

# Weight Management Information for Children in Special Schools

A booklet for parents, carers and school staff to provide information to support children and families with managing a healthy weight.



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## Table of Contents

- **What are your concerns about your child**
- **What weight should your child be**
- **Strategies**
- **Healthy eating advice**
- **Weekly food menu choices and meal planning**
- **Meal and recipe Ideas**
- **Healthy packed lunch guide**
- **Snack leaflet**
- **Additional information for Children on the Autistic Spectrum**
- **Activities**
- **Goal Sheet**
- **Information for Health Professionals**
- **Possible resources for teachers**

## What are your concerns about your child being overweight?

You could fill in these questions for your own use to help you think about trying to help you and your child manage their weight.

**What concerns you about your child being overweight?**

**What do you think would be the benefits of helping your child maintain their weight?**

**What do you predict some of the challenges might be?**

**How do you think you can overcome the challenges that you have mentioned above?**

These are some of the difficulties that parents/carers report:

*My child's behaviour is aggressive when they want food – it's difficult to say no.*

*Food is something that they can enjoy.*

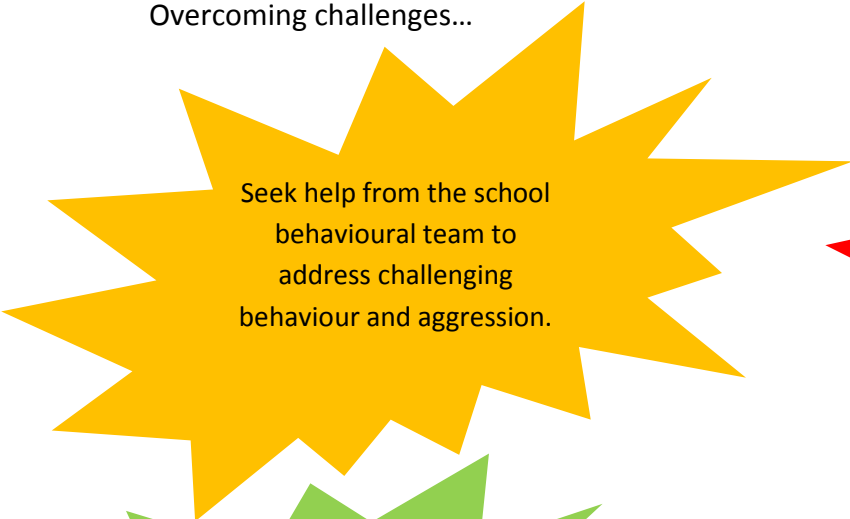
*His medication affects his appetite and weight gain is a side-effect.*

*It is difficult to get them to exercise.*

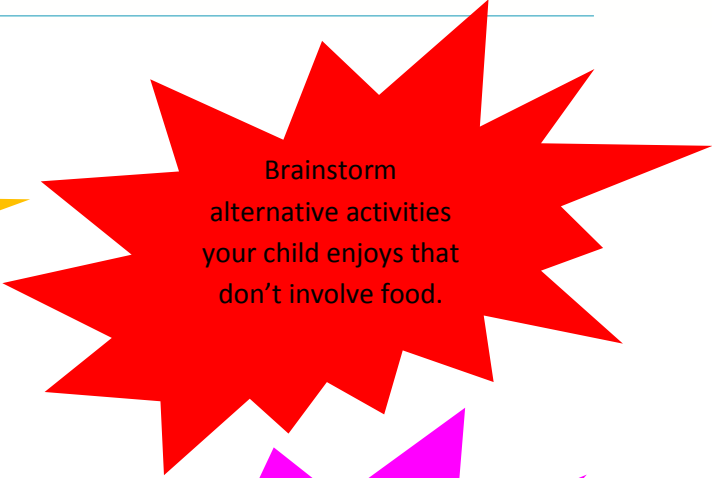
*When they were younger they had difficulty feeding and now they are able to eat, it is difficult to stop them.*

*She has such a restricted diet already that we don't want to limit it even further.*


Overcoming challenges...



