

Food, Nutrition and Safer Eating in Early Years; Acorn and Reception

At **Gothic Mede Academy**, we want our Early Years Acorn and Reception children to develop positive and healthy attitudes towards food while enjoying snack and lunchtime in a safe, happy and relaxed environment. We value working in partnership with parents and carers to support children to make healthy choices and to ensure that food is prepared and eaten safely.

Our approach is informed by the **Department for Education (DfE)** guidance for Early Years. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requires that where children are provided with meals, snacks and drinks, these must be healthy, balanced and nutritious.

Healthy Eating

We provide healthy and nutritious food and drinks in school, and **fresh drinking water is always available**. We also participate in the **Free Fruit and Milk for Under-Fives Scheme (milk for Acorn only)**.

If your child brings a packed lunch, we encourage you to provide a varied and balanced selection of foods to help children have the energy they need for the afternoon.

A healthy lunchbox might include:

-  **Fruit or vegetables** – for example, banana, apple, pear, berries, cucumber, carrot sticks or pepper
-  **A starchy food** – such as a sandwich, wrap, pitta bread, pasta, rice or potatoes
-  **A source of protein** – such as egg, chicken, cheese, hummus or beans
-  **A dairy or dairy alternative** – such as yoghurt or cheese
-  **Water** to drink

Children do not need large portions. A few different foods in child-sized portions is usually plenty.

Limiting Foods High in Sugar, Salt and Fat

We encourage families to **limit foods that are high in sugar, salt and saturated fat** and to make healthier choices where possible.

Foods such as **chocolate, sweets, cakes, biscuits, pastries and similar treats** do not need to be completely excluded from a child's diet, but we encourage these to be **limited and not included as a regular part of a school lunchbox**.

Instead, you could choose fruit, vegetables, yoghurt, cheese, sandwiches, wraps or other nutritious options.

 **Please do not send sweets or confectionery** as part of your child's lunch or snack.

 We also ask that children do not bring **fizzy drinks or squash** into school. **Water is the best choice** for keeping children hydrated.

Safer Eating and Choking Prevention

Keeping children safe while eating is particularly important during the Early Years. Young children are still developing their chewing and swallowing skills, and some foods can present a significant choking risk.

The DfE Early Years nutrition guidance highlights the importance of reducing choking risks through appropriate food preparation and supervision.

Please make sure that foods sent into school are prepared in a way that is appropriate for young children.

Foods that can present a choking risk include:

-  **Whole grapes and cherry tomatoes** – these should be cut into **quarters lengthways**
-  Large pieces of apple or other hard fruit – cut into thin, manageable pieces
-  **Whole or large pieces of sausage/hot dog** – cut lengthways and into small pieces
-  Large chunks of cheese – cut into small, manageable pieces
-  Whole nuts and peanuts (please don't send into school)
-  Popcorn (please don't send into school)
-  Hard sweets and boiled sweets (please don't send into school)
-  Large pieces of raw carrot or other hard vegetables
-  Large chunks of meat
- Foods that are **large, sticky or difficult to chew**

 **Please remember that grapes, cherry tomatoes and similar round foods should never be sent in whole.** Cutting these into quarters lengthways significantly reduces the choking risk.

Nuts and Allergies

Please do not send **nuts or products containing nuts** into school, including products labelled '**may contain nuts**'.

Nuts are a common allergen and can cause a serious or potentially life-threatening reaction.

We ask parents and carers to provide us with full details of any **allergies, intolerances or dietary requirements** their child has. This information is recorded and acted upon carefully.

Occasionally, we may need to ask families to avoid particular food products if they contain an ingredient that presents a serious risk to another child with a severe allergy.

Eating Safely at School

Children are closely supervised while eating. A member of staff with a valid **paediatric first aid certificate** will be present and observing the children during snack and lunchtime.

We encourage children to:

-  **Sit down** while eating
-  **Eat calmly and take their time**
-  **Take small bites and chew their food carefully**

In Acorn class, apples and pears provided by the Infant Fruit scheme will be cut in to smaller pieces. In Reception, children will be allowed to eat them whole but will be sitting down calmly & quietly, reminded to chew carefully and will be supervised by a member of staff with a paediatric first aid certificate. We ask that, if you send fruit from home for snack time, that you send it in already prepared and chopped up if required.

-  **Drink water** throughout the day
-  Become increasingly **independent with opening and managing their lunchbox**

We are also unable to refrigerate lunchboxes, so please choose foods that are safe to keep at room temperature or use an appropriate ice pack.

Birthday Celebrations

We love celebrating birthdays with the children! There is **no expectation for children to bring anything into school for their birthday**. We ask that families do not send food into school for birthday celebrations. This helps us to manage allergies safely and supports our approach to healthy eating.

Working Together

Starting school is a big step for children, and developing healthy and safe eating habits is part of this journey. Thank you for working with us to provide nutritious food, prepare food safely and help children develop positive attitudes towards eating.

By working together, we can ensure that snack and lunchtime are safe, enjoyable and positive experiences for everyone.