

Food, Nutrition and Mealtimes Policy

New Beginnings Day Nursery

Adopted: 1st September 2025

Review Date: Reviewed May 2026 for meals provided from home. Next review 1st September 2026

1. Policy Statement

At New Beginnings Day Nursery, we recognise that food, nutrition and mealtimes play a fundamental role in supporting children's health, wellbeing, learning and development.

We are committed to providing children with healthy, balanced and nutritious meals and snacks within a safe, inclusive and nurturing environment. Mealtimes are valued as important social experiences where children and adults eat together, develop independence, build positive relationships and learn healthy habits for life.

Our approach promotes:

- healthy growth and physical development
- positive attitudes towards food and healthy lifestyles
- safe food practices and allergen awareness
- children's independence and self-care skills
- inclusion and respect for individual dietary, cultural and medical needs.

Meals and snacks provided by the nursery are freshly prepared on site by experienced nursery chefs using high-quality ingredients and are planned in line with:

- the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework
- Department for Education Early Years Nutrition Guidance
- NHS healthy eating guidance
- Food Standards Agency food safety guidance
- Healthy Early Years and Food for Life principles.

New Beginnings is committed to maintaining robust food hygiene, allergy management and safeguarding procedures across all nursery settings. We operate as a nut-free nursery environment and support the work of The Natasha Allergy Research Foundation to help promote allergy awareness and safer food practices.

We recognise that some families accessing funded childcare may choose not to purchase nursery meals. In these circumstances, the nursery will work in partnership with families to agree safe and appropriate arrangements in line with:

- food safety requirements
- allergen management procedures
- healthy eating guidance
- and operational considerations within the nursery environment.

To support the safety and wellbeing of all children:

- food brought from home must be suitable to be consumed cold
- the nursery does not reheat externally prepared food
- parents are encouraged to use insulated containers and ice packs to maintain safe food temperatures
- food should be clearly labelled and, where possible, remain in original packaging displaying allergen information.

Due to limited refrigeration capacity, the nursery cannot routinely provide refrigerated storage for food brought from home, except where refrigeration is required for breast milk in accordance with safe storage guidance.

This policy supports New Beginnings' wider commitment to safeguarding, health and wellbeing, equality, inclusion and high-quality early years practice.

This policy should be read alongside the:

- Safeguarding Policy
- Allergies and Allergic Reactions Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Funding Policy
- Food Brought from Home (Funded Meal Opt-Out) Procedures.

2. Our Approach to Food and Healthy Eating

Children attending a full nursery day may receive breakfast, lunch, tea and snacks depending on their attendance pattern.

Menus are planned in line with:

- Department for Education example menus
- NHS guidance
- Soil Association guidance
- Healthy Early Years principles.

Menus:

- are reviewed regularly
- reflect cultural diversity and seasonal variation

- include fresh fruit and vegetables daily
- provide balanced and nutritious meals
- avoid excessive sugar, salt, saturated fats and unnecessary additives where possible.

Portion sizes are age appropriate and children are encouraged to develop healthy eating habits from an early age.

Parents and children are encouraged to contribute ideas and feedback regarding nursery menus and mealtime experiences.

3. Sustainability

New Beginnings promotes sustainable food practices where reasonably possible.

This may include:

- reducing food waste
 - using seasonal produce
 - preparing home-made sauces and meals
 - using frozen or tinned produce where appropriate
 - offering a range of meat, fish and plant-based alternatives.
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4. Mealtime Environment

Mealtimes are planned as calm, social and enjoyable experiences.

At mealtimes:

- children are never left unattended whilst eating or drinking
- a qualified paediatric first aider is always available
- staff model positive eating behaviours and good table manners
- children are encouraged to develop independence and self-help skills
- children are supported without pressure if they refuse food
- children are given time to eat at their own pace.

Mealtimes also support communication, language development and social interaction within the nursery environment.

5. Drinks

New Beginnings promotes healthy hydration throughout the nursery day.

The nursery provides:

- fresh drinking water at all times
- milk in line with age requirements
- support for breastfeeding and formula feeding where appropriate.

Sugary drinks, fizzy drinks and energy drinks are not provided.

Staff encourage children to drink water regularly, particularly during warm weather and physical activity.

6. Baby Feeding and Weaning

Feeding routines for babies and younger children are discussed and agreed with parents.

New Beginnings supports:

- breastfeeding
- formula feeding
- expressed breast milk
- and age-appropriate weaning.

Weaning is introduced collaboratively with parents and carers and reflects each child's stage of development.

Freshly prepared fruits, vegetables and suitable textured foods are introduced gradually and safely.

Daily feeding records are maintained for younger children where appropriate.

Commercial baby food is not routinely provided by the nursery, except for formula milk where required.

7. Management of Food Allergies and Dietary Needs

Children's dietary, allergy and medical information is collected prior to admission and reviewed regularly.

The nursery maintains:

- allergy awareness procedures
- individual care plans where required
- risk assessments for children with allergies or medical dietary needs
- clear communication systems between kitchen and nursery staff.

Allergens are displayed alongside menus.

Meals prepared for children with allergies, intolerances, religious or cultural dietary requirements are clearly identified before being served.

Children with dietary needs are supported sensitively and are not singled out during mealtimes.

Appropriate supervision and seating arrangements may be used to reduce the risk of allergen cross-contamination.

8. Formula Milk and Breast Milk

Parents are responsible for supplying:

- formula milk
- bottles
- and expressed breast milk where required.

Formula milk should be supplied:

- in manufacturer packaging
- pre-measured dispensers
- or ready-to-feed cartons where appropriate.

Breast milk is supported fully within the nursery and handled in accordance with safe storage and hygiene guidance.

Parents are responsible for updating staff regarding feeding requirements and any changes to routines.

