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Food and Nutrition and Mealtimes Policy

Statement of Intent

York Childcare Settings (YC) are committed to providing healthy, balanced and nutritious food for all children. We recognise that promoting healthy eating is an essential part of Safeguarding and supporting children's health, development and wellbeing. We comply with the Early Years Statutory Framework 2025 (EYFS) 3:62 page 36.

We provide healthy, balanced and nutritious food which ensures that all children:

- Get the right amount 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.
- Develop positive eating habits early on.

We are registered as a food provider with the local authority Environmental Health Department.

Aims

We aim to follow the [Early Years Foundation Stage Nutrition Guidance 2025](#).

We will aim to follow guidelines set out in '[Eat Better Start Better](#)' and the [Eatwell Guide](#) to define Governments recommendations on eating healthily and achieving a balanced diet.

We aim to meet the needs of most children with specific dietary requirements. The dietary needs of all children are discussed before a child starts at nursery and a 'Safe Food Agreement' completed where a particular need is identified, the details of which will be made known to all staff working at that nursery prior to the child attending. Please refer to our Food Allergies and Intolerances Policy.



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Procedures

Staff are required to follow the details stated on each child's Safe Food Agreement in order to support the individual needs of every child – any failures in complying with the requirements of a Safe Food Agreement will result in disciplinary action.

Occasionally it may not be possible to accommodate a specific dietary requirement in a nursery kitchen. In this situation parents may be asked to provide food themselves as a reasonable adjustment for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), or the offer of a place may need to be reviewed.

Parents are responsible for ensuring safe preparation, storage, and transportation of food to nursery when it has been agreed that food from home will be provided. The nursery is not responsible for food prepared at home in line with the Food Safety Requirements.

Snacks and lunches brought to nursery by other parents/carers should be peanut and nut free. The nursery will ensure that parents/carers are regularly reminded and will monitor the contents of any lunches and snacks sent in from home.

All staff working in nursery kitchens must adhere to hygiene procedures and must maintain an up-to-date Food Hygiene Certificate. Clean clothes/aprons must be worn, long hair tied back, nails clean and short; disposable gloves should be worn for handling food (and disposed of after use) and any cuts covered with waterproof plasters. Where gloves are not in use then staff will adhere to robust hand hygiene rules with regular handwashing after handling food stuffs. Jewellery such as rings and watches should be removed.

York Childcare (YC) employs a cook at each nursery to prepare and serve snacks and meals for the children.

In conjunction with the job description, the Nursery Cook is responsible for:

- Maintaining and updating the '[Safer Food, Better Business](#)' folder which is stored in each kitchen, ensuring the completion of daily diary sheets.
- Completing daily/weekly cleaning of the kitchen.
- Developing and implementing a rota for cleaning/deep cleaning requirements of the kitchen and associated equipment in line with current Environmental Health guidelines.
- Efficient stock rotation and use of produce, to minimise waste.



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- Ensuring they are aware of the specific dietary needs of the children with SEND or additional needs particularly those with Safe Food Agreements.

Most food will be homemade, with convenience and pre-packed food kept to a minimum. A variety of fruit and vegetables will be served daily as part of a balanced diet. These may be fresh, frozen, or canned (where possible not in syrup or brine).

Consideration will be given to the ingredients of purchased food items to take into account salt, sugar and saturated fat content. Where possible, lower sugar/salt options will be purchased. Sugar will be kept to a minimum as an added ingredient; salt will not be added to any food in conjunction with the stated allowances in the [Eatwell Guide](#).

In accordance with regulations regarding specific labelling of food allergens effective from December 2014, allergen information will be available for all ingredients used at each nursery.

Birth to 1 year

In the first year of life, babies follow individual feeding and sleeping patterns that can regularly change. Staff will ask parents and/or carers about their baby's current pattern. These patterns should be kept consistent and should be part of the baby's care each day, wherever possible.

