

Healthy and Safer Eating

The Ark at Waddington is committed to ensuring that the children in our care are provided with a safe eating environment that supports healthy eating, minimises food-related risks and ensures compliance with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, including the changes introduced in September 2025.

We aim to support children's health, development and well-being by encouraging balanced, nutritious meals and maintaining a safe and inclusive environment for all dietary needs. We will also aim to promote healthy eating habits from an early age and safeguard children from food-related risks, including choking hazards and food allergies.

This policy aims to:

- Provide guidelines for parent/carers on the expectations for packed lunches brought from home.
- Ensure packed lunches brought from home provide children with healthy, balanced and nutritious food, which meets their needs to be physically active, to learn, grow well and be healthy.
- Comply with food hygiene and safety regulations.
- Meet EYFS requirements for nutrition, independence and self-care.
- Protect children with allergies and dietary needs.

Packed Lunch Guidelines

Children have smaller stomachs so make sure that portion sizes are the right size for your child. Also ensure that the food provided is in manageable pieces and is not a choking hazard for your child (see below for further choking hazard information). A healthy packed lunch contains a mixture of the following items, from across the four main food groups, trying to provide variety throughout the week:

- a sandwich, wrap or pasta with a healthy filling/sauce
- a portion of fruit/vegetables
- a portion of dairy (i.e. yogurt, cheese)
- a portion of protein (i.e. meat snack, egg)

We do also allow crisps/crackers – though try to avoid those high in salt or fat – and sweet treats – please limit this to one, small treat per day (if there is more than one then your child will be asked to choose which they would like, and the rest returned to their lunch box and sent home again.)

A drink, such as water and milk, will be available for your child to access during the day. When providing a drink, please ensure that only plain water or milk is sent in – any squash or juice will be disposed of and replaced with clean, fresh water.

Items to avoid are sugary, fizzy drinks and nuts or nut-based products (these are strictly prohibited due to allergies.)

Safe Storage and Handling of Packed Lunches

To ensure compliance with food safety, we will ensure:

- All packed lunches provided are in a clearly labelled, insulated lunch box.
- It is advised that parents/carers should send packed lunches including an ice pack to keep perishable food fresh.
- Refrigeration is not available; therefore parents/carer should pack food that remains safe at room temperature.
- We are unable to heat/re-heat food for food hygiene purposes. Children can bring hot food in a suitable thermos flask or container.
- Staff monitor lunches for compliance with food safety, healthy eating standards and our own packed lunch guidelines.
- Any unsafe or unsuitable food will be returned home, and parents/carers will be informed.
- Children are only allowed to eat their OWN packed lunch.

Waste and Disposal

Staff will, within reason, send any uneaten packed lunch food items back home. This is so that parents/carers can also monitor what their child has consumed during the day and then raise any concerns over their child's food intake with the preschool.

Food Allergies and Special Dietary Requirements

We recognise the importance of catering to children's dietary needs, including food allergies and intolerances. All known food allergies or special dietary requirements must be disclosed to the preschool by parents/carers on the setting 'Registration Details Form' prior to the child starting preschool.

We maintain up-to-date records of children's allergies, intolerances and dietary preferences. This information is shared with all the relevant staff members and stored securely. We will prompt parents/carers to update the information we hold regarding special dietary requirements every 6 months.

A thorough risk assessment is carried out for children with food allergies, ensuring appropriate precautions are taken, including avoiding allergens in meals and snacks and at each meal and snack time, practitioners are clear about who is responsible for checking that the food being provided meets the dietary requirements for each child.

We will ensure that all staff are aware of the allergy needs of the children in their care and, where necessary, parents/carers are encouraged to supply the setting with emergency medication for their child.

Nuts, nut products and sweets are not permitted at The Ark at Waddington preschool. Staff may inspect lunch boxes on arrival to ensure adherence to food safety, allergy and our own packed lunch guidelines.

Allergy & Food Safety Policy Compliance

As previously mentioned, we operate a strict NO-NUT policy – any nut-based products or those products suspected to contain nuts will be removed and returned to parents.

All food must be safely prepared and stored at home following food hygiene guidelines and parents/carers must ensure that the food is fresh and appropriate for their child's dietary needs.

Any concerns about a child's diet or food safety will be discussed with parents/carers.

Non-Compliance & Right to Refuse Packed Lunches to Safeguard Children

Parents/carers must adhere to our allergy, food hygiene, healthy eating and our packed lunch guidelines. If a lunch does not meet our standards, we reserve the right to contact the parents/carers to bring a substitute packed lunch or provide one at an additional cost to the parents/carers. We will also refuse packed lunches until compliance is ensured and are required to report any ongoing non-compliance as a safeguarding concern, in line with EYFS regulations.

If a child comes in without a packed lunch, every attempt will be made to contact the family to bring one in for 12pm. In the event contact cannot be made, we can provide an 'emergency' lunch, though this will be at an additional cost to the parent/carer.