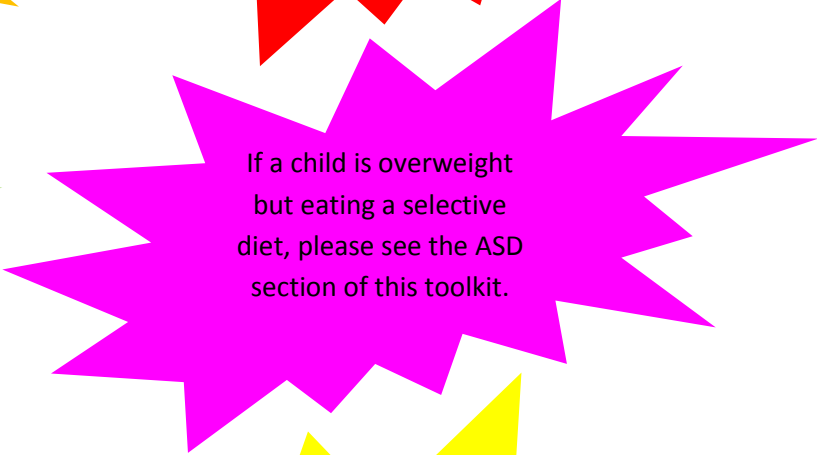
Seek help from the school behavioural team to address challenging behaviour and aggression.



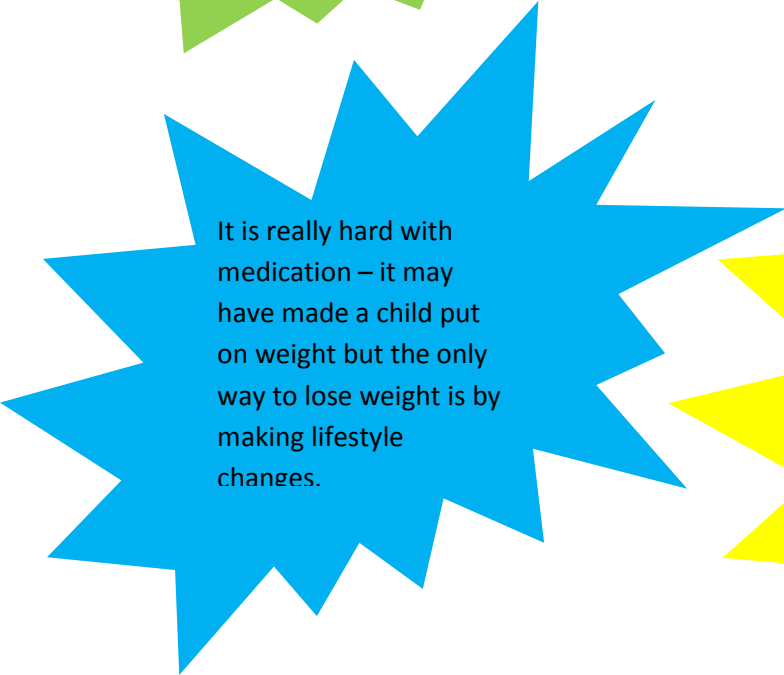
Brainstorm alternative activities your child enjoys that don't involve food.



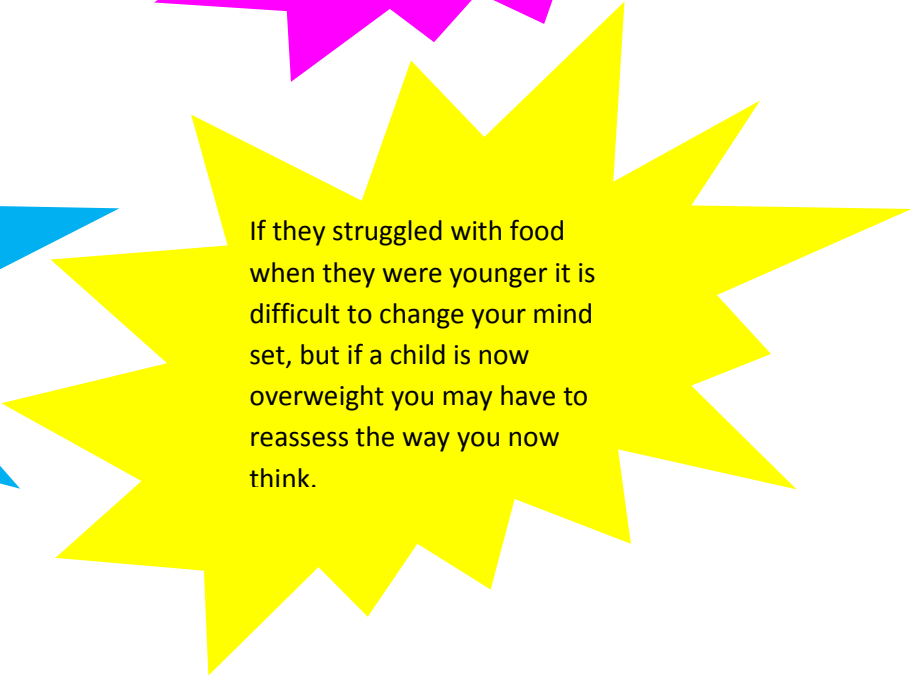
Look for ways to make exercise fun with new activities and games.