Staff should be aware of the signs (feeding cues) a baby will show when they are hungry (e.g. mouth opening, puckering, smacking lips, or turning of head towards the bottle) and when they are full (e.g. milk spilling out of the mouth, closing mouth, head turning away, splayed fingers and toes, or pushing the bottle away in an older baby). Children should be fed responsively according to their needs. This means feeding children whenever they show signs that they are hungry, feeding at their own pace and using the cues that they are full. Staff will never force a baby to finish a feed if they seem to be full. Overfeeding may upset their tummy, make them vomit or gain weight too quickly.



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Breastfeeding

In the UK, exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for around the first 6 months of a baby's life with continued breastfeeding throughout the first year and beyond for as long as the parent or carer and baby wishes to continue.

The NHS provides information on the benefits of breastfeeding - [NHS](#).

[NHS Start for Life](#) has helpful information and advice on breastfeeding.

Staff should support parents or carers wishing to continue breastfeeding and encourage them to provide breastmilk for their baby while attending the setting.

Supporting parents and/or carers to continue breastfeeding could include:

- providing a comfortable place to breastfeed within the setting
- signposting to evidence-based and expert information and support
- encouraging parents and/or carers who wish to provide expressed breastmilk for their babies and children to do so.

The NHS provides information on safe storage of expressed breast milk - [NHS](#).

Infant formula

If a baby is not exclusively breastfed, then first infant formula (first milk) should be the addition, or alternative, to breastmilk for babies in the first year of life, unless an alternative milk has been prescribed by a doctor.

The NHS provides information on [types of formula](#).

Good hygiene is very important when making up infant formula. Staff preparing infant formula should wash their hands thoroughly and all bottles, teats and other equipment should be sterilised and drip-dried before use.

Staff must follow the instructions on how to prepare the formula carefully. Adding too much powder to a feed can make a baby constipated and dehydrated; adding too little will mean insufficient energy and nutrients are provided.



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Powdered infant formula is not sterile and therefore needs to be made up with water which is boiled and left to cool for no more than 30 minutes so that it stays at a temperature of at least 70°C to kill any harmful bacteria. You then need to let the made formula cool before it is given to a baby.

NHS Start for Life has advice on [how to make up infant formula](#) and [how to sterilise equipment](#).

Babies aged 6 – 12 months

Introducing solid foods or weaning

Introducing a baby to solid foods is sometimes called complementary feeding or weaning. This should start when a baby is around 6 months old in collaboration with parents and/or carers. Staff will need to continue to give the baby breast or formula milk alongside solid foods.

The introduction of solid foods should only start once a baby can:

- stay in a sitting position and support their own head
- coordinate their eyes, hands and mouth so they can look at their food, pick it up and put it in their mouth
- swallow food (rather than spit it back out)

Introducing solid foods helps a baby learn new skills such as chewing and biting. It also introduces new foods, flavours and textures to them. Babies develop at different rates. Staff must have ongoing discussions with parents and/or carers about the stage their child is at in regard to introducing solid foods and assumptions must not be made based on age. This includes reaching agreement with parents and/or carers about when and how they want to start introducing solid foods.

Staff need to understand what foods babies have been exploring at home and where they are in the food introduction process.

Staff will go at the baby's pace and let them show when they are hungry or full. For example, they may firmly close their mouth or turn their head away.

The baby will show you if they are ready to move on to the next step, for example by chewing, moving food around their mouth and swallowing it. It is important to share information with parents and/or carers to track the baby's progress in becoming a



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confident eater. Babies develop at different rates. Age is just an indication so let them go at their own pace.

NHS Start for Life has advice on [how to start weaning](#).

The Food Standards Agency has 2 posters on [how to prepare food safely to avoid choking](#).

First foods to introduce

From around 6 months of age, babies should be introduced to a wide range of foods, flavours and textures, alongside their usual milk feeds.

Wherever possible, the cook should prepare food from scratch and not provide pre-made foods from shops such as puree pouches unless these are provided by parents as a parental preference. This helps introduce babies to a range of appropriate flavours and textures.

