



# Guide to delicious meals little ones will love



Nursery Meals



Tastings  
made easy

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The role of schools  
in developing pupils'  
culinary tastes

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# Love food – A path for life

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A warm welcome to our third Guide in a series designed to help nurseries make mealtimes easy and enjoyable for their little ones.

And in this 'How To' Guide – we take a look at the importance of 'enjoyment' and how nurseries can encourage young children to broaden their culinary horizons and enjoy new experiences.

Throughout our lives, mealtimes are central to our social and physical needs. Most people love food and sharing the social experience with friends and family – in fact, it's estimated that a person spends 439 days actually eating across the average lifespan!

The formative years of a child's life are crucial for their physical, cognitive, and emotional development. And it's during these years that their eating habits are formed and influenced – setting them on a path for life!

It's also important for us all to remember how vital it is that children learn to actually enjoy their food and embrace the social elements that go with mealtimes.

And of course, it's good for children to develop a broad culinary repertoire at an early age, so they can experiment and establish their individual likes and dislikes before they come conditioned to what they think they should like!

Here, we explore the elements that nurseries may like to consider. You'll find it packed with ideas and hints and tips to make mealtimes fun, easy – and most importantly, enjoyable, whilst still delivering that all important nutritional balance.

We're here to help – do get in touch with any queries or points we can help you with.



Check out:

- Nursery meals
  - Take the stress out of mealtimes
- [apetito.co.uk](http://apetito.co.uk)





# How nurseries can help broaden young children's culinary tastes

It's never too early to encourage little ones to try new things – it's an important part of their learning and development.

And nurseries can play a significant role in helping young children try different dishes at mealtimes, appealing to their sense of adventure and desire for learning.

In today's world, where fast food and convenience meals dominate the market, many children are not exposed to a wide range of flavours and cuisines. However, by introducing children to a variety of foods and cultures at an early age, nurseries can not only encourage healthy eating habits but also broaden their horizons and instil a sense of curiosity and appreciation for diverse cultures.

Let's face it, almost every child would prefer to eat burgers every day or tuck into a bar of chocolate or a packet of crisps if given the choice between that and a healthy piece of fruit, but now's the time to introduce them positively to foods that are vital for their long-term health and wellbeing.

This doesn't mean forcing children to eat certain foods or restrict others. It's about creating a positive and enjoyable food environment that guides and encourages them to try new foods and make healthy choices.

One of the most effective ways that nurseries can help children broaden their culinary horizon

is by offering diverse and culturally rich menus. It's easy to develop menus that include a variety of international dishes and local cuisines and by doing so, children will be exposed to new flavours, ingredients, and cooking styles, which will help them enjoy broader palates.

Studies have shown that children who enjoy a variety of foods early in life, are more likely to maintain a healthy diet later in life. In contrast, children who are fussy eaters and refuse to try new foods are more likely to become picky eaters and develop a limited and unhealthy diet as they grow older.

Most children are fed well at home within their family lives. But nursery mealtimes also present a great opportunity to stretch their experience. That might be trying out more plant-based dishes or meals from around the world.

All our meals here at *apetito* can do the 'heavy lifting' for you. Our range has been specially developed to meet nutritional standards – and nurseries can choose from more than 200 main meals and desserts offering opportunity and fresh ideas and helping young children to try new dishes without creating stress and cost in the kitchen.

It's a range that we know children love and comes packed with goodness and nutrition.



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**[apetito.co.uk](https://www.apetito.co.uk)**

# There are **three of us** in this marriage!



Quite rightly, nurseries cannot be held accountable for everything that relates to a child's daily diet when it's responsible for providing one main meal a day. It's a three-way relationship between home, nursery, and child to achieve a balanced outcome.

Parental engagement in nursery meals is becoming more evident in the success of a nursery's catering programme. The growing uptake of nursery meals is important to drive catering efficiency and deliver enhanced nutrition.

When parents are involved in their child's nursery meals programme, they are more likely to encourage their children to experiment with new experiences.