If a child is overweight but eating a selective diet, please see the ASD section of this toolkit.



It is really hard with medication – it may have made a child put on weight but the only way to lose weight is by making lifestyle changes.



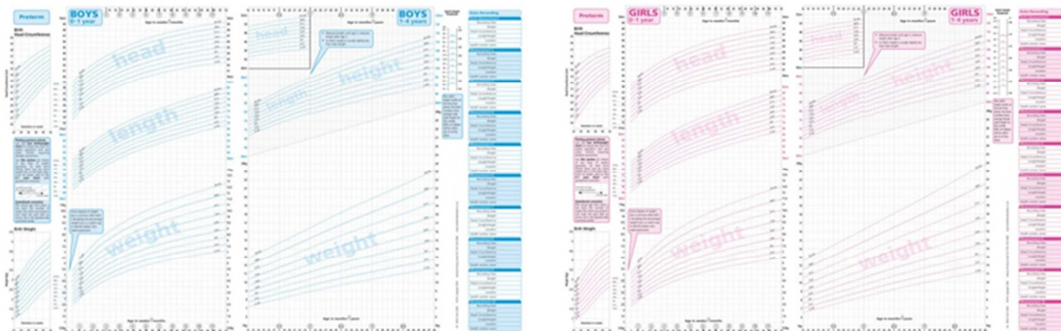
If they struggled with food when they were younger it is difficult to change your mind set, but if a child is now overweight you may have to reassess the way you now think.

They may help as a prompt to find some motivation to help your child.

If you are ready to make changes for your child it might be helpful to take a whole family approach. Other children and family members will still benefit from following a healthy eating plan too.

## What weight should my child be?

Ideally your child's weight and height should be in proportion. This means that on the growth chart (this can also be known as a Centile chart) their weight should fall on a similar line to their height. You may not have seen these since your child was a baby.



Healthcare professionals use your child's growth chart when assessing weight and height.

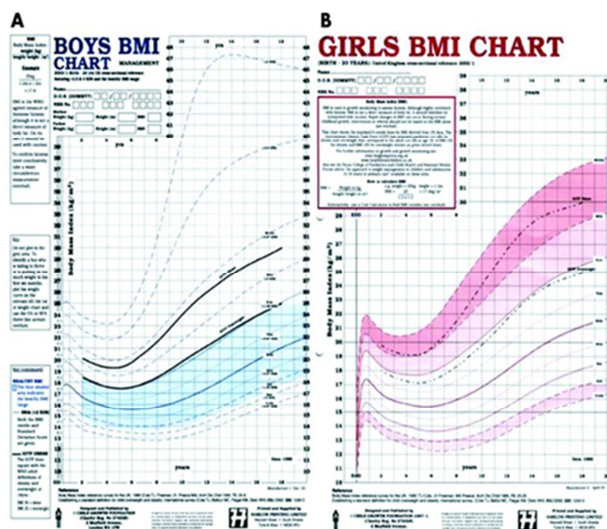
They may also use 'Body Mass Index' which is a measurement that looks at weight and height together. There are separate charts to measure this that your Healthcare professional might use.

