

Time for a cup?

New guidance on using cups with infants aims to improve both their dental and physical health

The prolonged use of baby bottles or using the wrong style of infant cup — coupled with unhealthy drinks — can cause dental decay in young children and health problems, including obesity, in adult life. In response, the British Dietetic Association (BDA) has launched a policy for 'Introducing a Cup to an Infant's Diet'.

In it, the BDA recommendations are:

- 'A cup can be introduced to an infant at around five to six months of age, once the infant is sitting up and able to hold their head steady.
- An open cup should fully replace a bottle at around one year of age.
- The cup should be made of appropriate food-safe plastic material, have two handles and preferably no lid.
- A free-flow, lidded beaker is also suitable, but the lid should be removed as soon as the infant has learnt how to drink. Cups and beakers with non-drip valves are not suitable.
- A small amount of water or milk (breast or formula) should be offered in a cup initially. From one year of age, full-fat cows' milk can be offered. Milk and water are the best drinks for children.
- Juice or squash are not required by infants, but if they are given they should be diluted one part pure juice to at least ten parts water, given only at mealtimes and in an open cup.
- For children over one year of age, flavoured milk and smoothies should also only be given with meals (not between meals) and from an open cup.
- Other drinks, including squash, flavoured milks, smoothies and fizzy drinks, are not recommended for infants or toddlers. If these are given, they should be restricted to mealtimes, given in an open cup, and squash should be very well diluted with at least ten parts water.
- The consumption of fizzy and/or sugary drinks should be minimised.
- Tea, coffee and hot chocolate contain caffeine. Do not give these to infants or young children.
- A lidded cup or bottle should not be given to infants to help them get to sleep.
- An infant should never be left alone when drinking and they should always be sitting upright. Solid food (for example, rusk or baby rice) should never be put into a cup or bottle.'

Policy author and member of the BDA's Public Health Nutrition Network specialist group Elaine Gardner says, 'There is a compelling case to introduce cups to infants at the appropriate age to combat tooth decay that occurs due to prolonged bottle use, especially if the child sleeps with a bottle. The inclusion of sugared drinks in bottles with frequent sipping from bottles during the day is also a risk factor for severe dental caries. A prolonged use of bottles and excessive intake, including milk, are also emerging as risk factors for obesity in young children.'

- *The full policy can be accessed at: www.bda.uk.com/improvinghealth/healthprofessionals/policystatements*

Waste not...

Cutting food waste is important both ethically and environmentally. *Mary Llewellyn* explains how

According to the UK Government's waste advisory body Waste and Resources Action Programme (Wrap), we throw away seven million tonnes of food and drink from our homes every year at a cost of £12.5bn. Not surprisingly, non-domestic food waste statistics are even more shocking, with the education sector featuring high on the list of offenders.

Nick Morrison, writing in *The Guardian* last year, claimed that 'the education sector produces 13 per cent of all non-domestic food waste in England, throwing out some 123,000 tonnes a year, the bulk of that going straight to landfill'.

Apart from the moral issue of throwing away food when many people go hungry, this wastage has a massive environmental impact. Food production and transportation contribute to a significant proportion of the world's CO₂ emissions, and food waste in landfill produces methane, another greenhouse gas.

If the environmental and ethical costs are not enough to make us think again, then surely the financial cost should be an incentive to look at our practice. At Snapdragons we consider the issue of food waste at every stage of the process from planning the meals right through to composting.

THE NUMBERS GAME

Good communication between the office and the kitchen is important. When children are ill or on holiday or when parents change their booking pattern, the kitchen team need to know so that they can cater for the right amount of children.

If you have term-time-only children in the nursery, this is especially important because it is likely to affect the numbers significantly, and if special meals are being produced for children with dietary needs the kitchen should know if those children are away.

CUPBOARD LOVE

One of the most frustrating ways to waste food is having to throw it away before it has even left the kitchen.

- You should be used to checking



your fridge and freezer temperatures daily, and adding a weekly inventory of your cupboards will pay dividends too.

- Check the dates on all your packaging and bring the oldest packets to the front to make sure they are used first.
- Seal opened packets in air-tight containers labelled with the date that they were opened.
- Make sure you understand the difference between the 'best before' and 'use by' dates on food labels: 'Use by' is used on foods that could be harmful to health if eaten after the date; 'best before' appears on products like biscuits which may begin to go stale but will not harm consumers if eaten within a reasonable time.

