

NurseryWorld

For everyone in the early years community



www.nurseryworld.co.uk



Guide to...

The Early Years Nutrition Partnership

KEY CONTENT

- Why the EYN Partnership was formed
- The need to tackle obesity and poor diets
- Training and nutritional advice
- Achieving the Quality Mark
- Case studies: nursery and practitioner
- Subscription packages and resources

In association with



Guide to...

The Early Years Nutrition Partnership

It's easy to get confused by the often conflicting information on what foods you should feed the children in your care. Unpicking the latest advice on healthy eating and then ensuring it applies to children under the age of five – topped by different dietary requirements, allergies and fussy eating – is enough to leave anyone feeling dizzy. That's why the Early Years Nutrition Partnership (EYN Partnership) was formed in 2016 to give hands-on help and advice to early years settings and set a standard for nutrition practice.

The EYN Partnership is an independent social enterprise created in partnership with the Pre-school Learning Alliance, the British Nutrition Foundation and Danone Early Life Nutrition. The EYN Partnership believes that good nutrition is one of the fundamentals of children's wellbeing and that a consistent evidence-based approach is essential to establish healthy eating practices. Its ambition is that every child in England under the age of five will have access to expert nutrition support within their early years setting to help give them the best possible nutritional start. While schools must adhere to standards in terms of the quality of food provision, there are currently no mandatory guidelines on food provision in the early years. Despite this many settings provide children with the majority of their meals during the week and parents often rely on practitioners for dietary advice.

'Most practitioners are already more than aware of the importance of healthy eating, but it's easy to underestimate just how much influence we can have – to think that if healthy eating isn't encouraged at home, there's only so much we in the sector



can do,' says Neil Leitch, Pre-school Learning Alliance chief executive and EYN Partnership chair. 'But what I've learned through our involvement in the EYN Partnership is that encouraging healthy eating is more than just serving balanced meals at a setting. It's about involving and supporting families to gain a better understanding of good nutrition, and that's the message that we're hoping to get across to providers through the partnership.'

Nurseries are being encouraged to register with the EYN Partnership to gain tailored hands-on nutritional advice. As part of the programme, settings can achieve the EYN Partnership Quality Mark and access training. June O'Sullivan, chief executive of the London Early Years Foundation and an EYN Partnership board member, says, 'It's a flexible offer so there is an opportunity for all nurseries to get involved. And it's a financially viable scheme, a great investment and opportunity to show the community that you prioritise nutrition.'

THE BIG PICTURE

Establishing a healthy diet from birth enables young children to have a better quality of life, but

currently one in five children in the UK starts school overweight or obese¹. The big picture is shocking and Ms O'Sullivan warns that the consequences of a poor diet are 'dire':

- Long-term childhood obesity is a strong predictor of obesity in adulthood, which is a major risk factor for several chronic conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes and some types of cancer, and premature mortality².
- Obesity prevalence for children living in deprived areas is double that of those living in the least deprived areas².
- While households across the UK are buying too many foods high in fat, salt and sugars and too few fruit and vegetables, this is especially the case for households on a low income³.
- As well as obesity, some toddlers already have

nutritional problems that can have immediate and long-term effects on their health, growth and development, such as food allergies, iron deficiency, tooth decay and constipation⁴.

- 32 per cent of parents struggle to deal with their toddler's eating pattern and a fifth of mothers are unsure about what is healthy for their baby or toddler to eat⁵.

'The biggest hurdle is that while staff recognise the problem, it's too large to manage so it's overwhelming, which leaves staff frozen in action,' says Ms O'Sullivan. 'We need a simple clear strategy that looks at message, knowledge and opportunities to connect and share learning. We also need to train our chefs.' By encouraging healthy food and eating habits early on it is possible to encourage and steer children toward the right behaviours.

CASE STUDY 1: RAINBOWS DAY NURSERY, SALFORD, GREATER MANCHESTER



Rainbows Day Nursery gained EYN Partnership accreditation last year [2017].

'At Rainbows we're committed to providing healthy, balanced meals and have always seen mealtimes as a big social and learning opportunity. Salford has a poor oral health record and a problem with child obesity so we are active in promoting healthy food choices to parents, but often find that online advice can be conflicting or not tailored to early

years children,' says manager Kathryn Munden (right).

