

# Eating Well for Very Young Children in Child Care



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A report on a nutrition training project funded by 5 out of the 6 area local committees and delivered to early years settings by teams of early years trainers and dietitian/nutritionists across Cumbria

This report describes how a nutrition training programme was developed and delivered to 140 staff from Early Years settings across Cumbria, and describes the outcomes. It followed an extensive two year national study examining the food routinely provided in Early Years settings. This showed that, despite much effort by Early Years staff, none of the nurseries which took part were managing to meet the current guidelines on food for this age group, and also that staff themselves were not clear on what constituted a healthy diet for children under five. This report details the outcomes from the training, including a number of practical initiatives which demonstrate how to include parents in nutritional advice, and some simple changes which contribute towards encouraging appropriate weight management in young children.

## Background

***'The evidence is clear on how a well-qualified and appropriately skilled Early Years workforce makes a real difference to the quality of provision and outcomes for young children.'***

**Dame Clare Tickell**

Cumbria recently took part in an extensive two year national study looking at the food served to children in nurseries. (A representative sample of Cumbrian day care settings participated during the period September – December 2009). The study found that many nurseries were putting a lot of effort into providing healthy menus, and that staff were very keen to meet all of the current guidelines on food for this age group. However, many staff expressed concerns that their knowledge of basic nutrition was limited, and although they intended to provide suitable food they were often not aware that healthy eating messages for adults were not appropriate for under-5s. In addition they were unclear on what constituted a healthy diet for children in the Early Years.

The main issues involved were:

- lack of variety of foods from the five food groups
- inappropriate portion sizes
- food label knowledge
- food choice and shopping techniques
- poor knowledge or lack of confidence in cooking skills

As a result of this survey, funding for nutrition training for staff from Early Years settings such as day nurseries and sessional pre-schools was provided by the County Council Area Committees in Cumbria.

A training delivery group (comprising a dietician, a nutritionist and two Early Years trainers) were commissioned to plan, develop and deliver a series of workshops tailored to meet the needs identified by the nursery study. The group met to plan the bespoke training during the period April – June 2011 and a range of resources were produced to support the training by Cumbria County Council. The training (one full day plus a half day follow-up workshop three weeks later) was delivered over the period September 2011 – March 2012. Administration of the programme was provided internally by Cumbria County Council Children's Services

The main aims of the training were to give childcare managers and caterers the confidence to introduce children to a wide range of healthy foods whilst in their care, and to gain a good understanding of the nutritional needs of the under-5s. Developing an effective partnership with parents was also an important facet of the training, in order to improve the content of packed lunches, promote healthy family meals, and highlight the importance of correct portion sizes. Establishing good eating patterns early in life provides the best start for children and will help to maintain good nutrition and a healthy weight throughout life.



## Details of training

### Numbers of delegates and settings that participated

Individual participants	Childcare settings	Roles of participants
140	91, including full day nurseries, sessional pre-schools, and childcare provided through Children's Centres	Primarily Nursery Managers and other childcare practitioners, also 10 cooks, 2 Health Visitors, 2 Children's Services staff members, 1 Dental Nurse

### Area and venues

Twelve sessions of training, comprising one full day and a half-day follow-up workshop were delivered county-wide in the following areas:

Areas	Locations
Carlisle	3 x Carlisle
Furness	2 x Barrow
Eden	1 x Appleby, 1 x Penrith
South Lakes	1 x Kendal
Allerdale	1 x Keswick, 1 x Cockermouth
Copeland	1 x Whitehaven, 1 x Cleator Moor



### Times and content of workshops

Day 2 took place 3 weeks after the initial training day, in order to give the settings an opportunity to implement some of their planned ideas, develop strategies for improving the food offered, update food policies and work in partnership with parents.