Increasingly nurseries are involving parents in their efforts to improve the quality of meals and encourage children to become more adventurous in their choices and also to make healthy food selections.

Parental engagement in mealtimes can also help create a sense of community. When parents are involved, they feel more connected to the nursery and have a greater understanding of mealtime' goals and objectives.

One of the ways nurseries can involve parents is by organising regular special food tasting events. These events can be held during (or outside of) nursery hours and can include samples of meals on offer. Parents learn about the meals served and how they contribute to their child's health and wellbeing.

These events can also provide an opportunity for parents to offer feedback on the meals and suggest ways to improve them.

At apetito, we regularly work with our nursery partners to host tastings of our main meals and desserts which have incredibly well received.

As one parent recently said: "I thought we had a very varied diet at home, but this event was terrific and gave us plenty of food for thought around culinary opportunities for my daughter.

"Not only were the meals totally delicious and high quality which impressed my husband and I, the event helped us understand more about the nutritional balance that is so important for emotional, and physical development".



Find out more: [www.apetito.co.uk/our-service/nursery-meal-services](http://www.apetito.co.uk/our-service/nursery-meal-services)



# Tastings made easy

As we've mentioned tastings are a great way to get parents and little ones more invested and interested in the food nurseries are serving. They can sound daunting and a lot of work to organise, but they don't have to be. Here's apetito's top tips on how to organise a tasting

## Give plenty of notice



Parents are often busy juggling life, so you'll want to make sure the tasting is as convenient as possible for them. Giving plenty of notice means you'll be able to give parents enough time and opportunity to organise their diaries.

It's also worth remembering that little ones are not the most reliable of messengers, so make sure to tell parents about the upcoming tasting at pick up time or put a reminder in the children's early years diary for parents to read.

It's also important to choose a convenient time to encourage attendance. Why not try organising the tasting for pick up time so parents don't have to make an extra journey!

## Think about what you want to achieve!



It's important to know what you want to achieve from a tasting. Are you just trying to showcase new dishes to encourage more adventurous eating or are you trying to get more engagement and buy-in from the parents?

Both are important but depending on what you're wanting to achieve, you need to be prepared in different ways.

If you're wanting to encourage children to try different cuisines, be sure to give some parents some information about the different dishes and cuisines you're serving, including ingredients in them the children might recognise. This way parents can talk to their child about the different dishes and teach them about new cultures.

If you want to get more engagement and buy-in from parents, it's worth having some pre-prepared information to hand that you can share about the meals being served, the planning behind them and the nutritional information.

## Are you catering for any allergens?



It's worth remembering that whilst you'll know of any allergens the children have but you might not have this information about the parents. Try to serve a few dishes that cater to different dietary requirements and allergens. apetito's 'free from' range is a particularly good option here.

## Make it as interactive as possible



Try giving children and their parents a chart with all the dishes on and some red and green stickers. This way once they've tried a dish they can mark if they've liked it or not. This will also give you a way to remember which dishes the child has said they've enjoyed so you can remind them next time it is served.

Give parents feedback forms so they can make more detailed notes about their opinions on the different dishes and an opportunity to suggest changes or improvements.

## Let apetito help



**apetito offers**

**free parent food  
tasting sessions,  
working in partnership with schools**

This means apetito organises the whole tasting without creating any extra work for nursery or catering staff. It gives nurseries the opportunity to get parents to try the food and ask us any questions they may have, helping to encourage parental engagement in their child's nursery meals programme.



# A passport to new cuisines

There are fun ways to introduce new cuisines and at apetito, we help our nurseries with fresh ideas and the tools to make this easy.

For example, themed menu days can be a valuable tool to not only offer little ones a diverse range of meals but also to broaden their culinary horizons.

Themed days offer an opportunity for children to learn about different cultures and traditions whilst experiencing new flavours and ingredients. For instance, celebrating Chinese New Year can expose young children to dishes such as dumplings, noodles and stir fries, whilst Diwali may offer opportunities to enjoy dishes such as biryani, samosas, and mild curries.

