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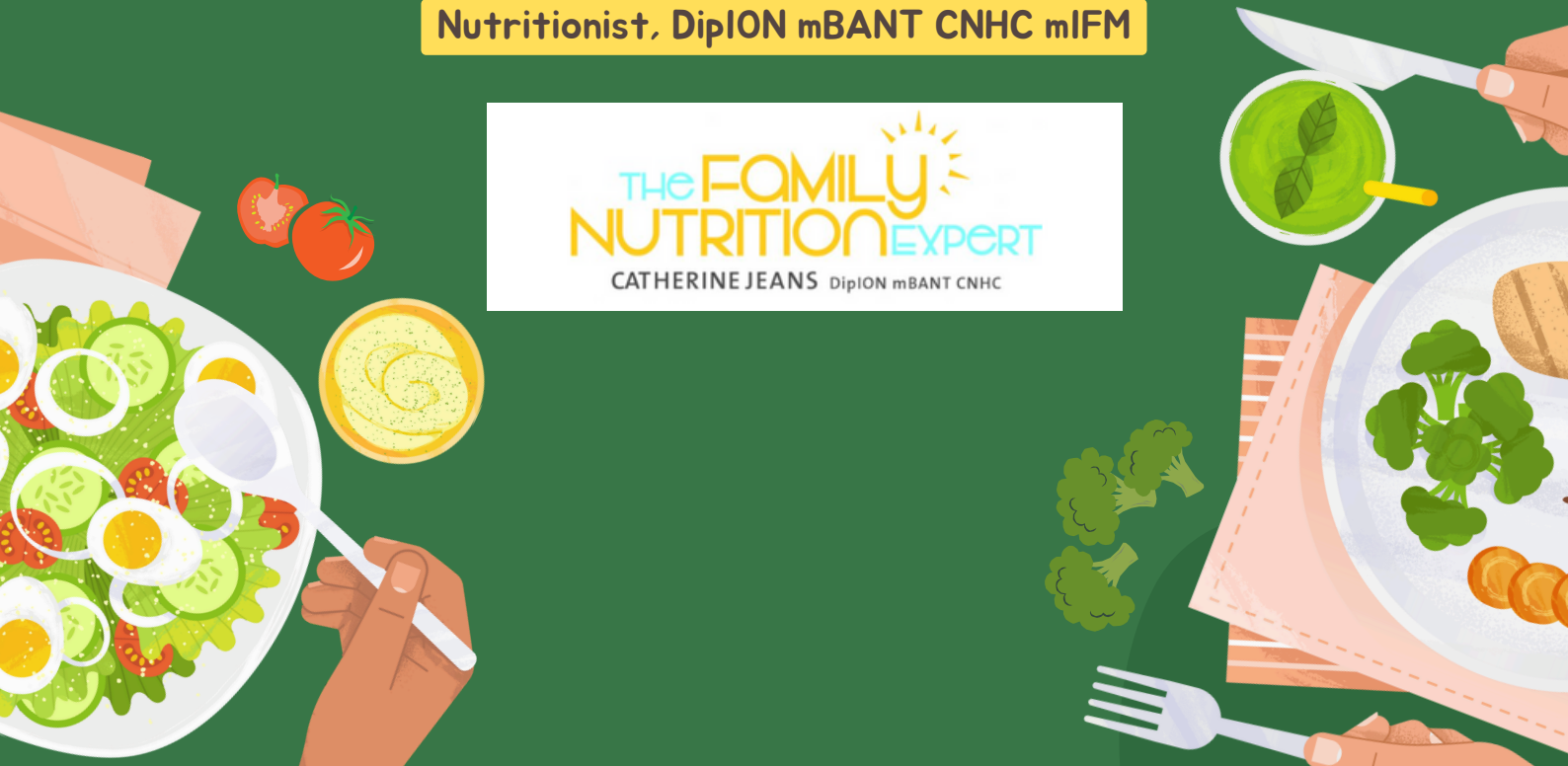
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# The New 2025 Early Years Foundation Stage Nutrition Guidelines: A Practical Guide for Practitioners

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THE FAMILY  
NUTRITION EXPERT  
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# The New 2025 Early Years Foundation Stage Nutrition Guidelines: A Practical Guide for Practitioners



**Catherine Jeans, The Family Nutrition Expert** has over 15 years experience supporting families and professionals across the UK, with her practical, non-judgemental and evidence-based nutrition guidance.