Day 1 - 9.30 am – 3 pm	Day 2 – 9.30 am – 12.30 pm
Looking at food choices and issues affecting food choice	Reflecting on progress so far
Understanding why healthy eating is important in early years and the consequences of food choice to health	Feedback of successes and challenges / learning from others
Key nutrients of interest for early years; the importance of planning menus to meet the nutritional needs of under 5s rather than using healthy eating advice intended for adults	Reviewing and updating food policies
Learning to read nutritional information on food labels	Weaning information
Menu planning and snack provision	Guidance on particular issues affecting settings e.g. allergies, fussy eaters
Strategies to encourage children to eat well	Planning for the future
Developing a food policy for a childcare setting	
Engaging families	

## Training methods and delivery

Training methods	Impact
Co-facilitated in teams of 2, by a dietitian or nutritionist working with an Early Years trainer.	Drew on both nutritional expertise and an understanding of the practical issues faced by nursery staff, and offered a value-added collaborative approach.
Interactive and facilitative, workshop-style.	Enabled participants to learn experientially.
Built on existing knowledge, skills and strengths.	Gave opportunities for participants to share ideas and solutions to challenges from personal examples.
Solution-focused.	Encouraged participants to look for practical ways to overcome issues such as budget and time constraints rather than being problem-focused.

## Resources and value to participant

Resources used	Impact
'Chew' booklets including Eating Well for 1-4 year olds: Practical Guide and a set of food photo cards with recipe suggestions and portion guidance, based on Caroline Walker Trust guidelines.	High quality, practical, pictorial and user-friendly, easy to share ideas with other staff and parents.
Eatwell plate, dividing hoops to illustrate relevant food groups for under 5's and food models.	Practical exercise on understanding food groups and balancing the plate.
Participatory Appraisal 'H' diagram.	Tool to explore issues, solutions and make action plans. Useful technique for settings to learn - could use this approach at staff training sessions or parents' events.
Range of food products and packaging.	Used to explore and understand food labelling information.
Range of information leaflets including Best Start for Life leaflets, ideas for healthy packed lunches, guidance on weaning and suitable drinks for children, suggestions for reluctant eaters, food policy guidance.	Useful reference guides to have on hand in setting and to share with parents.
Healthy lunch provided for delegates as part of training day 1, healthy snack options for day 2.	Opportunity to model nutritious and attractive range of food options, and discuss the importance of social interactions at mealtimes.





## Positive outcomes from the training

Personal training needs as identified by participants' on Day 1	OUTCOMES: Practical strategies implemented or planned by participants as identified on Day 2 review
Information on nutritional guidelines for children. Advice on correct portion sizes.	<p>Cooks and nursery practitioners met to improve consistency of portion sizes; this has led to a reduction in food waste and better calculation of food orders, thus helping with planning budget. Led to improved eating patterns of children.</p> <p>Attention to getting portion sizes right, including milk. Many settings checked by practically weighing food portions offered when back in work place. Often included reducing amount of food offered as such snacks, items such as sausages, potato portions etc.</p> <p>Substituted cream cheese for Dairylea (effectively reducing salt and additives). Substituted pitta bread or oatcakes for sweet biscuits. Substituted fresh chopped fruit plus natural yogurt for sweetened yogurt. Replaced fruit squash with milk or water. Raisins given at mealtimes rather than offered as snacks (better for dental health).</p>
New ideas for meals and snacks. Ideas for healthy eating while still keeping costs down. Easy to prepare recipes for when time is at a premium.	Used new starchy foods, e.g. cous cous, pitta bread, malt loaf. Planned menus ahead to ensure good range and variety. Baking activities provided have previously been high-sugar, e.g. rice crispy cakes – setting now plans to use new recipes for savoury / healthier option. Made soup with children as cooking activity and ate it for lunch.
Ideas on how to motivate and interest parents. Ideas on improving nutritional content of packed lunches.	Involved parents more in meal planning and updated healthy eating information on parents' notice board. Developed recipe exchange with families. Highlighted healthy packed lunch suggestions to all parents. Healthy eating display and graffiti board for parents' suggestions. Used Change for Life website for recipes, information and leaflets.
Tips on dealing with food refusal. Advice on children with allergies.	Staff sitting and eating with children, emphasis on the social aspect. Encouraged staff to have consistent low-key relaxed approach to child who refused to eat with positive results – child now eats with rest of group. Allergy procedure incorporated into food policy.
Ideas on how to encourage children to try different foods.	Incorporated oily fish - used salmon in fish pie, tried sardines on toast and surprised to find they became a popular food! Led to discussion on influence of staff attitudes to foods. Used food in play and games for tactile exploration of new foods. Re-named dishes to make them fun, e.g. Captain's Pie. Focused on presentation to make food attractive to children, e.g. fruit kebabs.
Advice on weaning.	Changed milk order from semi-skimmed to full-fat.
Cutting down on waste. Best places to shop.	Buying more seasonal fresh food (cheaper and more nutritious). Taking advantage of budget supermarket special deals on fresh fruit and veg. Planning to grow own vegetables and herbs and involve children in this activity.
Understanding confusing food labels.	Increased awareness of food labelling information eg salt / sugar content. Better understanding of how to interpret labels. Cook now making own sauces and gravies rather than using pre-packaged products. This has reduced salt content and also costs.
How to get all staff on board with making changes.	Used H diagram at staff meeting to gain information on presenting issue and facilitate action planning.

