are limited and infrequent. Parents and/or carers will be notified of the snack before consumption and allowed to request that their child be given an alternative snack.

Policy Review

This policy is reviewed annually or when there are changes to EYFS nutritional guidance. Staff training on nutrition and food safety is updated regularly to ensure compliance with current guidance.

The policy is available to all parents and carers and forms part of our commitment to providing high-quality early years care in line with EYFS requirements.