



GOVERNMENT OFFICE
FOR THE NORTH WEST



Best Start for Life: Guidelines for food, nutrition, play and physical activity for early years childcare

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FOREWORD

The best long-term approach to ensure healthy weight is to follow a healthy balanced diet with optimum levels of physical activity from early years. The pre-school years are an ideal time to establish healthy lifestyles and although parents have the main responsibility for their child's food, nutrition and activity, childcare providers also have an important role. When parents choose to use early year's services they want to know that provision will help them to thrive. The partnership between parents and the early year's provider is vital to ensure babies and young children have the best possible start in life. We hope that these Guidelines will be useful for those working within early years and for parents seeking the best possible environment for their child outside of the family.



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WHY WE NEED THESE GUIDELINES

“Healthy eating, regular play and physical activity are essential for growth and development in childhood. To help children develop healthy eating patterns from an early age, it is important that the food and eating patterns to which they are exposed – both at home and outside the home – are those which promote good health and positive attitudes to good nutrition”.¹ Likewise, exposure to health risks through inactivity begins in childhood so establishing activity patterns early in life will have an impact on later behaviours.

Increasing numbers of under-5s are spending long periods of time in childcare settings outside of their homes. These settings include day nurseries, nursery schools, playgroups, childminders, crèches and private nannies. Those who provide childcare are in a unique position to have a positive influence not only on the nutritional intake and activity levels of the babies and children in their care, but also in the knowledge and attitudes about food and activity that form behaviours and can impact on health and wellbeing in later life. Giving positive messages about food, physical activity and play in early years settings can also help to influence families.

All Ofsted registered settings attended by young children are required to follow the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage². It states that children should be provided with healthy meals and snacks that are balanced and nutritious. Children must have opportunities to be active and interactive and to develop skills of co-ordination, control, manipulation and movement. They must be supported in developing an understanding of the importance of physical activity and making healthy choices in relation to food. These Guidelines build on those requirements and will help those working within early years settings to achieve the best possible practice. They also support holistic whole day, whole setting approach to policy development. The information provided is intended for use alongside appropriate professional training and as a ‘signpost’ to best practice – notably the Caroline Walker Trust Guidelines³ and NICE (National Institute of Clinical Excellence) Guidance⁴. We hope that they will also be a useful tool for parents and carers seeking quality childcare provision.

The North West Early Years Cluster brings together health and education professionals working to reduce obesity and improve the health of babies and young children across the region. The Cluster members have worked together to provide expert knowledge and to support the development of these Guidelines.

1 Caroline Walker Trust Guidelines - Eating well for under-5s in child care (2006)
3 www.cwt.org.uk

2 Department for children, schools and families - The Early Years Foundation Stage (2008)
4 NICE – Promoting Physical Activity for Children: Review 8 – Active Play (2008)