# Evaluation results

## Participants' evaluation

A Cumbria County Council Evaluation form using a scale of 1-5 was completed after each training day. The percentage of participants rating the following questions at 5 (maximum) is shown below, with a selection of additional comments following.

Evaluation question	Percentage who rated this 5
Quality of the workshop overall	83%
Quality of trainers	82%
Relevance of handouts	94%
Relevance of session to your work	83%
Level of personal learning	77%
Quality of course information	86%



## Additional comments

*'I am now more aware of what is an appropriate snack for 2 – 3 year olds, and we have changed portion sizes'*

*'An excellent course – I would recommend it to anyone working in Early Years'*

*'Great to have something directly aimed at Early Years instead of general training which we have to adapt'*

*'Nutrition evolves all the time so with this information we can alter what we do to give our children the best start'*

*'Really enthusiastic about what we've learnt – we've revitalised our snack menus'*

*'Helpful and informative – I felt confident in the trainers' knowledge'*

*'Fantastic quality resources – will use at information evening for parents'*

*'Learning about food labelling was eye-opening - I've been looking at how much salt and sugar I eat at home'*

*'Great opportunity to share ideas with other settings'*

## Summary and recommendations

***'I recommend that the Government act on the report of the Advisory Panel for Food and Nutrition in Early Years and consider providing further advice and good practice for practitioners.'***

**Dame Clare Tickell in the EYFS Tickell review**

The project has fulfilled this recommendation and provided clear and practical guidance to Early Years practitioners on meeting the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, and developing good practice by improving the nutritional standard of the food offered within settings. It also meets one of the four main priorities of the Cumbria Healthy Weight Strategy (Priority One: Early Years and Children – healthy growth and weight), with particular reference to targeting the elements of Workforce Development and Early Years Nutrition. The result of this should impact on children's health and wellbeing in the following areas:

- strengthened immune systems, giving better resistance to illnesses
- healthy weight maintenance and avoidance of the problems of obesity
- improved social and emotional health through emphasis on social eating
- better dental health and a reduction in tooth decay

## Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our thanks to the following practitioners who attended the training and allowed us to use their photo's, sample menus and newsletters in this document.

**Safe Hands Nursery**  
**Aspatia Community Childcare**  
**Footsteps Nursery**  
**Playbase Nursery**  
**Toddler Town Nursery**  
**Kinder Park Nursery**

We would like to extend a special thank you to Kay Cook, Michelle Doherty, Kay Johnson and Katrina Brown for not only providing the training but also the main body of the report.





## Toddler Town Nursery

As a result of the training, Toddler Town have changed their snack menu to reflect the knowledge gained around what constitutes healthy snacks for young children. Cath, proprietor of Toddler Town said, *"One of the best training sessions we have attended. We came away with so many ideas of how we could develop as a setting"*.



## Safe Hands Nursery – Penrith

We have made some positive changes to our menu plan as a result of the Nutrition Training. These include having a fish dish every week we have introduced salmon, mackerel and sardines which are going down really well.

Our main changes have been to the tea time menu, in the past Helen our cook who prepares lunches only, set out the menu and we had lots of convenience foods which when I took over as manager I aimed to change, from both Helen and myself attending this training we got lots of ideas for our tea menu and I have devised a new menu incorporating some of the meals within the recipe books we received on the course.

A particular favourite is sardines mixed with cream cheese on toast the children love this which has even surprised me as I didn't think they would like it!!!

This month I have introduced two new meals to the tea menu including salmon summer surprise, which is cous cous mixed with peppers and onions and flakes of salmon. As well as a greek salad with pitta bread. We usually run new meals a few times so children can develop a taste and feel for new flavours and textures.