Support for Parents/Carers

If you need support in providing a healthy packed lunch, we are happy to offer guidance and resources. Please speak to a member of staff if you require any assistance.

You can also access guidance and ideas by visiting the following websites:

[Eating well early years — First Steps Nutrition Trust](#)

[Preparing the perfect packed lunch | Pre-school | Health for Under 5s](#)

[Lunchbox ideas and recipes – Healthier Families - NHS](#)

Safer Eating Practices

To minimise the risk of choking and ensure safe eating environments for young children the following practices are implemented:

- All children will be supervised during meal and snack times, they will be within sight and hearing of a member of staff whilst eating. Where possible, staff will sit facing children whilst they eat so they can be sure they are eating in a way to prevent choking and so they can prevent food sharing and be aware of any unexpected allergic reactions. Staff will not be permitted to eat their own food during lunch time however can enjoy a healthy fruit snack whilst supervising the children's snack time.
- Staff will prepare food in a way to prevent choking and be vigilant to ensure foods sent in packed lunches have also been prepared safely. Firm, spherical foods like grapes and cherry tomatoes must be sliced into quarters or segments. Cylindrical foods such as cucumber, carrot and cocktail sausages must be cut lengthways into thin batons. This guidance on food safety for young children [Help for early years providers : Food safety](#) includes advice on food and drink to avoid, how to reduce the risk of choking and links to other useful resources for early years settings. If a child experiences a choking incident that requires intervention, staff will record details of where and how the child choked and parents/carers are made aware. The records will be reviewed and risk assessed alongside other accidents/incidents at preschool on a half-termly basis. Appropriate action will be taken to address any identified concerns.
- Food will be served in a manner suitable for the child's developmental stage (e.g. foods will be cut into small, manageable pieces for younger children). Popcorn, marshmallows, jelly cubes and hard sweets are not permitted for children under 5.
- Children will sit down and remain seated while eating and be given time to chew and swallow their food properly. Children are discouraged from talking loudly at meal/snack times. Other distractions such as toys at the meal tables are, wherever possible, discouraged. Food sharing is not allowed.

Healthy Eating and Nutrition

We aim to support the health and well-being of all children by promoting healthy eating habits:

- We offer the children a mid-morning snack during their session. This consists of fresh milk, water or a suitable dairy free alternative, a selection of fresh fruits and vegetables, crackers or yogurt. We will always encourage the children to eat healthily. Snack menus can be shared with parents/carers on request.
- We will encourage the children to try a bit of everything they are offered but there will be no pressure if they choose not to. They will be praised for tasting something new and not pressured if they say they don't want to eat something.
- Parents are advised about the safe preparation of packed lunches and given information about providing healthy packed lunches during their child's registration to the preschool.
- We will engage the children in learning about food, nutrition and healthy eating through age-appropriate activities and discussions.
- Staff will have regard for children's food intake and work with parents/carers to provide healthy food options.

Mealtime Hygiene and Safety

To ensure the safety and hygiene of food, the following procedures apply:

- All food will be stored at the correct temperature, in compliance with food safety regulations. Food preparation areas and equipment will be kept clean, and staff will adhere to strict handwashing routines and wear gloves when handling food.
- Potentially dangerous substances, such as bleach and laundry detergents, will not come into contact with food preparation areas. Food preparation areas will be located in a suitable place, away from toilets and nappy changing facilities.
- All kitchen utensils and eating equipment will be safe and age-appropriate for the children. Any broken or damaged items will be immediately replaced.
- Children will wash their hands before eating and after using the toilet or being outside. Staff will ensure that all children have clean hands before meals and snacks are served.
- We will notify Ofsted as soon as it is practical to do so, but no later than 14 days after the event has occurred, of any food poisoning incident affecting two or more children that attend the setting.

Training and Awareness

Staff will receive regular training in paediatric first aid, food safety, allergy management and safe eating practices. This includes:

- All staff will be trained in first aid procedures specific to food-related incidents, including how to handle allergic reactions and choking. Whilst children are eating there will be at least one member of staff with a valid full paediatric first aid certificate present in the room. Paediatric first aid will be updated at least every 3 years as a minimum.
- All staff are aware of the symptoms and treatments for allergies and anaphylaxis, the difference between allergies and intolerances and that children can develop allergies at any time.
- Staff will undergo refresher training on food hygiene and allergy awareness.

Parent/Carer Involvement

We believe that parents and carers play a key role in the nutritional care of their children. We encourage parents to share any concerns or preferences related to their child's diet and we will maintain open lines of communication regarding food and mealtimes. For special occasions or celebrations (e.g. birthdays) we will work with parents to ensure that any treats brought in align with our safer eating and allergy policies.

Website www.thearkatwaddington.co.uk OFSTED registration no. EY 2660835

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