You can use the BMI calculator on the NHS website :  
[http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Healthy\\_weightcalculator.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Healthy_weightcalculator.aspx)

There are categories with an overweight child known as overweight and obesity.

Overweight is when your child's weight is over the normal range by a certain value.

Obese is the next stage up from being overweight.



The heavier your child is the greater their risk of having other detrimental health conditions.

The main aim for your child is that they 'maintain' their weight rather than losing any weight at this age, so that over an agreed time frame they will have 'grown into their height'.

Children with Complex Disabilities are more likely to have weight management concerns and they may have many more obstacles when trying to manage their weight. The health risks associated with being overweight include:

- Heart disease, Type 2 Diabetes, Cancer, Stroke and osteoarthritis, as well as the psychological impact of being overweight and any negative opinions from peers and society.
- There is the connection between poor sleeping habits and being overweight too.
- All of these factors can be motivators to encourage a healthier lifestyle for the child.

Ask your school Nurse for advice about growth charts and whether your child may be better monitored on a special chart for your child's condition e.g. Downs Syndrome have specific growth charts.

Remember, every child is different and your child's weight and growth journey may not be typical due to the complexities of issues that may impact on eating and drinking. When assessing if you should be concerned, look back at previous weight and length measures and think about any big changes in their centile position as they have grown.

## Strategies when all your child wants to do is eat...

What strategies work in other areas of your child's life?

Try discussing with your child's Teachers or Behavioural team at school to look at some possible ideas and interventions. For example:

*Social stories, timers, goal setting, positive reinforcement, objects of reference, use visuals such as No Entry signs on fridges and cupboards or posters with foods that are allowed & not allowed, providing visual hunger and fullness scales to help with expressing and recognising cues.*

Generally try to:

- **Introduce changes very slowly** – make one change at a time
- **Limit access to food** - keep out of reach, use locks or do not buy unhealthy foods
- **Show evidence when there is nothing left** – eg an empty saucepan
- **Never give food as a reward** – use other actions/prizes as a reward eg a cuddle, a fun activity such as having their nails painted, stickers, a marble – if they get a container full of marbles they are awarded a toy/book/day out (be careful with allowing the television or something that will encourage your child to sit down, rather than being active)
- **Have a container of healthy snacks ready** – chopped up veg, fruit, see the 100kcal or less section of the 'Snack ideas' (page 14). Allow your child to choose one whilst they wait for the meal.
- **Offer a sugar free drink** – ideally water but sugar free squash would be the alternative. Often our bodies are unable to distinguish hunger from thirst, so a drink may help 'settle' your child.
- **Have a box of distraction 'toys' / activities** – drawing, junk modelling, cars. Change this regularly so they don't tire of it.
- **Keep your child occupied as much as possible** - Sometimes when we are bored we feel like eating more so occupying your child may help take the focus away from food

**Strategies for Eating in Restaurants:**

- 1) When placing an order ask for a dish to take home some food in, then when the food is brought to the table you can put some aside saying this is for tomorrow's lunch.
- 2) Discuss the menu and healthy food choices before ordering to help your child understand about making health choices where possible, but then let your child still order what they want within reason. Ensure that you give your child positive feedback when they have made a healthy choice.
- 3) Avoid all you can eat restaurants, as some children will find this extremely difficult to manage.
- 4) Try to think about how dishes may be cooked e.g are they deep fried?
- 5) Think about food portion sizes e.g. will your child accept a children's portion? Can my child have a regular burger and small fries instead of much larger portions - these kinds of changes can make a really big difference.
- 6) If you can look on line before you go, it may be helpful to have in mind what options may be a better choice for your child.
- 7) If your child is eating out with other adults and carers, don't be afraid to chat to them about helping your child to talk through what they would like to eat if you feel this would be helpful to support them to make a healthy choice. This might also include after school clubs and some respite settings.