'We were approached by the EYN Partnership when we were looking at updating our menus. Having the direct help of a nutritionist really appealed. We enjoyed attending the practical workshops, and the visits from the nutritionist underpinned our knowledge. She observed our practice and set us achievable targets, such as adding more non-meat based protein to our menus. It was reassuring to be told that overall our three-week rolling menus were good, but she helped us to improve the balance of meals to avoid cheese or meat heavy weeks. We also reduced the amount of carbs in our snacks and

increased the fruit. And now we ensure that, rather than just supporting children with their meals, staff eat with them.

'Food comes up very quickly in conversations with prospective parents. Gaining the accreditation and working directly with a nutritionist gives great reassurance. I feel we're now more confident in discussing food-related issues. For our last parent evening the nutritionist set up a portion size display for us with bowls.

'Above all the children really enjoy the food, with cauliflower cheese, roast dinners and sweet and sour chicken being particularly popular. We're keen to continue with the EYN Partnership and see what else we can learn.'

HANDS-ON HELP

The EYN Partnership model is designed to be flexible and sensitive to individual settings' needs and challenges. 'I know all too well how incredibly difficult things are for many providers at the moment – and when you're trying to balance the books, keep up with your paperwork and, of course, continue to deliver quality care and education, keeping on top of the latest nutrition guidance understandably might not be your number one priority,' says Mr Leitch.

'But I also know that most early years practitioners do know and appreciate the value of good nutrition, and so what we want to do is to build upon this understanding and support providers to implement changes that will benefit young children, without this being seen as yet another onerous task that already-overworked practitioners have to tackle.' Uniquely, by registering with the EYN Partnership, nurseries secure access to a registered nutritional professional – either a nutritionist or dietitian with at least a bachelor's degree in nutritional or dietetic science and experience in early years nutrition. The EYN Partnership's localised model pairs nurseries with nutritionists who understand the demographic make-up of the area, so they can tailor advice for varied needs.

They will help work out what is needed to upskill the staff team on their nutrition practice and offer a range of ways to do so, such as practical workshops or CACHE-accredited online training (see case studies). The personalised support makes it easier for settings to achieve and maintain healthy eating.

'The vision is to set a standard for nutrition in early years settings – and make good nutritional advice available for the benefit of all children attending nurseries,' says Ms O'Sullivan. 'We need to be working towards systemic change by connecting with settings, offering the service and inspiring staff to lead on improving food and nutrition knowledge.'

QUALITY MARK

Nurseries subscribed to the EYN Partnership programme are given 'Committed' status and materi-

als to show parents and carers that they are investing in their child's health and wellbeing. They can then start working towards a Quality Mark. With the support of their dedicated nutrition professional, who observe mealtimes as well as giving feedback on menus, they are supported to:

- Learn about early years nutrition and hydration
- Develop nutritionally balanced and tasty menus
- Understand appropriate portion sizes
- Encourage children to understand healthy eating
- Inform parents about healthy eating issues
- Use mealtimes to encourage more positive attitudes to food.

After being assessed, nurseries receive accreditation at the appropriate level – 'Accredited', 'Advanced' or 'Specialist' – based on government nutrition recommendations, voluntary guidelines and best practice in good nutrition for children in the early years. Settings can continue to work with their nutrition professional and further improve how they approach food, nutrition and health.

To ensure that settings also develop in-house expertise, the EYN Partnership programme provides access to tailored training and assessment for practitioners, supported by their nutrition professional. Practitioners embarking on this route access vocational training online with learning materials that have been written by the British Nutrition Foundation in order to gain the CACHE Level 3 qualification unit 'Promote nutrition and hydration in early years and childcare settings' or Level 2 CACHE award 'Prepare meals to meet current nutritional standards in an early years setting'.

CHANGING HABITS

An evaluation commissioned by the EYN Partnership after its first year found that it had a positive impact on the overall quality of nutrition and hydration in nurseries involved. Examples include:

Dietary changes: Providing protein and iron-rich foods for vegetarian diets and the inclusion of more oily fish in menus. One nursery has stopped buying fish cakes and now uses a recipe

CASE STUDY 2: DONNA GRAHAM, DEPUTY MANAGER AT TENDER YEARS DAY NURSERY IN SOLIHULL, WEST MIDLANDS



Ms Graham (left) did the Level 3 CACHE award in Nutrition and Hydration in Early Years last year [2017]

'Our nursery's main meals are provided by an outside caterer, but we provide the children's tea on site and were wondering how to revamp this when we heard about the EYN Partnership. It was the perfect opportunity for us to access professional nutrition support aimed specifically at the early years,' says Ms Graham.