Although we have changed our food suppliers we have managed to cut our food budget in half which is great news in this economic climate!!

Parents have all commented on our new menus and they now get a monthly menu plan rather than finding out on the day what will be served.

Children have also enjoyed making some of the dishes and serving them at meals times'. Banana and raisin flapjack is a particular favourite!!



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Dear Parents/ Carers,

Cumbria recently took part in an extensive two year national study looking at the food served to children in nurseries. This work found that many nurseries were putting a lot of effort into providing healthy menus and staff were very keen to make changes but none of the nurseries which volunteered to be involved were managing to meet all of the current guidelines on food for this age group. Many staff expressed concerns that their knowledge of basic nutrition was limited and they thought they were providing the right food but were not aware that healthy eating messages for adults were not appropriate for toddlers. They were not clear on what constituted a healthy diet for a toddler.

From this study the local committee released some money to fund a training course called 'Eating well in early years'. We as a setting have taken part in the training and have decided to make some changes to our snack menu to make them healthier; we have also taken on board children who have allergies within our setting. The menus are included in this healthy eating pack. The menus will run on a four week rota. They all include different foods and we will be encouraging your children to try them. We ask that you as parents and carers work with us on our healthy eating project to provide your children with healthy lunch boxes. Also included in your pack are a healthy lunchbox fact sheet and our healthy eating policy. Together we can help our children become healthier and beat obesity within our community. If you have any ideas to help us along with this project we would be happy to take them on board. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

Thank you for your cooperation with the project.

All the staff of Aspatia Community Childcare

Supported by:



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## Aspatia Community Childcare

As a result of the Nutrition Training practitioners sent letters to parents encouraging them to help children become healthier and beat obesity within their communities. An example is this letter sent out by Aspatia Community Childcare



Children at ACC enjoying a healthy snack





## Footsteps Nursery

As a result of the training Footsteps Nursery came away considering portion sizes which was one of the main considerations when planning the training. They also debated the appropriate ages for blue and green top milk, noting the quantities each child may be drinking prior to lunch and re-visited the Caroline Walker Trust checking guidelines against current practice. They would like to further the knowledge gained on the training by attending HENRY core training.



Pears for snack



Fruits from the Very Hungry Caterpillar



Blackberry pie for lunch



Exploring the fruits in Handa's Surprise



Polish cooking



Chopping bananas at snack (child age 28 months, excellent fine manipulative skills as a result of regular opportunities to engage in cutting and spreading).

# Playbase Nursery

At their recent Ofsted inspection Playbase Nursery was awarded outstanding for their contribution to the extent they help children adopt a healthy lifestyle.

Actions taken from or existing practice supported by the training were:

- All the portions are served according to the guidelines and information we received at the training
- Recipes from the meal books have been made and well received in the nursery
- Sugar in the puddings have been removed from the cakes and replaced with dried fruit
- Children can have second helpings of their main meal if still hungry but we have stopped seconds of puddings
- We are still continuing giving the children cheese after their pudding to neutralise their mouth, a point made at the training
- Children have been enjoying learning about fresh fruit and vegetables and where they come from



MENU WEEK FOUR	
MONDAY:	Sweet & Sour Chicken with Rice Veggie Curry with Rice Mousse Fruit & Yoghurt
TUESDAY:	Sausage & Mash with Veg Veggie Sausage & Mash with Veg Fruit Cake & Custard Fruit & Yoghurt
WEDNESDAY:	Auntie Anne's Tuna Tarts Jacket Potato & Beans Cheese Tart Fruit Salad Fruit & Yoghurt
THURSDAY:	Cheesy Potato Veg Rice Pudding Fruit & Yoghurt
FRIDAY:	Fish Fingers & Roast Veg Gingerbread & Custard Fruit & Yoghurt
**Jacket Potatoes with Filling are available as a further daily option**	

MENU WEEK ONE	
MONDAY:	Pasta Bake with Meat & Veg Vegetable Bake Mousse Fruit & Yoghurt
TUESDAY:	Sausage Mash & Veg Veggie Sausage Fruit Cake & Custard Fruit & Yoghurt
WEDNESDAY:	Fish & Veg Pie Veggie Meal Rice Pudding Fruit & Yoghurt
THURSDAY:	Cheese Veggie Pizza with Jacket Potato & Beans Fruit Crumble and Custard
FRIDAY:	Chicken Curry & Rice Veggie Curry & Rice Carrot & Orange Cake with Custard
**Jacket Potatoes with Filling are available as a further daily option**	