Baby's first food could be a simple vegetable or fruit puree. To help baby get used to different textures and tastes quickly, moving onto mashed and finger foods (from purées or smooth blended foods) as soon as they are ready can let them get used to moving food around their mouths and swallowing it.

Start off with slightly bitter pureed or smooth blended vegetables (such as broccoli, cauliflower and spinach) This will help babies get used to a range of flavours (rather than just the sweeter ones like carrots and sweet potato).

Gradually increase the amount and variety of the different food groups. Further information on these can be found in the section on '[The 4 food groups](#)'.

It may take 10 tries or more for a baby to get used to new foods, flavours and textures. Staff will be patient and keep offering a variety of foods, even the ones that they do not seem to like. Please refer to DfE's help for early years providers website [solid food roadmap](#).

Staff should have discussions with parents and/or carers about common food allergens that have been introduced at home. These foods need to be introduced one at a time and in very small amounts so that staff can spot any reaction. A full list of common food allergens can be found on [DfE's help for early years providers website](#).



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Drinks to offer from 6 months

The only drinks that are recommended for babies aged 6-12 months are:

- breast milk
- first infant formula
- water

Babies should be offered sips of water during mealtimes from an open or free-flow cup without a valve. Open cups help babies learn to sip and are better for their teeth.

The importance of different textures

Once babies are comfortable with eating solid foods, it is important to start introducing more mashed and lumpier foods.

It's important to introduce different textures as it helps babies to:

- learn to chew and swallow properly, which encourages mouth and muscle development
- get used to different textures, which means they will be less likely to become fussy eaters or develop sensory needs.

Babies take different amounts of time to get used to texture and lumps. Keep offering lumpy textures from around 6 to 7 months and always supervise them closely so you can be sure they are swallowing it safely.

The NHS has advice on [fussy eaters](#) including tips that can be passed on to parents and/or carers.

How to introduce different textures

If foods are pureed, purees should be gradually made thicker. Vegetables or fruit can also be mashed. These thicker and lumpier textures can help babies develop muscles in their mouths.

Trying finger foods which are easy to grab and hold, such as thin sticks of cheese or bread, soft-cooked broccoli, cauliflower, carrot or banana cut into thin batons. These can encourage a baby's hand-eye coordination, as well as introducing new textures.



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It is important to let babies touch food with their hands and play with textures, such as portions of cooked spaghetti.

Cutting food safely when introducing solid foods

Make sure to cut food to a size that's right for a child's size, age and stage of weaning. This helps avoid choking.

Choking can happen with any food, but there are steps you can take to minimise the risks please refer NHS Start for Life has advice on [Preparing food safely for babies](#) - Start for Life - NHS.

Foods that are a good choice for first finger food include:

- soft-cooked fruit such as peeled apple slices or finger sticks of bananas, kiwis
- soft-cooked vegetables in finger sticks such as carrots, broccoli, courgette sticks
- cooked protein in finger sticks such as tofu or chicken.

For more advanced eaters, from around 9 months old, food may be cut into small, bite-sized pieces so that babies can practise their pincer grasps.

When preparing food, it is important to avoid round shapes as these are a choking hazard. Cut small fruits lengthways and then halve again (quarters). These fruits include:

- grapes
- raspberries
- strawberries
- cherry tomatoes.

The Food Standards Agency has a poster about [choking hazards](#).