In this blog, Catherine walks you through key principles of the new Early Years Foundation Stage Nutrition Guidance (Department for Education, 2025), answering common questions she receives from practitioners. Catherine will provide practical steps you can take straight away and help you understand why these guidelines have been brought about, so that you can communicate effectively about nutrition with the families you work with.



## Why have these new guidelines been brought in?

The stark reality is that our country is facing a health crisis. The NHS is on its knees, and we know that a large percentage of chronic conditions such as cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes are preventable, with diet and lifestyle playing a key role.

For our young children, optimal nutrition is vital for healthy physical growth, brain development and immune system programming. What children eat at a young age helps to prevent the development of lifestyle diseases as an adult.

Unfortunately, the UK has one of the highest rates of ultra processed food (UPF) intake in the world, with around 60% of our average pre-schoolers' diet coming from UPFs (First Steps Nutrition Trust, 2023). We know the potential harm of these foods, from increased risk of cardiovascular disease, mental health challenges and even impacting our life expectancy (Lane MM et al., 2024).

Research suggests that our early days of eating are so vital for establishing healthy eating habits and taste preferences. Pre-school children who are high consumers of UPFs tend to be higher consumers of these foods later on in childhood, with children in the most economically deprived areas consuming more of the unhealthiest types of UPFs than their peers. They are also twice as likely to be medically obese and of short stature (The Food Foundation, 2025).

These nutrition guidelines are such an essential step to help all children to thrive, paving the way for a lifetime of good health.

For you as practitioners, they provide a framework and step by step approach to ensure you're providing the best nutrition possible for the children in your care – even if you're only providing one snack per day, or if you're catering for 3 meals plus snacks.



## Key Changes in Early Years Nutrition Guidance

The guidance is a much more comprehensive document for practitioners, laid out in age stages, with downloads, infographics and recipe links to guide you. There is encouragement of home-cooked food, to help move children away from ultra processed foods, and emphasis placed on supporting children to eat more fibre, vegetables and fruit and less sugar.

The guidance should be followed unless 'there is good reason not to.' This could include cases where a child has been diagnosed with ARFID (avoidant restrictive food intake disorder) or has strong sensory challenges around food, or where there has been medical advice that an alternative feeding pattern needs to be followed.

So let's dive into some of the key changes – focusing on the areas that practitioners report they are finding particularly challenging.

## Second dish and the disappearance of puddings

I'm hearing a lot of confusion from practitioners around 'second dish' and what this can include. I do agree that the guidance is a little ambiguous here, without a clear statement around whether any puddings are now allowed.

As a nutrition professional, my advice is to always make that second dish nutritionally valuable. For example, we could replace a sugary, low fibre sponge and custard, with a home-made crumble, with real fruit and a topping made with dates, oats and butter/vegan spread. The reality is that infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers don't need a sweet dessert daily, particularly as many are likely to have a sweet treat at home most days.

I recommend you prioritise savoury for second dishes, with some nutritionally valuable desserts. Second dishes are a great opportunity to help children discover new vegetables, because this is a food group lacking from so many children's diets. Examples include sweet potato wedges, hummus and steamed carrot sticks, home-made tzatziki or a mug of veg packed soup.

Sweeter second dishes should primarily be fresh fruit with natural yoghurt, but there are so many ways to present this. Try natural yoghurt blended with frozen berries, stewed or baked apples sweetened with cinnamon and raisins, or a yoghurt dip flavoured with vanilla or cinnamon. The key is to make those second dishes nutritionally valuable – so it could be a home-made granola bar made with oats, ground seeds\*, mashed banana or pureed apple, and some blended dates or raisins for sweetness. Or a home-made no-sugar crumble.  
\* (note if you're using seeds, do be aware they are likely to have a 'may contain' warning for nuts – so risk assess whether this is appropriate for your setting. The brand Creative Nature have guaranteed nut free chia seeds as an option.)