MENU WEEK TWO	
MONDAY:	Tomato & Veg Pasta Fruit Scone Fruit & Yoghurt
TUESDAY:	Meat Loaf, Roast Potatoes & Veg Vegetable Meatballs & Potatoes Semolina Fruit & Yoghurt
WEDNESDAY:	Cheese & Veggie Potato Swirls Shortbread & Custard Fruit & Yoghurt
THURSDAY:	Spanish Chicken & Rice Quorn/Veggie Nursery Baked Cookies Fruit & Yoghurt
FRIDAY:	Mince Stew & Dumplings Veggie Stew & Dumplings Jam Roly Poly with Custard Fruit & Yoghurt
**Jacket Potatoes with Filling are available as a further daily option**	

MENU WEEK THREE	
MONDAY:	Pasta Tuna Bake Veggie Bake Fruit & Yoghurt
TUESDAY:	Chilli Con Carnie with Rice Quorn Mince Chilli Peaches & Ice Cream Fruit & Yoghurt
WEDNESDAY:	Corned Beef Hash Vegetable Hash Jelly Whip Fruit & Yoghurt
THURSDAY:	Meat & Potato Pie with Veg Veggie Pie Fruit Crunch Fruit & Yoghurt
FRIDAY:	Cheese & Vegetable Flan Apple Cake & Custard Fruit & Yoghurt
**Jacket Potatoes with Filling are available as a further daily option**	



# Kinder Park Nursery

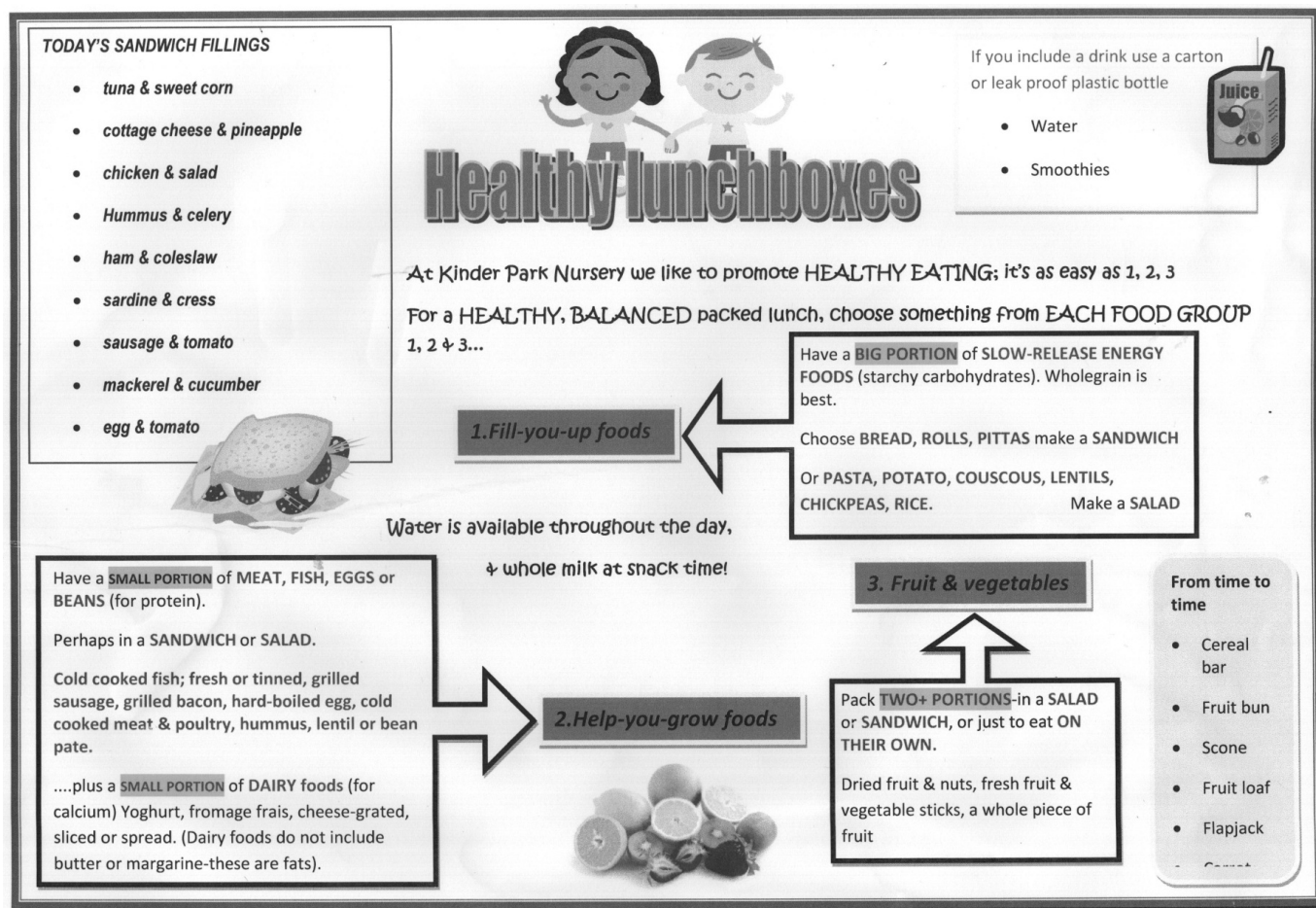
The proprietor and cook from Kinder Park Nursery attended the training. Both had a very positive experience and went on to give a presentation to all members of staff on the key points raised. These included –

