



Level 2 Children's Care, Learning and  
Development Practice and Theory

# Unit 200 Nutrition and Hydration

Supporting Materials

Assessor Notes/Learner Handout

## Specific Nutrition and Hydration Requirements in Children

Level 2 Children's Care, Learning and Development  
Practice and Theory Unit 200

AC 2.6

### Circumstances where children can have specific nutrition and hydration requirements

Examples of special dietary requirements include:

- Children with learning disabilities may have physical health problems that cause difficulties with eating, chewing or swallowing. They may be advised to have a texture modified diet if they have swallowing difficulties (e.g. soft or pureed foods).
- Children and their families/carers may exclude foods for religious or cultural reasons.
- Children and their families/carers may follow a vegetarian or vegan diet for ethical reasons.
- Children may need to avoid certain food due to food allergies e.g. peanuts, milk, egg, fish or wheat.
- Children may need to follow a therapeutic diet if diagnosed with a specific medical condition such as coeliac disease or diabetes.

The National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare (2012) standard for food and drink requires that '*Children are provided with regular food in adequate quantities for their needs*'.

It states that the registered person is responsible for ensuring that:

- Information is obtained from parents/carers about individual children's dietary requirements e.g. cultural and religious and therapeutic diets for officially diagnosed food allergies. These needs must be recorded and complied with.
- Food and drink provided must meet the religious, cultural and dietary requirements of the children in their care.

It is important to involve parents or carers in encouraging good nutrition and hydration. Parents or carers of children who are on special diets or who have food intolerances are responsible for providing the setting with information about suitable food choices for their child.

In **food allergy** there is an abnormal response to a substance in food which can cause a variety of symptoms from mild e.g. a skin rash, to a very rapid severe response where breathing becomes difficult (anaphylaxis). Food allergies are more likely to occur in children with a family history of allergies such as asthma, eczema or hay fever. Parents/families/carers should talk to their GP or Health Visitor for help and advice if their child has a suspected food allergy. The GP may refer the family to a Registered Dietitian or doctor who specialises in allergy. It is unwise to restrict food choices among young children without appropriate help and advice.

## Specific Nutrition and Hydration Requirements in Children

	Special dietary requirement	Consequences of not following the diet
Difficulties dealing with food and drinks in the mouth including swallowing difficulties (dysphagia)	When changes are needed to the consistency and texture of foods due to swallowing difficulties, specialist advice from a Speech and Language Therapist and a Registered Dietitian should always be sought. The requirements of individuals with swallowing difficulties will be highly varied and specialist advice will ensure the person's nutrient needs are met and their food and fluids are of the correct texture.	Dysphagia can lead to food and drink being sucked into the lungs (aspiration) causing coughing and gagging. This can also cause choking and if air cannot get into the lungs, breathing difficulties and even death can occur due to lack of oxygen (asphyxiation).  Aspiration is also related to chest infections and pneumonia.
Autism	Autism is a lifelong disorder that affects the brain and how people relate to others and the world around them.  Often children with autism have sensory issues which can change the way foods taste, feel and smell. This can lead to a limited intake of foods. Mealtimes often involve lots of people, smells and noise which can be stressful. Gut symptoms such as bloating, diarrhoea and constipation are also common in children and adults with autism.	It is important that children are supported to eat well to make sure they are well nourished and hydrated and to maintain a healthy weight. Support is important to help make mealtimes less stressful. Children and their families/carers may be referred to a dietitian for help and advice.
Cultural and religious choices	The food choices made by those from different religious and cultural groups may involve the types of food eaten, how the food is prepared, what combinations of foods are used or when particular foods are eaten. There can be periods of celebration when celebration foods are eaten and periods of fasting (though very young children don't usually fast). There may be individual differences in food choices between families, and it is important to avoid making assumptions about anyone's dietary preferences. Always check with the child's parent/carer/family so that individual food customs can be catered for.	It is important to ensure that food provision celebrates equality and diversity and aims to create an inclusive environment where the religious, cultural and non-religious beliefs and practices of families/carers and staff are respected.  When providing food for those who exclude food items for religious or ethical reasons, it is important that food given is not compromised in any way e.g. picking meat out of a dish is not acceptable for a vegetarian – the vegetarian dish should be prepared first and the meat added later for other children.