I would argue that labelling has taken away our faith in our own senses when deciding if food is safe: how does it smell, look, feel? Having said that, although at home I would happily use my discretion, in nurseries we should definitely not be taking that risk.

AT THE TABLE

In our nurseries, we place great emphasis on the importance of self-serve mealtimes because we have seen the impact that it has on children's willingness to try new foods — if they have chosen to put it on their plate, they are much more likely to eat it and this, in turn, cuts down on food waste.

The food is presented in serving dishes and children are encouraged to take manageable amounts, going back for seconds if they wish. Staff will talk to the children about the food they are serving themselves and encourage sensible portion sizes,



Food waste should be composted to avoid it going to landfill, where it creates methane gas

which we base on Children's Food Trust guidelines.

We encourage a calm and unhurried atmosphere at mealtimes and children wait for everyone to finish before leaving the table so that slower eaters are not tempted to leave half way through a meal.

Any leftover food in the serving dishes goes back to the kitchen where our chef, Raquel, often uses her ingenuity to transform it into another delicious dish. Of course, this also means we can monitor waste and the popularity of meals; although, don't give up too quickly on a new dish – it sometimes takes children a few goes before they decide to accept any new flavours.

CLEVER WAYS WITH LEFTOVERS

So, which of our leftovers are safe to use? Because all our food is freshly prepared from raw ingredients, it can quite safely be popped in the fridge straight after being offered at a meal time.

Fish One of Raquel's favourite leftover recipes is fish pâté made from paprika baked fish. Mash the fish with cream cheese or sour cream and chopped chives and serve as a snack with bread or toast.

Bread Our homemade bread is delicious toasted on the third day and anything left is turned into bread-crumbs and frozen ready to coat fish or chicken goujons.

Biscuits and cakes can be crumbed too and used for fruit crumble toppings.

Milk Recently, Raquel wowed us with some delicious halloumi cheese that she stirred up from some milk that needed to be used. Just heat the milk to boiling point and add lemon juice to create a curd, then scoop this out with a sieve and strain it into a clean muslin cloth, tie it tightly and squeeze out the excess water before hanging it up in a cool place or a fridge overnight.

COMPOSTING

In an ideal world, we would all be composting our food waste, but in nurseries this is not always possible because it can encourage rats. If this is a concern, simply investigate your local council's composting collection service.

Try to avoid sending food waste to landfill, though: when food is sent to landfill, air cannot get to the organic waste so, when it breaks down, it creates harmful methane gas, which damages the Earth's atmosphere. ■

Mary Llewellyn is operations manager for Snapdragons' eight nurseries. Snapdragons Keynsham has the Food For Life Partnership Gold Catering Mark, a Children's Food Trust Award, is accredited by the Vegetarian Society and was winner of the Nursery World Food Award in 2012 and 2014. See www.snapdragonsnursery.com

MORE INFORMATION

- Essential Waste and Resources Action Programme (Wrap), www.wrap.org.uk
- www.lovefoodhatewaste.com
- www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2014/may/22/schools-food-waste-save-money

'Any leftover food in the serving dishes goes back to the kitchen'

Cookery corner



Cheese, paprika and poppy seed crackers

These crisp and delicious crackers are perfect with soup, cheese or home-made hummus.

Makes: 25, depending on cutter size

Preparation time: one hour

*** denotes child-friendly activities**

Ingredients ✓ 50g plain flour * ✓ 50g wholemeal flour * ✓ 25g wheatgerm * ✓ grated zest of half a lemon, plus a few gratings of nutmeg or ½ tsp salt (optional) ✓ 150g grated parmesan or hard goat's cheese ✓ 1 tbsp poppy seeds * and ½ tbsp chia seeds * ✓ 1 tsp dried oregano * ✓ 1 tsp paprika * ✓ 50g butter or olive oil spread * ✓ 2-3 tbsp cold water

Method

- ✓ Put everything apart from the water into a food processor and mix well for about three minutes. *
- ✓ With the processor still running, add the water, bit by bit, until the dough forms into a ball.
- ✓ Remove the dough and knead gently with your hands. *
- ✓ Roll the dough into a ball and wrap in clingfilm. Refrigerate for 30-60 minutes, until it is well chilled.
- ✓ Lightly flour your worktop and roll out the dough to 3mm thick. *
- ✓ Use animal cutters to cut out the crackers. *
- ✓ Place them on a baking tray lined with baking paper. * Bake at 180°C/ Fan 160°C/Gas 4 for 10-15 minutes until slightly golden.

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