- Use of positive praise and encouragement in a relaxed atmosphere
- The importance of portion sizing in relation to the child and
- Not overwhelming the child with too much food (use a child's fist size as a guide)
- Staff leading by example and trying a small portion of foods with children at meal times

*"I also found the discussion with other nursery settings very informative and interesting, I felt able to share my knowledge in a relaxed atmosphere with positive feedback."*

*"On returning to my nursery setting I set up a display stand using the free resources which were given to us, I am offering hand outs to parents/carers of the recipes which the children most enjoy."*

*"I used the free sample lunch box guide given out at the training as a template to design my own."*



## Useful websites for information on nutrition and healthy weight

Sustainable food, a guide to early years settings:  
[www.cwt.org.uk/publications.html#sustain](http://www.cwt.org.uk/publications.html#sustain)

Eating well for under 5's in childcare:  
[www.cwt.org.uk/pdfs/Under5s.pdf](http://www.cwt.org.uk/pdfs/Under5s.pdf)

Off to the best start:  
[www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Baby\\_Friendly/Leaflets/4/otbs\\_leaflet.pdf](http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Baby_Friendly/Leaflets/4/otbs_leaflet.pdf)

Guide to food labelling:  
[www.bhf.org.uk/publications/view-publication.aspx?ps=1000110](http://www.bhf.org.uk/publications/view-publication.aspx?ps=1000110)

Building blocks for a better start to life:  
[www.nhs.uk/start4life/Documents/PDFs/C4L101\\_Start4Life\\_acc.pdf](http://www.nhs.uk/start4life/Documents/PDFs/C4L101_Start4Life_acc.pdf)

Introducing solid food:  
[www.nhs.uk/start4life/Documents/PDFs/introducing-solid-foods.pdf](http://www.nhs.uk/start4life/Documents/PDFs/introducing-solid-foods.pdf)

School food trust and early Years:  
[www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/research/advisory-panel-on-food-and-nutrition-in-early-years](http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/research/advisory-panel-on-food-and-nutrition-in-early-years)

Guidance for food and drink in early years settings:  
[www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/download/documents/pdf/early\\_years\\_food\\_and\\_nutrition\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/download/documents/pdf/early_years_food_and_nutrition_guidance.pdf)

Raising the issue of weight in children and young people:  
[www.teesvalleysport.co.uk/files/raising\\_the\\_issue\\_with\\_children.pdf](http://www.teesvalleysport.co.uk/files/raising_the_issue_with_children.pdf)

Physical activity guidelines factsheet 1 and 2:  
[www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_127931](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_127931)

NCWM programme 2011:  
[www.ic.nhs.uk/ncmp](http://www.ic.nhs.uk/ncmp)



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