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<p><b>Other beliefs and personal choice</b></p> <p>Vegetarian and vegan diets</p>	<p>People may choose to follow a vegetarian or vegan diet due to concern about the environment, animal welfare, health concerns and/or religious beliefs.</p> <p><b>Types of vegetarian diets</b></p> <p>Vegetarians typically don't eat meat, poultry, fish or shellfish. However different types of vegetarian diets exist. Vegans don't eat any animal products at all, including honey. Further information can be found at <a href="https://www.vegansociety.com">https://www.vegansociety.com</a> and <a href="https://www.firststepsnutrition.org">https://www.firststepsnutrition.org</a> (see eating well: vegan infants and under 5s). It is possible for a child to get all the energy and nutrients they need from a well planned vegetarian diet. Care is required if feeding children a vegan diet to make sure it contains important nutrients such as B12. Families/ carers are encouraged to speak to a health professional for support and advice.</p>	As above.
Food allergies	<p>Food allergy is more common in infancy and early childhood than in adulthood. About 5-8% of infants are allergic to certain foods and many will grow out of their food allergies. The foods that most commonly cause problems in children are milk, eggs, soya, fish/shellfish, wheat, peanuts and tree nuts. Since 2014 all food businesses are required by law to give details about allergens in the food they provide.</p>	The majority of allergic reactions to peanut and tree nuts are mild. Hives (nettle rash), eczema and vomiting are the most common complaints in children. However, some allergic reactions to peanut or tree nuts can be severe, causing difficulty in breathing due to asthma or throat swelling, or a drop in blood pressure. This is known as anaphylaxis, and allergy to peanut or tree nuts is one of the most common triggers.
Peanut and tree nut allergy	<p>Allergy to peanut and tree nuts (almonds, cashews, macadamia and Brazil nuts) is the most common food allergy in adults and children. Reactions to peanuts or nuts can be life threatening. Children with peanut allergy should avoid peanuts and food containing peanuts. Care must be taken to prevent accidental consumption of food containing nut products or food that has come into contact with them. Careful checking of food labels is necessary. Online training is available on the Food Standards agency website and is recommended for food handlers <a href="https://allergytraining.food.gov.uk/">https://allergytraining.food.gov.uk/</a></p>	Doctors usually prescribe an adrenalin pen for people with nut allergies as there is no test to predict who is at risk of anaphylaxis.

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Milk allergy	<p>Cow's milk protein allergy affects around 2-5% of infants and children who usually start to have symptoms in their first few months. Most children outgrow milk allergy by 5 years of age so only about 1 in 1000 older children and adults have a true milk allergy.</p> <p>If a child needs to avoid cow's milk, it may be present in many foods e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• milk</li> <li>• milk powder</li> <li>• milk drinks</li> <li>• all types of cheese</li> <li>• yoghurt</li> <li>• cream</li> <li>• ice cream.</li> </ul> <p>For further information go to <a href="http://www.allergyuk.org">www.allergyuk.org</a></p> <p><b>A note about lactose intolerance</b></p> <p>Lactose intolerance in infants and children is rare but some level of lactose intolerance is common amongst Asian and African populations. This is not an allergic condition, but an inability to digest lactose (milk sugar) because the body produces low levels of lactase, the enzyme responsible for digesting lactose. It can cause diarrhoea, bloating and discomfort. Lactose intolerance may occur temporarily following a bout of gastroenteritis (severe stomach bug), with diarrhoea being the main symptom.</p>	<p>Symptoms include abdominal pain, vomiting and diarrhoea; in the skin, itching and swelling (rash or nettle rash); in the upper airways, a runny nose or sneezing; in the lower airways, a wheeze or cough and in rare cases anaphylaxis (as mentioned above). If a severe allergy has been identified, it is important that the sufferer should avoid even tiny amounts of their trigger food or substance.</p> <p>The Welsh Government Best Practice Guidance: Food and Nutrition in Childcare Settings contains templates for recording and managing special dietary requirements in children including allergies.</p>
Therapeutic diets	<p>Some children have special dietary requirements for a specific medical condition. The GP can refer the family to a Registered Dietitian for advice and support. Therapeutic diets can be quite complex but parents, carers and families should be able to supply a list of foods and enough information to enable a carer to provide the right food.</p>	

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Gluten-free diets	<p>Some children may be diagnosed with a condition called coeliac disease that means they must follow a strict gluten-free diet. Gluten is the protein found in wheat, rye and barley and therefore all foods which contain these cereals must be avoided. There are a good variety of gluten-free foods available and advice on foods to choose and avoid can be given by a dietitian. The charity Coeliac UK (<a href="http://www.coeliac.org.uk">http://www.coeliac.org.uk</a>) also provides help and advice as well as booklets outlining gluten-free foods. It is worth noting that play-dough is made from flour as are home-made play material often used in childcare settings and the pasta shapes sometimes used for collages. It is important that children with coeliac disease are supervised when using these materials to stop small children putting these in their mouth.</p> <p>Children with coeliac disease must follow a gluten free diet for life. A gluten free diet is the only treatment for coeliac disease.</p>	<p>Symptoms of coeliac disease, including bloating, diarrhea, nausea, tiredness and headaches can occur if gluten is eaten. By avoiding all gluten (some people also need to avoid oats), the gut can heal and symptoms improve.</p> <p>If a child with coeliac disease eats gluten by mistake, they will usually start to have symptoms a few hours after eating it and the symptoms can last from a few hours to several days. However, the effects vary from person to person, and depend on how much gluten is eaten, how sensitive they are and how long they have been on a gluten-free diet.</p>
Diabetes	<p>Type 1 diabetes is a serious life-long condition that requires constant management through diet and administering insulin. Different foods can affect blood glucose levels. Parents/carers/families should be able to provide information on what their child is able to eat and when.</p>	<p>It is essential that type 1 diabetes is well managed to prevent long-term complications (such as kidney and eye problems), hyperglycemia (high blood sugar levels) and hypoglycemia (low blood sugars). For more information see <a href="https://www.diabetes.org.uk">https://www.diabetes.org.uk</a></p>

For further information on catering for children with special dietary requirements and cultural and religious considerations, see the Welsh Government Best Practice Guidance: Food and Nutrition for Childcare Settings. Available from - <https://gov.wales/food-and-nutrition-childcare-settings-full-guidance>

If a family/carers have questions about the specific nutrition and hydration needs of their child, they should be encouraged to talk to a health professional.