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Foods to avoid

Babies should not eat:

- much salt, as it is not good for their kidneys. Do not add salt to food prepared for babies or cooking water. Stock cubes and gravy should not be used either
- any sugar. Avoiding sugary snacks and drinks including fruit juice can help prevent tooth decay
- foods that are high in saturated fat, salt and sugar like cakes, puddings, sweet and savoury pastries, biscuits, crisps, chocolate and other confectionery
- popcorn, raw jelly cubes, or whole nuts, which are all choking hazards
- honey (which should be avoided until 12 months) as it can contain bacteria that can make babies seriously unwell
- cheeses made from unpasteurised milk or mould-ripened soft cheeses, such as brie or camembert, or ripened goat's milk cheese and soft, blue-veined cheese, such as roquefort. There is a higher risk that these cheeses might carry a bacteria called listeria
- raw and lightly cooked eggs (including uncooked cake mixture, homemade ice creams, homemade mayonnaise, or desserts) if you do not see a red lion with the words "British Lion Quality" on the box
- rice drinks as a substitute for breast milk or infant formula as they may contain too much arsenic
- slush ice drinks, sometimes known as slushies, as they may contain too much glycerol
- raw or lightly cooked shellfish, such as mussels, clams and oysters, which can risk food poisoning.

The NHS has advice on [foods to avoid giving babies and young children](#).

NHS Start for Life has advice on [Safe weaning - Start for Life](#) - NHS.

Staff will always supervise babies closely when they are eating.

Guidance for children aged 1 to 5 years

A healthy plate

York Childcare Nurseries will encourage children to eat a balanced diet containing a wide variety of foods.



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Our meals and snacks will be planned to include a variety of food and drinks from the 4 main food groups every day. We recognise that the more children try new foods, the wider the range of nutrients they will get from their meals.

All children eat together in our nurseries, and this is a social time fostering independence.

The 4 food groups

We acknowledge children aged 1 to 5 years have different nutritional requirements to adults. We will refer to the [Eatwell Guide](#) advice to show what a healthy and balanced diet looks like. The advice in the Eatwell Guide applies to children from the age of 2 years.

A healthy, balanced diet is based on the [4 main food groups](#) (fruit and vegetables; potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates; dairy or dairy alternatives; and beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins). We understand that these provide essential nutrients to help children grow and develop.

We are aware of allergies, further guidance on how we manage and support children with allergies can be found in our Food Allergy and Intolerance Policy.

Our food is prepared appropriately to minimise any risk of choking.

Food and drink guidelines at a glance

To help provide children with healthy, balanced and nutritious food, the following categories have been taken from the food and drink guidelines below Early Years Nutrition Guidance:

- **Provide** - Where the guidelines advise that a food or drink should be provided, we will use these to plan meals, drinks and snacks.
- **Limit** - Where the guidelines advise that foods should be limited, these should be restricted as detailed in the specific guideline. This will help to decrease the amount of sugar, salt and saturated fat in children's diets and increase the variety of foods they are offered.
- **Avoid** - Where the guidelines advise that a food or drink should be avoided, these should not be provided as part of any meals, drinks or snacks.



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Food and drink guidelines Food	Guideline
Fruit and vegetables These include: • Fresh, frozen, tinned or dried fruit and vegetables • Pulses such as lentils and beans	• Provide at least 1 portion of vegetables, and/or fruit as part of each main meal (breakfast, lunch, dinner) and as part of some snacks (not including dried fruit). • Provide a variety of vegetables or fruit across the day and each week. • Limit baked beans to once a week if this is being counted as a vegetable. • Avoid dried fruit as a snack. It should only be provided as part of a meal. • Avoid fruit tinned in syrup and choose fruit tinned in juice. • Avoid added salt and sugar in tinned vegetables and pulses and choose no added salt and sugar options or those tinned in water.
Starchy Carbohydrates These include: • bread • potatoes, sweet potatoes, and other starchy root vegetables • pasta and noodles • rice and other grains • breakfast cereals.	• Provide a portion of starchy food as part of each main meal (breakfast, lunch and tea) each day. • Provide plain starchy food such as plain savoury crackers, or unsalted unsweetened rice or corn cakes as part of at least 1 snack each day. • Provide at least 3 different types of starchy food and a variety of wholegrain and white starchy foods across breakfasts, snacks, lunch and tea each week. • Provide wholegrain starchy foods for at least 1 breakfast, lunch and tea each week. 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 to a maximum of once a week (e.g. chips, fried rice and fried noodles). • 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.
Dairy and plain, fortified plant-based alternatives These include: • milk • cheese • yoghurt and fromage frais.	• Provide 3 portions of milk and unsweetened dairy foods each day (which includes those provided at home). • Provide non-dairy alternatives that are unsweetened and calcium fortified (e.g. oat milk or soya milk). • Provide full fat dairy foods (such as cheese and unsweetened yoghurt and fromage frais) for children under the age of 2 and gradually introduce lower-fat dairy options after this age. • Avoid sweetened yoghurts and fromage frais (including non-dairy alternatives) and choose plain unsweetened options.



