

Guidance notes for specific types of special diet

1. Severe Food Allergies

Some food allergies can be serious or even fatal. Nut allergy is the best known, but it can apply to any food in a particular case. Some parents may wish to send their child to school with a nutritious food that is a known allergen to another child. Schools should allow children to do this. For example, nuts are a good source of unsaturated fats, soluble fibre and vitamin E, all nutrients associated with a decreased risk of degenerative diseases. In schools where there is a child with a severe food allergy, it is unlikely that it is practical to make the school an “Allergy free zone”. This would give false reassurance that cannot be guaranteed in practice. For example, schools can not guarantee that every cereal bar in every packed lunch is nut free. The child with a severe allergy must be taught by parents and the school staff not to swap food with other children. The school should discuss with parents appropriate ways of reducing the chances of exposure to the offending substance (e.g. cleaning protocols).

2. Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Children with ASD are particularly likely to be highly selective in their food choices. This is often symptomatic ASD. The child is not simply being fussy or awkward. There is a need for many ASD children to look for patterns, structure and repetition in many aspects of their lives including meal times. Also, many children with ASD are extremely susceptible to “sensory overload” from the noise, smells and visual stimulation of the dining room, and the texture, taste and smell of the food. Meal times therefore can be highly stressful. For some children with ASD, it is unrealistic to expect them to accept “healthy and nutritionally balanced” school menus immediately. Broadening the diet of such children is a difficult, painstaking task that requires persistence, patience and a measured approach. Caterers, support for learning staff, parents and pupils should work together to develop a pragmatic and phased approach to dietary improvement.

3. Children with communication difficulties

Some children have difficulty reading but respond well to visual images. Others can read, but find it difficult to establish a clear mental image of what that food will actually be like. Therefore appropriate visual images of food choices should be available to help children decide what they want to eat.

4. Children requiring texture modification

Many other children find that certain textures are difficult to manage. This may be because they have poor oral motor skills and find chewing and/or swallowing certain foods difficult. Learning to chew and swallow a range of textures is important for normal development of speech. Therefore, children who could manage a diet with more mixed, complex and challenging textures should be given such foods.

5. Obesity

Children who are obese or overweight do not need a “special diet”. The changes being implemented as a result of Hungry for Success will increase the number of appropriate choices and reduce the number of inappropriate choices for all children. This will have even greater benefit for overweight and obese children. There will be more choice of nutrient dense foods, and less foods that are high in fat and added sugars.

6. Diabetes

Children with diabetes should follow similar healthy eating guidelines to the rest of the population. Difficulties in controlling blood sugar and increased risk of cardiovascular disease mean that there is more likely to be harmful health consequences to poor diet than for the general population. Insulin regimes should be designed around the child’s lifestyle (rather than the other way around).

Special Diet Request Form

If your child requires a special diet for health reasons, please fill in the following form and send it to the head teacher of the school that your child attends. The request will be considered by the head teacher in consultation with the school meals service. Where appropriate, they will seek the advice of the local dietitian. If necessary, refer to the guidance notes shown on the other side of this page.

Child's name _____ Date of Birth _____

School _____

Address _____

Contact daytime telephone number _____

Please describe any relevant medical condition that is affected by eating unsuitable food

Please tell us what would happen if an unsuitable food is consumed by accident (please tick the relevant box):

Life threatening Severe impact

Mild to moderate reaction Unknown but not life threatening

Special diet to be provided (please tick one or more relevant boxes):

Gluten free Milk free Egg free
Nut free Soya free Selective eater* Other

**See guidance note 1 for definition of selective eater*

If you have ticked **other**, please provide clear details of the substances or ingredients that need to be avoided

If some foods containing the offending substance **can** be included in the diet, please say what these foods are (see guidance note 2)

How often would you like this special diet to be provided? (See guidance note 3)

Every day 3 days a week once or twice a week

Has a Doctor or Dietitian prescribed this diet? (See guidance note 4, and tick box)

Yes No

If **yes**, please provide details of the dietitian or doctor prescribing the special diet.

Name _____ Telephone number: _____

Please make sure you inform the Head Teacher of any changes to the diet

Guidance Notes to Special Diet Request Form

1. Selective eaters:

This term is used to describe children whose diets are unusual limited due to serious diagnosed psychological difficulties. For example, a proportion of children on the Autistic Spectrum are exceptionally fearful of new foods and have very limited diets. In these cases, packed lunches are usually the best option. However, it may be possible for these children to enjoy a school lunch on days where the cook is able to make minor adaptations to the existing menu. For selective eaters who bring a packed lunch regularly, it may still be possible to provide a sample “taster” of something from the school menu, to try along side the packed lunch.

2. Foods containing offending substances that can be included in the diet:

Some children with food allergies or intolerances can tolerate a small amount of the offending substance in a food. Also, someone with an intolerance to something in one food (e.g. protein in milk, or gluten from wheat) may tolerate it well in another (e.g. yoghurt or oats). Please provide this sort of specific information on the form, including a list of actual foods.

3. “How often would you like this special diet to be provided?”

Some special diets are not easy to provide every day. Please have a look at the weekly menus. Some days may require very little alteration to the standard meal options. You might want to ask the school to provide a meal on the “easier days” and send a packed lunch on the other days. If you take this option, please ensure that the school knows on which days a meal needs to be provided.

4. Diets not prescribed:

If you are requesting a diet for health reasons, but this has not been prescribed by a dietitian or doctor, we recommend that you inform your GP so that they are aware of the situation and they can provide any necessary supervision or advice. If you do not wish to do this, don't worry. We will still consider your request.

