

Menu planning for children's education and care

Food Intolerances



Key Information

- A food intolerance is not the same as a food allergy. Food allergies are immune system reactions to specific proteins in food and can be life threatening.
- Children with food intolerance may feel sick, but the symptoms are not life threatening.
- Some children with food intolerances cannot digest their food properly. Two examples include lactose intolerance and fructose intolerance.
- Other children may react to artificial food additives including sulphites and other preservatives, and artificial colours.

Providing food and drinks for children with food intolerance

This fact sheet is for cooks and chefs working in children's education and care.

For more information about preparing and serving food for children with food intolerances, complete the Healthy Eating Advisory Service course, [Managing allergies and other dietary requirements in children's education and care](#). You will find a micro-module specific to managing [food intolerance](#) within this course.



It is important to speak with a child's parents or carers about their food intolerance.

It is also recommended that you have written information from the child's healthcare provider confirming the intolerance and how much of the food they can tolerate.

This is particularly important if several food intolerances are suspected, to prevent avoiding foods unnecessarily.

Lactose Intolerance

Children with lactose intolerance cannot digest lactose, the sugar in milk.

Symptoms of lactose intolerance include bloating, gas, tummy pain, and diarrhoea. Lactose intolerance is usually temporary.

Lactose free products have had the lactose removed. Children with lactose intolerance can have lactose free products, but children with milk allergy cannot.



Do not give lactose free milk or lactose free dairy foods to children with cow's milk allergy.

Planning meals for children with lactose intolerance





Replacing lactose containing products on your menu

Children with lactose intolerance can have lactose free milk, lactose free yoghurt, and ordinary cheddar cheese. The table below provides some examples of food swaps for children with lactose intolerance.

Cow's milk product	Suggested replacement
Cow's milk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lactose-free cow's milk
Yoghurt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lactose-free yoghurt
Cheese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hard cheeses – regular cheddar/tasty, parmesan cheese contain almost no lactose. It is not necessary to buy lactose-free cheddar, tasty or parmesan cheese. Lactose-free cream cheese Lactose-free ricotta
Margarine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ordinary margarine is usually tolerated

How to change recipes for lactose intolerance

Here are some examples of how to change recipes for lactose intolerance. If a separate meal is required, make meals for children with allergies and intolerances look like meals served to the rest of the children. This way children with allergies and intolerances will feel included at mealtimes.

Curries and stews	Pasta dishes	Shepherd's pie	Baked snack foods (sweet or savoury)
			
Most curry recipes use coconut milk and therefore do not contain lactose	Use lactose free ricotta	Use lactose free milk	Use lactose free milk and yoghurt
Most stew recipes do not use milk or other milk products such as yoghurt and cheese	Regular cheddar, tasty or parmesan cheese can be used	Regular cheddar, tasty or parmesan cheese can be used	Use lactose free cheese or lactose free ricotta. Regular cheddar, tasty, or parmesan cheese can be used
If serving with yoghurt, use plain lactose free yoghurt			



Fructose Intolerance

Young children may have diarrhoea when they eat too much fruit – this is called fructose intolerance.

Fructose is the naturally occurring sugar in fruit and some vegetables. Most fruits are high in fructose.

Many children with fructose intolerance just need to avoid eating large amounts of fruit.



Managing Fructose Intolerance

Parents or carers should be guided by their health professional and provide early childhood services with written guidelines about which fruits and how much their child can tolerate. Children with fructose malabsorption tolerate different amounts of fruit.

Parents or carers may request no fruit to be given to their child while in long day care so they can control the amount given at home.

Children with fructose intolerance generally only need to limit the amount of fruit they eat. Try to include some snack options other than fruit, for example:

- vegetable platter with savoury crackers and cheese
- vegetable slice
- spinach and cheese muffins
- pumpkin scones
- carrot muffins

Sulphites and other food additives

Some food intolerance symptoms are caused by food additives. Sulphites are the most common preservative that cause intolerance symptoms. Sulphites may be added to dried fruit, fruit juice, fruit snacks, sausages, and other products.

If a food product contains sulphites, this must be listed on the food label as an ingredient. Sulphites are food additive numbers 220-228. For more information, refer to the [reading food labels for food allergens](#) section of the National Allergy Council's Food Allergy Aware website.

If you notice a product you are using lists sulphites as an ingredient do not give this to the child with a sulphite intolerance.





More helpful resources and information

For more information complete the Healthy Eating Advisory Services [Managing allergies and other dietary requirements in children's education and care](#) online course.

Further information and support

Healthy Eating Advisory Service:

- Early childhood services
- Recipes
- Menu planning guidelines for long day care
- Online module: [food intolerances](#)

National Allergy Council:

- All about Allergens training for Children's Education and Care
- All about Allergens Resource Hub (Children's Education and Care section)



We're here to support you

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