## Switching to Natural Yoghurts

If a child has only ever eaten flavoured yoghurts, then switching to plain is quite a shift in taste. However, it's an important one, so that growing taste buds don't get used to sweeter flavours. Of course, this will be easier for weaning babies, because they get used to the flavour from the beginning of solids. For those transitioning from flavoured yoghurts to plain, you could blend in some frozen fruit, sprinkle in a little cinnamon, mash in a banana or stir in stewed apples. Or try using the yoghurt as a dip for fruit batons, pop some natural yoghurt on top of porridge or make ice pops in the summer from blended fruit and yoghurt, frozen in lolly moulds.

## Working towards 5 a day

Latest figures suggest that pre-school children are simply not eating enough fruit and vegetables. 88% of 1.5 to 3 year olds do not get enough fibre, of which fruit and veggies are such a valuable source (Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition, 2023). We need enough fibre to support the developing gut microbiome, which plays a pivotal role in childhood development – from brain health to immune programming.

Fresh veggies or fruit should be provided at every main meal and with snacks. Encouraging children to eat 'just one more' from this food group can have huge health benefits, as we know that every incremental rise in vegetable and fruit intake is good for us.

So every time you present a meal or snack, include some brightly coloured vegetables and fruit alongside it. You can also encourage families to include at least one veg or fruit with their meals or snacks at home – with ideas for nutritionally valuable snacks or simple additions to main meals. Frozen vegetables are fine, and you can encourage families to try to eat the rainbow every day.

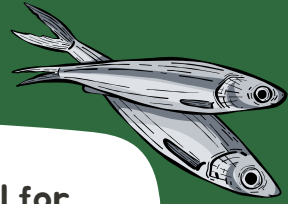
## Keeping it wholegrain

Given that the majority of children do not eat enough fibre, the guidelines now include recommendations around the addition of wholegrain foods. This could be a wholegrain breakfast cereal like Shredded Wheat or low sugar bran flakes, porridge made with rolled or steel cut oats (rather than instant), wholegrain bread, brown rice and wholegrain pasta.

These provide more fibre, as well as essential vitamins and minerals such as folate, zinc and iron. In the early days of weaning, it's important not to overload children with fibre, but you can focus more on vegetable-lead weaning and introduce small amounts of wholegrains.



## Fats for the brain!



Omega 3 fatty acids are often lacking in children's diets. These are vital for brain development, and research suggests that children with ADHD particularly have a higher need for omega 3 fats (Hawkey & Nigg, 2014).

The new now recommend at least 1 portion of oily fish every 3 weeks. However, given that less than 10% of UK children meet the oily fish targets, it may be prudent to increase this to fortnightly or even better, weekly. Oily fish is one of our best sources of omega 3 fats – this includes salmon, mackerel, anchovies, sardines, herring. For non-fish eaters – their main source will be nuts and seeds, particularly chia, flax, hemp and walnuts. You can encourage grown ups to include these at home (being mindful of choking risk – unsalted nut butters, ground nuts and seeds for younger children).

For fish eaters, you could add to your menu a fish pie, salmon tagliatelle, sardines on toast or a fish dip made with mashed cooked fish (eg smoked mackerel for older children or sardines), blended with cream cheese or silken tofu and some lemon zest. Great as a dip!

## Does your setting have a nutrition policy?

Of course, it can take time to transition children and settings to new guidelines. One of the first steps you can take is develop your setting's nutrition policy. This sets a clear framework for parents and carers, particularly when it comes to what they should be including in lunchboxes.

You may also add to your policy how you accommodate those with allergies and intolerances, how you ensure you are covering nutritional needs for every child and how you engage children and their families with nutrition education. Do make sure it is inclusive of all food cultures, faiths and beliefs and takes into account the needs of those with sensory challenges.



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## Webinar recordings

In this engaging 2-part webinar series, Catherine Jeans DipION mBANT CNHC mIFM shared practical insights and tools to help early years practitioners confidently support children's nutrition in line with EYFS expectations.

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Delivered by  
**the FAMILY NUTRITION EXPERT**  
CATHERINE JEANS DIPION mBANT CNHC

## Webinars available at:

<https://www.pengreen.org/stronger-practice-hub/sph-webinars/>