*This is an example early years packed lunch policy based on the latest national guidance.*

*Providing clear, supportive guidance on healthy lunchboxes helps parents:*

* *Promote better nutrition: Encourages balanced meals with fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins, supporting children’s growth and development*
* *Establish healthy habits early: Shapes lifelong eating behaviours and reduces the risk of childhood obesity and related health issues.*
* *Reduce confusion and stress: Offers practical, easy-to-follow ideas that simplify lunch prep for busy families.*
* *Support equity: Ensures all children, regardless of background, have access to nutritious food during the day.*
* *Create consistency: Aligns home and early years settings in promoting a healthy food environment.*

*RESOURCES – INSERT LINKS*

* *You could also provide parents with a leaflet or a link to healthy and affordable packed lunch ideas so that they have a place to start. Check out the Better Health North Somerset Website for some free resources.*

[INSERT SETTING NAME] LUNCHBOX POLICY

**Purpose:**

This policy aims to support families in providing nutritious, balanced packed lunches for children in early years settings. It aligns with national efforts and guidelines[[1]](#footnote-1) to improve children's health, reduce inequalities, and promote lifelong healthy habits.

You might wish to disallow certain allergens in your setting.

**Objectives:**

* Promote healthy eating and reduce childhood obesity.
* Support parents with clear, practical guidance.
* Create a consistent food environment across home and setting.
* Encourage children to enjoy a variety of nutritious foods.

**Our Responsibilities:**

In order to support healthy eating and lifestyles, and promote the best health and wellbeing outcome for children in our settings:

We will:

* Share lunchbox tips and recipes from trusted sources like the NHS and Local Authority.
* Offer workshops or newsletters to support healthy choices.
* Encourage children to help prepare their lunchboxes.
* Encourage children to try new foods.
* Provide feedback to parents when needed.
* Celebrate healthy lunchboxes and share success stories.

**What to Include:**

A healthy diet is based on 4 key food groups. Parents are encouraged to provide a variety of each of these foods[[2]](#footnote-2).

* **Starchy foods**: Bread, wraps, pasta, rice, potatoes, breakfast cereals.
* **Protein**: Lean meats, meat alternatives, fish, eggs, beans, lentils, tofu.
* **Dairy**: Yoghurts, fromage-frais, milks, cheeses (including unsweetened and calcium fortified dairy free and plant-based alternatives)
* **Vegetables and fruit**: Fresh, frozen and tinned vegetables and fruits.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| FOOD GROUP | INCLUDE | LIMIT | AVOID |
| Starchy Foods | One portion of a starchy food. Try to priorities wholegrain options. | • Limit sugar and salt content in breakfast cereals. Choose those with the lowest sugar and salt content which are labelled as ‘low’ (green).  • Limit the salt content in bread and bread products. Choose those with a lower salt content which are labelled as ‘low’ (green) or ‘medium’ (amber) in salt.  • Limit starchy foods which have been fried.  • Limit tinned pasta in sauce (e.g. spaghetti hoops) and choose no added sugar options. | • Avoid cereals labelled as ‘high’ (red) in sugar such as sugar-coated or chocolate-flavoured cereals.  • Avoid flavoured dried rice, pasta and noodle products e.g. packets and pots of instant flavoured noodles, pasta and rice. |
| Protein | Provide a portion of protein as part of lunch each day. | • Limit the provision of processed meat products (e.g. sausages, breaded chicken, meatballs), processed fish products (e.g. fish fingers, fish cakes), and products made from meat alternatives (e.g. vegetarian sausages) as these products can be high in saturated fat and salt. |  |
| Dairy | One portion of dairy, or of a calcium fortified and unsweetened dairy alternative. |  | • Avoid sweetened yoghurts and fromage frais (including non-dairy alternatives) and choose plain unsweetened options. |
| Fruits and Vegetables | Provide at least 1 portion of vegetables and/or fruit. |  | • Avoid fruit tinned in syrup and choose fruit tinned in juice.  • Avoid added salt and sugar in tinned vegetables and choose no added salt and sugar options or those tinned in water. |
| Drinks | Provide only fresh tap water and plain milk to drink. |  | • Avoid skimmed and 1% cow’s milk.  • Avoid sugary drinks (including fruit juices, squash and smoothies). |

**Additional foods to avoid:**

To support a healthy environment, we additionally ask parents to:

- Avoid foods high in saturated fat, salt, and/or sugars like cakes, sweet and savoury pastries, biscuits, crisps, chocolate and other confectionary.

- Avoid artificial sweeteners as they may encourage children to prefer very sweet foods.

- Avoid [INSERT ALLERGEN] if relevant to your setting.

**Portion sizes:**

Portion size refers to 1 part of a meal. For example - 1 portion of vegetables alongside a portion of carbohydrates and a portion of protein could be 1meal.

A portion size for a child aged 1 to 5 is generally smaller than an adult portion.

There are no official guidelines on exactly how much food children need, although the DFE has produced a guide which might be helpful[[3]](#footnote-3). This is reproduced below.

Portions should be appropriate for a child’s body size and appetite. For toddlers, portion size is usually roughly the size of their clenched fist. About half a piece of fruit (cut appropriately) or a tablespoon of vegetables is a good portion size for a snack.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Food Group** | **Portion Size** |
|  |  |
| **Fruit and Vegetables – at least 5 portions a day** | |
| Cooked and raw | 40 g |
| **Carbohydrates – 4 portions each day** | |
| Cooked rice, pasta and potatoes | 80g |
| Bread | 25g |
| Average sized potato | 1 |
| **Dairy and alternatives – 3 portions each day** | |
| Milk | 150ml |
| Cheese (sliced or grated) | 15g |
| Cottage cheese | 30g |
| Plain yoghurt | 60g |
| **Protein – 2 portions each day** | |
| Egg | 55g |
| Baked beans | 55g |
| Meat, fish and poultry | 40g |
| Most beans and hummus | 40g |

**Helpful resources and lunchbox ideas:**

[Lunchbox ideas and recipes – Healthier Families - NHS](https://www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/recipes/healthier-lunchboxes/)

[Eating Well Under 5 | Better Health North Somerset](https://www.betterhealthns.co.uk/information/eating-well-under-5/)

[Food Support | Better Health North Somerset](https://www.betterhealthns.co.uk/information/food-support/)

DFE Portion Size Guide

**Extra support:**

If you would like any extra support with applying this lunchbox policy, or with accessing food in line with this policy, please contact [INSERT CONTACT NAME].

1. [Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition guidance](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6839b752210698b3364e86fc/Early_years_foundation_stage_nutrition_guidance.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [A\_healthy\_balanced\_diet\_for\_children.pdf](https://assets.ctfassets.net/dvmeh832nmjc/1xYCZwYWqIaiFfCyddkL32/1bceae0a6144c7e7d395852580c1a17f/A_healthy_balanced_diet_for_children.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [Portion\_sizes.pdf](https://assets.ctfassets.net/dvmeh832nmjc/1OEirRzB8F7iMahdZkWNDb/3e7eb82bf95af23b06266b7fced62575/Portion_sizes.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)