8a. Breast Milk Brought from Home

Breast milk brought into nursery must:

- be clearly labelled with the child's full name and date expressed
- be transported safely
- and provided in suitable storage containers.

The nursery will:

- store breast milk safely within refrigeration arrangements
 - follow safe handling procedures
 - maintain feeding records where appropriate.
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9. Cultural and Dietary Preferences

New Beginnings values diversity and respects cultural, religious and ethical dietary preferences.

Menus aim to reflect a variety of foods, tastes and traditions.

Children are encouraged to:

- experience familiar foods
 - explore new foods
 - and develop positive attitudes towards different cuisines and cultures.
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10. Learning About Food

Children are encouraged to learn about:

- healthy lifestyles
- healthy food choices
- cooking and food preparation
- and food origins.

Children may participate in:

- cooking activities
 - food tasting
 - gardening activities
 - and discussions relating to healthy eating and wellbeing.
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11. Celebrations and Special Occasions

New Beginnings encourages celebrations that are inclusive and safe for all children.

Non-food celebrations are encouraged where possible.

Where celebratory food is provided:

- it must be shop bought
- clearly labelled with ingredient and allergen information
- and may be sent home rather than consumed within nursery.

Alternative arrangements will always be considered for children with allergies or dietary requirements.

12. Food Safety and Hygiene

New Beginnings maintains robust food hygiene and food safety procedures.

Staff receive training appropriate to their role, which may include:

- food hygiene
- allergen awareness
- choking prevention
- and paediatric first aid.

Safe food handling, cleaning and supervision arrangements are maintained throughout the nursery.

Incidents relating to food safety, choking or allergic reactions are managed in line with nursery procedures and reported where required.

13. Food Brought from Home (Funded Meal Opt-Out)

13.1 Policy Overview

New Beginnings Day Nursery normally provides freshly prepared meals and snacks as part of the nursery day. This supports:

- healthy nutrition
- food safety
- allergen management
- and consistent mealtime experiences for children.

For children accessing funded childcare places, meals are not included within the funded entitlement. Parents may therefore:

- purchase nursery meals and snacks, or
- choose to provide food from home.

Where families choose not to purchase nursery meals during funded sessions, the nursery will work in partnership with parents to agree a safe and appropriate arrangement.

This approach reflects the Department for Education Early Years Foundation Stage Nutrition Guidance (2025), which highlights the importance of allergen management, food safety, healthy nutrition and safe storage arrangements for food brought into early years settings.

13.2 Food Safety, Storage and Transportation

New Beginnings operates robust food safety procedures for food prepared on site by nursery chefs. The nursery is unable to verify how food prepared outside the setting has been stored, prepared or transported prior to arrival.

For this reason:

- food brought from home must be suitable to be consumed cold, as the nursery does not reheat externally prepared meals
- parents are strongly encouraged to provide food in insulated containers or lunch bags with appropriate ice packs or cooling packs to help maintain safe food temperatures throughout the nursery day
- all food should be suitable and safe for consumption during the child's attendance period.

The nursery has limited refrigeration capacity and therefore cannot routinely provide refrigerated storage for food brought from home, except where refrigeration is required for breast milk in line with safe storage guidance.

Parents should be aware that current Department for Education guidance does not require early years providers to refrigerate or reheat food brought into the setting from home.

Storage arrangements within the nursery are intended to support food required for the child's daily consumption only and the nursery cannot accommodate large quantities of externally prepared food.

Where chilled storage or ice packs are not used, parents should be aware that the Food Standards Agency "4-hour rule" may apply in relation to perishable foods brought into the

setting. Parents remain responsible for ensuring that food provided from home is appropriately prepared, stored and transported before arrival at nursery.

13.3 Allergen Safety and Food Identification

As part of our allergy-aware and nut-free nursery environment:

- all food brought from home must be clearly labelled with the child's full name
- food should, where possible, remain in original packaging displaying ingredient and allergen information
- where food is transferred into containers, parents should provide clear written information relating to known allergens or ingredients where requested by the nursery.

This supports the nursery in managing allergy risks and reducing the possibility of allergen cross-contamination.

Children are supervised carefully during mealtimes and are encouraged to eat only their own food and drink.

Any food items that:

- present an identified allergy risk
- are not clearly labelled
- appear unsafe
- or do not meet the nursery's food safety expectations

may not be served within the nursery setting.

13.4 Nutritional Expectations

Food provided from home should support children's healthy growth and development and should reflect healthy eating guidance for young children.

Parents should provide suitable food for the duration of the child's attendance, which may include:

- breakfast
- lunch
- tea
- and snacks.

Nursery managers will support families to understand the Department for Education Early Years Foundation Stage Nutrition Guidance and the nursery's healthy eating expectations where required.

13.5 Supporting Families

New Beginnings will always work sensitively and collaboratively with families to support children's nutritional, medical, cultural and dietary needs.

Where concerns arise relating to:

- food safety
- allergen management
- food suitability
- or children's nutritional needs,

the nursery will work in partnership with families to review arrangements and consider appropriate next steps.

The nursery will always seek to ensure that no child goes without food during their time at nursery.

14. Monitoring, Review and Compliance

New Beginnings monitors food provision, food safety and nutritional practice across all nursery settings.

This policy is reviewed annually or sooner if:

- legislation changes
- government guidance changes
- or operational requirements change.

Where parents voluntarily opt into nursery-provided meals as part of funded childcare arrangements, these arrangements are managed in line with the nursery Funding Policy and associated operational planning arrangements. Where families choose to provide food from home, parents/carers are required to work in partnership with the nursery to support allergen management, food safety, and the wellbeing of all children attending the setting. This includes ensuring food is appropriately labelled and, where possible, provided in original packaging displaying ingredient and allergen information.