Proteins

These include:

- beans, pulses and nuts
- meat and poultry
- fish and shellfish
- eggs
- meat alternatives.

- **Provide** a portion of protein as part of lunch and tea each day.

- **Provide** a variety of protein sources as part of lunch and tea across the week.

- **Provide** at least 1 lunch and 1 tea for children each week which uses beans, lentils, pulses or a meat alternative as the protein source.

- **Provide** vegetarian and vegan children with a variety of protein sources such as beans, pulses, and meat alternatives each week as part of lunch and tea.

- **Provide** oily fish (such as salmon, sardines or mackerel) at least once every 3 weeks; this can be provided as part of lunch or tea. When oily fish is not provided as a main meal in the week, you could try to provide oily fish as a snack.

- **Limit** oily fish to a maximum of twice per week.

- **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), to once a week for each of the 3 types as these products can be high in saturated fat and salt.



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Portion size for children aged 1 to 5 years

For all foods	• 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
Drinks	• Provide children with access to water throughout the day. • Provide only fresh tap water and plain milk to drink. • Provide whole milk, semi-skimmed cow's milk or unsweetened calcium fortified non-dairy alternatives for children from 1 year of age. • Avoid skimmed and 1% cow's milk. • Avoid sugary drinks (including fruit juices, squash and smoothies).

We recognise 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. 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.

Staff will monitor a child's appetite and adjust portion sizes to make sure they get enough energy and nutrients.

Staff will avoid:

- making children finish everything on their plate or eat more than they want to
- offering rewards to children for finishing everything on their plate (e.g. stickers or dessert).



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We will refer to the DfE's help for early years providers website has a [guide to portion sizes](#).

When serving food to children, we always make sure to cut food to a size that's right for a child's size, age and stage of weaning. This helps avoid choking.

Mealtimes

At York Childcare mealtimes are sociable occasions. Children are seated at low level tables, alongside staff members who encourage appropriate conversation in order to make mealtimes a relaxed and enjoyable experience. Staff adhere to the EYFS 2024, page 28 3.35.

We provide and/or serve food and drinks for children at the following times: morning snack, lunch, and afternoon snack. Drinking water is always available to children, within the rooms.

We organise meal and snack times so that they are social occasions in which children and staff participate. We use meal and snack times to develop independence through making choices, serving food and drink, and feeding themselves.

We provide children with utensils which are appropriate for their ages and stages of development and consider the eating practices of their culture and staff will support with this. This may include supporting children to place food on cutlery and/or cutting their food.

Good manners are promoted throughout mealtimes and children will be encouraged to say please and thank you where appropriate.

In the older age range of rooms, children are encouraged to self – serve food, this allows them to control their portion size, and this is fully supported by the staff team.

All information regarding mealtimes is shared with parents/carers at the end of the nursery day.

Menus are created in conjunction with parents, staff, and the children where appropriate and all dietary, religious, and cultural needs are taken into consideration.



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Where there are no dietary, religious or cultural requirements, all children are encouraged to try a variety of foods. Should a child display dislike for a particular food, they will be verbally encouraged to try it. No child will have food forced them in any way, including placing foods on their lips and/or open mouth to encourage them to taste food. Where a child continues to display dislike for the food on offer after verbal encouragement, it may be appropriate to offer the child a 'safe food' option. This would be offered in consultation with parents/carers. The practitioners know the children very well and can distinguish between a child not liking something and them trying to push boundaries when it comes to mealtimes.