'A colleague and I also signed up for the Level 3 award. I wanted to learn more about this area – my daughter

has a milk allergy and there are a range of allergies within the children in our care. It took about three months to complete the online course. I received regular support from the nutritionist who also works with our nursery. I spent around five hours of my own time each week completing set tasks, such as designing a hydration poster to share with parents explaining the importance of having enough to drink or creating a healthy menu. It was interesting learning about why some religions have specific dietary requirements, the importance of giving children oily fish weekly and portion sizes.

'Studying for the award has

given me more confidence to explain what food we offer and why – we serve "smelly" mackerel to children because it gives them Omega 3 and Vitamin D, plus many of the children love it. Now if a staff member questions the amount of food we're serving, I know what is sufficient. Learning that we had a habit of over-feeding children was an eye-opener. I'm now confident to offer alternative protein sources to vegetarian children. Butter bean and cream dip is high in fibre and a simple protein source.

'I put a lot of effort into the studying but feel I gained a lot back. We're now going to look at our snack menu.'

recommended by their nutritionist instead.

Changes to packed lunches: Managers have worked with nutritionists to educate parents on alternatives to items such as jam sandwiches.

Mealtime behaviour: Nutritionists observed mealtimes and offered suggestions for how these could be used to encourage a more positive attitude to food. A nursery has set up a separate dining room so that children are not distracted while eating.

Water intake: Many nurseries previously offering squash now only provide water or milk. Children at one nursery now drink more water simply by their nutritionist suggesting that staff put children's cups and their own water bottles on the same table so they remember to prompt the children when they take a drink themselves.

Impact on behaviour: Staff have noticed an improvement in children's behaviour as a result of menu changes, including one boy who may have previously been hungry which prevented him sleeping well and made him 'grouchy' in the afternoons.

Impact on staff: A manager said that her staff are also adopting healthier eating habits, such as bringing in less chocolates and crisps.

The evaluation demonstrates that by subscribing to the EYN Partnership, early years settings can actively improve their business while also empowering and educating practitioners and parents to make positive, practical and sustainable changes in their food provision. Above all, involved settings will encourage good nutrition from an early age and make a real difference to children's futures.



FURTHER INFORMATION

The Early Years Nutrition Partnership has a range of subscription packages to suit early years settings. Subscription fees include access to the online EYN Partnership portal, which has exclusive downloadable resources:

- 12-month subscription, EYN Partnership Quality Mark Award, two staff places on three half-day training sessions: £549
- 12-month subscription, EYN Partnership Quality Mark Award: £199
- Half-day whole setting training for eight staff (£50 per extra staff member): £499
- Level 3 CACHE qualification unit 'Promote nutrition and hydration in early years and childcare settings': £299 (plus £35 registration fee)
- Level 2 CACHE award 'Prepare meals to meet current nutritional standards in an early years setting': £199 (plus £35 registration fee)

The EYN Partnership's social enterprise business model means that profit from selling subscriptions is used to subsidise advice and training for early years settings based in areas of high social deprivation. Get in touch with the EYN Partnership directly to find out if your setting qualifies for a subsidy.

REFERENCES

1. Health and Social Care Information Centre. National Child Measurement Programme – England, 2014-15 report: <https://digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB19109>
2. Public Health England. About Obesity, Health Risks: http://www.noo.org.uk/NOO_about_obesity/child_obesity
3. Family Food 2014: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/485982/familyfood-2014report-17dec15.pdf
4. Infant and Toddler Forum. Common Nutritional Problems in Toddlers. Growth and Development of Toddlers. Available at: <http://www.infantand-toddlerforum.org/toddlers-to-preschool/common-nutritional-problems-in-toddlers>
5. Word of Mum Bounty Survey, Demos 2012.

This Guide to... has been produced by Nursery World for the Early Years Nutrition Partnership

- Email: hello@eynpartnership.org
- Phone: 020 7697 2565
- Website: www.eynpartnership.org

 Facebook @eynpartnership

 Twitter @EYNpartnership