Another benefit of themed menu days is that they provide an opportunity for nurseries to educate children about different cultures and traditions. For example, celebrating Diwali can provide an opportunity to discuss the significance of the festival and its associated customs, such as lighting lamps and exchanging sweets.

This not only helps to broaden a child's cultural awareness, but also helps to foster a sense of inclusion and tolerance within the nursery community.

Moreover, themed menu days can also help to promote healthy eating habits among children. For example, celebrating Holi, a Hindu festival that celebrates the arrival of spring, could feature dishes such as fruit chaat or salads which promote healthy eating.

**By offering a diverse range of dishes on themed days, nurseries can help children become more adventurous and open minded, whilst also creating a sense of community and inclusivity within the nursery environment.**



# Make mealtimes interactive & engaging

Mealtimes are not just about consuming food, they also provide an opportunity for children to develop social, emotional, and educational skills.

At apetito, we provide our nursery customers with a raft of activity tools to help them achieve just that, providing interactive and engaging initiatives and kits that help enhance the learning experience and keep children focused on the enjoyment and education of their food choices. Recent kits that we have produced for our nurseries include Easter colouring kits, and a World Food Tour.

Activities such as our Easter-themed colouring can make mealtimes fun and exciting, whilst also promoting creativity and imagination. These can also promote team building and problem-solving as children work together to complete tasks.

For instance, an easy quiz centred around cuisines can help children learn about different foods and where they come from and helps them appreciate the diversity of the World's cuisine. Such activities can also provide a platform for discussing different eating habits and how different cultures engage socially with mealtimes. It can help children make informed choices about the food they eat.

Additionally, making mealtimes interactive can help create positive associations with food and mealtimes. Studies have shown that interactive mealtimes can lead to better eating habit and a more positive attitude towards food. It makes it more likely that children will want to eat and try new things.



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# Hints & tips for success to enjoyment of mealtimes



## **Consider scheduling activities at the dining table**

to promote engagement with meals, social dining experience and fun. A great way to weave food education into mealtimes.



## **Ensure your mealtime menu choices are well balanced**

between traditional dishes (that may include meat), plant-based options and fish. Make sure there is something for everyone.



## **Ensure there is a forum for daily feedback monitoring**

to ensure disliked foods are identified and changed promptly. Here at apetito, we offer our customers food diaries to help them effectively monitor feedback from children.



## **Take advantage of national and world calendar days**

to create excited themed menu days to offer opportunities to understand their roots and traditions and broaden culinary horizons such as Chinese New Year, Diwali, Holi (Festival of Light and Colour) as well as Thanksgiving and Easter.



## **Engage with parents around their children's mealtimes**

– host tasting events either in (or out) of nursery hours where parents and their children can come along and taste meals and experience the wide range of meals on offer and discuss the importance of good nutrition in their child's development programme.



# How apetito Can help you

We're proud of our extensive range of meals – nurseries have more than 200 main meals and desserts to choose from that have been specially created by our inhouse chefs and dietitians to meet nutritional standards whilst providing great choice giving something for everyone!

We can help you make nursery meals hugely enjoyable for your pupils – our meals can be cooked easily from frozen meaning there are no complexities of cooking different cuisines from scratch. No wasted ingredients, fresh ideas every day, just delicious high-quality meals that couldn't be easier to prepare.

And we work with our teams to ensure you have the right tools to ensure little ones really can enjoy their food – whether themed days, mealtime activities or hosting tasting events for parents, we are partners in every sense to help you make your mealtimes enjoyable for both staff and children.

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## Did you know?

apetito is a three-time winner of the UK's highest business accolade, The Queen's Award for Enterprise, most recently in April 2019, awarded for Sustainable Development. The company is proud to be an accredited Living Wage employer, and to operate in an ethical and sustainable way that respects the environment, people, and the wider community.

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