Allergies, intolerances, and preferences:

It is important that we work in partnership with parents and ensure the wishes of the parents are met, along with any allergies, intolerances, parental preferences, and any other dietary requirements. All children at the setting have a colour coded placemat which is used at snack/mealtimes to ensure diets are adhered to. The placemats have a picture of the child, their name, and dietary requirements. There is an allergy file in each room and allergy lists displaying the children who have dietary requirements for the purpose of if there is a change of staff in rooms and serves as a visual reminder for all. We consider seating to avoid cross contamination of food from child to child. In line with EYFS 2025 (page 36 3.63-3.70) an adult must 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. Please refer to our Food Allergy & Intolerance Policy.

We will sometimes celebrate special occasions such as birthdays with the occasional treat of foods such as cake, sweets, or biscuits. These will be given at mealtimes/home times to prevent tooth decay and not spoil the child's appetite. Where we have frequent birthdays and celebrations, we consider other alternatives such as celebrating through smiles and praise etc choosing a favourite story, becoming a special helper, playing a party game, dancing and/or singing their favourite song.

We do allow parents to bring in cakes on special occasions. We ensure that all food brought in from parents meets health and safety requirements and the full ingredients are listed in line with the Consumers Regulation 1169/2011.



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Planning food activities

We acknowledge cooking is a great experience for young children and helps to create a positive relationship with food. Some children have limited opportunities to cook or learn about food at home. We plan fun activities for children in our nurseries and also suggest activities that can be done with parents and/or carers at home. We take in to account the DfE's help for early years providers website which has further information on [planning food activities with children](#).

Food hygiene procedures:

- Daily opening and closing checks on the kitchen to ensure standards are met consistently.
- There are separate facilities for handwashing and for washing up.
- All surfaces are clean and non-porous.
- All utensils, crockery etc. are clean and stored appropriately.
- Cleaning materials and other dangerous materials are stored out of children's reach. See COSHH file.
- Children do not have access to the kitchen.
- All equipment must be used according to manufacturer's instructions and checked regularly to ensure that it is functioning correctly. Pat testing of electrical appliances is carried out yearly.

Cleaning the Kitchen:

It is important that the kitchen is always kept clean and tidy.

- Put all food away before cleaning so it does not come into contact with cleaning agents.
- All equipment and working surfaces must be kept in a clean and hygienic condition.
- Cleaning chemicals should be used at the prescribed dilution rate.
- Sinks that you do washing up in must be kept clean.
- Hand washing sinks are for hand washing only.

To clean things properly you need to follow four different stages:

- Pre-clean – brush away any food debris.
- Main clean – use clean hot water and detergent making sure you get into difficult areas.

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- Rinse – use clean hot water and a clean cloth.
- Drying – leave to dry naturally.

Personal hygiene:

All employees, paid or voluntary, who handle food, have a responsibility to:

- Maintain a high standard of personal hygiene.
- Adhere to the nursery's no smoking policy.
- Refrain from handling food when they are suffering from an infectious disease or have boils, ulcers, cuts or rashes, diarrhoea, eye, ear, or throat infection.
- Report shortcomings to the manager, e.g. faulty or damaged equipment.
- Wash hands before preparing food or drink.
- Adhere to the nursery's Health and Safety Policy.

Reporting of food poisoning:

Food poisoning can occur for several reasons; not all cases of sickness or diarrhoea are because of food poisoning, and not all cases of sickness or diarrhoea are reportable. Where children and/or adults have been diagnosed by a GP or hospital doctor to be suffering from food poisoning and where it seems possible that the source of the outbreak is within the setting, the manager will contact the Environmental Health Department and the Health Protection Agency, to report the outbreak and will comply with any investigation. If the food poisoning is identified as a notifiable disease under the Public Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations 1988 the setting will report the matter to Ofsted.

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