

Circadian Nest Nursery

Reviewed: 20 September 2026 · Next review due: 20 September 2027

Packed Lunch Policy

Oxford · OX4 4BB · Version 1 · February 2026

Aim of this policy

To ensure that all packed lunches brought from home and consumed at Circadian Nest Nursery, or on trips with the nursery, provide each child with healthy, nutritious food for their growth and development, while keeping all children safe from known food allergies and choking hazards.

At Circadian Nest Nursery we are committed to children eating healthy, nutritious and balanced meals and snacks which meet individual needs and requirements, in line with the Department for Education Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition guidance.

This policy supports the health, safety and well-being of all children in our care and reflects the requirements of our insurers.

Parents and carers are asked to provide packed lunches that comply fully with this policy. We reserve the right to remove food items that present an allergen or choking risk. Parents who regularly fail to meet the expected standards will be invited to meet with the Nursery Manager to find joint solutions and ensure this policy is upheld.

We are required to support families with information to help provide healthy meals for their child to bring to nursery. To meet our statutory welfare requirements, we avoid foods which are high in saturated fat, salt and sugar, as these are proven to negatively affect children's health, development and overall well-being. We wish for food brought from home to align with the healthy, nutritious meals we provide, so children receive consistent messages about healthy eating throughout the day.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following Circadian Nest policies: Food and Drink, Allergies and Allergic Reactions, and Sickness and Illness.

Our facilities at Circadian Nest

- Circadian Nest Nursery operates a strict nut-free environment. No food containing nuts, nut products or traces of nuts may enter the building.
- We provide dedicated facilities for children bringing packed lunches, with hand-washing supervised before and after eating.
- Fresh, plain tap water is always readily available to every child throughout the day.
- We work in partnership with parents to ensure packed lunches meet the standards set out below.
- We provide refrigerated storage for packed lunches in the staff kitchen area. Parents are additionally asked to send lunches in an insulated lunch bag with an ice pack, to protect food from the point of leaving home until it reaches our fridge.
- We can reheat packed lunch items on request using the nursery microwave. Food is reheated once only, until piping hot throughout (a core temperature of at least 75°C / steaming), then briefly cooled to a safe eating temperature and temperature-checked before serving. Reheated food is never re-chilled or reheated a second time. Parents

wishing reheating should clearly label the relevant container 'please reheat' and must still send the food chilled in an insulated bag with an ice pack.

Healthy lunchbox guidance for parents

We signpost parents to the following free resources for nutritious lunchbox ideas:

- NHS Healthier lunchbox recipes: <https://www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/recipes/healthier-lunchboxes/>
- Food for Life's packed lunches guidance: <https://bit.ly/4t3Jb9d>

Packed lunch guidelines

All food for the day must be brought on a daily basis to ensure freshness and manage storage space. Food left over at the end of the day will be returned in the lunch bag so parents can monitor intake.

A balanced packed lunch at Circadian Nest should include, every day:

- A minimum of two portions of fruit or vegetables.
- A starchy food for energy and concentration, e.g. bread, wrap, chapatti, pasta, rice, noodles or potatoes.
- A protein source, e.g. meat, fish, eggs, lentils, kidney beans, chickpeas, hummus or tofu.
- A dairy food or dairy alternative, e.g. cheese, plain unsweetened yoghurt, fromage frais or fortified plant-based alternative.

To reduce risks of allergens and choking, the following items must not be included:

- Nuts of any kind — whole nuts, nut products and anything prepared using nuts (including nut oils and spreads). Circadian Nest is a strictly nut-free setting.
- Any drink other than plain water or milk. Fresh water is provided for every child and milk is offered with snacks, so other drinks (such as juice, squash or fizzy drinks) will not be served. If you send milk from home, please label it with your child's name.
- Flavoured dried rice, pasta or noodle products, e.g. instant noodle pots or flavoured rice packets (these are high in salt).
- Popcorn, chewing gum, marshmallows, raw jelly cubes, and sweets (boiled, hard, gooey or sticky) — these are choking hazards.
- Whole grapes, cherry tomatoes, cherries, olives or berries unless already halved or quartered lengthways — see Food Preparation below.

Food preparation to reduce choking risk

We follow the Food Standards Agency '*Early years food choking hazards*' advice. Parents are asked to prepare food as follows before it is packed:

- Hard pips or stones removed from fruit; skins removed for very young children.
- Small round fruits (grapes, cherry tomatoes, cherries, berries) cut into quarters lengthways.
- Vegetables such as carrots, cucumber and celery cut into narrow batons.
- Sausages and hot dogs peeled and cut into short thin strips.
- Meat and fish boned and cut into thin strips.
- Cheese grated or cut into short strips.

Packing and labelling

- Use easy-to-open containers and packaging where possible, to promote your child's independence at mealtimes.
- Check that all food is within its use-by date before packing.
- Clearly label your child's lunch bag and every container inside it with their full name.
- Circadian Nest keeps a small supply of spare spoons and forks in case of need, but please provide any specific cutlery your child prefers.

Management of food safety, allergies and dietary needs

- All Circadian Nest staff are made aware of children with food allergies, intolerances and individual dietary requirements. Information from parents is shared with everyone involved in supervising meals.
- Where a known allergy exists, the Nursery Manager will carry out a written risk assessment and agree an individual dietary and allergy plan with the family. Plans are reviewed regularly and any changes shared with all staff.
- Every child's lunch box will be visually reviewed by a nominated practitioner before the contents are given to the child, to manage any risks from potential allergens or choking hazards.
- Careful consideration is given to seating arrangements at mealtimes to avoid cross-contamination of food from child to child.
- Children are always within sight and hearing of a member of staff while eating. Where possible, an adult sits facing the children while they eat, to minimise risk from choking and allergic reactions.
- A member of staff holding a full and valid paediatric first-aid certificate will be on the premises at all mealtimes.
- At each meal and snack time, a nominated practitioner is responsible for checking that the food being offered meets each child's individual requirements.
- Where age-appropriate, practitioners will talk with children about allergies and the importance of not sharing certain foods.
- Staff show sensitivity towards children's diets and allergies. A child's diet or allergy is never used as a label for the child, and no child will be made to feel singled out.
- Cultural and religious differences in eating habits are respected and welcomed.

If a lunch is missing or incomplete

If a child arrives at nursery without a packed lunch, or with a lunch that is clearly insufficient to meet their needs for the day, staff will follow this procedure:

- Contact the parent or carer immediately to ask whether a lunch can be brought in, and to confirm any allergy or dietary information if the child has not previously eaten at nursery that day.
- If a lunch cannot be brought in, the nursery will provide an emergency meal and appropriate snacks from our kitchen so that the child is not hungry. Where practical we will match any known dietary or religious requirements.
- The incident is logged in the daily register and the parent is given a written reminder of the Packed Lunch Policy expectations.
- Where a lunch is persistently missing, inadequate or arrives in unsafe condition, the Nursery Manager will meet with the parent to agree a plan. If underlying safeguarding concerns are identified, the matter will be referred to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (Samina Farooq) in line with our Safeguarding Children and Child Protection Policy.

Partnership and review

This policy has been developed in partnership with parents, staff and — where appropriate — children, and is reviewed annually, or sooner if legislation, guidance or practice changes.

Policy sign-off

Adopted (initial)	Reviewed	Next review	Signed on behalf of the nursery
1 February 2026	20 September 2026	20 September 2027	Suhail Farooq, Director

Reference: DfE Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition guidance (2025).