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## Healthy Eating Advice

### The Principles of Healthy Eating

Fact sheets are available: here are a number of titles and where to download them from

**British Dietetic Association Website:**

Healthy Eating: <https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/HealthyEating.pdf>

Eat Well Spend Less: <https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/eatwellspendless.pdf>

Healthy Eating for Children: <https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/healthyeatingchildren.pdf>

**Public Health England:**

The Eatwell Guide: picture attached with booklet below

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/551502/Eatwell\\_Guide\\_booklet.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/551502/Eatwell_Guide_booklet.pdf)

**Food and Drink Federation:**

Food and drink labelling: a tool to encourage healthier eating

[http://www.fdf.org.uk/corporate\\_pubs/Food\\_Drink\\_Labelling\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.fdf.org.uk/corporate_pubs/Food_Drink_Labelling_toolkit.pdf)

**Teen Weightwise:**

<http://www.teenweightwise.com/index.html>

**British Nutrition Foundation:**

Healthy Hydration for Children

<https://www.nutrition.org.uk/healthyliving/hydration/hydration-for-children.html>

## Weekly Food Menu Choices and Meal Planning

It can help to plan out your meals for the week.

Although sitting and working this out might be time consuming at the time, it can solve some problems when you get in late with a hungry child and the easiest thing to reach for is an unhealthy meal/snack. There is a meal planner on the next page to help with this. This can also help with shopping too.

This might be something difficult to get into the habit of doing, but if you know what you and your family are going to eat over the week then you will be less likely to choose high calorie foods at short notice.

### How to plan:

- Have a list of recipes and meals that you know are lower calorie options these can be as simple as needed depending on time constraints.
- Think about the week ahead and on busy days consider whether you can have a meal prepared in the freezer or left overs from a previous meal. Further tips can be found at <http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/lets-get-cooking-at-home/how-to/get-started/batching-and-freezing/>
- If your children have hot meals at school, they do not need big evening meals.
- It can be helpful to communicate your aims with school. They can support your child to eat the correct portion size whilst being able to inform you if your child has not eaten a big meal at lunch time, so that if your child is hungry, you can take this into account.
- Some children will enjoy and respond well to making a visual plan - so downloading a photograph of choices, snack options, breakfast options in pictures and allowing your child to choose may be helpful in heading off behaviour issues. If your child is able - try to involve them in this. Put the picture guide in a place that is helpful e.g. kitchen cupboard/ fridge and personalise it with a photo of your child.
- Adding clocks to the meal timings can help some children to get used to the idea of meal structure, if they are keen to eat frequently through the day
- If your child is able to understand rewards, think about a reward chart or way of encouraging them along the way with non-food treats.

**Activity:**

There is a column for activity to assist with daily planning.

Being as active as possible as a family and for your child as an individual is an important way to help them be healthy. Try to think about activities that your child will enjoy and speak to your class teacher about any potential opportunities to join in with after school activities at school. There are more ideas about this later in the booklet.

# WEEKLY FOOD MENU CHOICES – write in what you plan

	BREAKFAST	Snack or Distraction	LUNCH	Snack or Distraction	DINNER	Planned Activity for the day
MONDAY						
TUESDAY						
WEDNESDAY						
THURSDAY						
FRIDAY						
SATURDAY						
SUNDAY						

# Meal Ideas

Change4life: These are children's meals and there are lots of ideas here, but sometimes they might not be appropriate for children with complex needs.

Recipe Ideas: <https://www.nhs.uk/change4life-beta/recipes>

The Public Health England website has some recipe ideas that may be more suitable for children with complex needs.

Recipe ideas: <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/healthy-recipes/Pages/Healthy-recipes.aspx>

When looking at portion sizes for your child you need to think about how big the portion you are providing is and could it be reduced and then consider:

- 1) Using a smaller plate
- 2) Filling up 1/3 of their plate with vegetables (if they will eat them)
- 3) If they have had a cooked meal at lunch they can have a smaller meal in the evening eg a sandwich type meal, or beans on toast. If you do have a hot meal be sure to give smaller portions.
- 4) A useful resource is a portion plate – these can be purchased on line but be sure to get the right size for your child. There are child sized versions if you have a smaller child and for a teenagers a larger size.
- 5) If your child will always want seconds make the first portion smaller.
- 6) Portion size advice for toddlers: <https://www.infantandtoddlerforum.org/toddlers-to-preschool/portionsizes>

## Snack Ideas

50-100 calories	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mini milk, chocolate or strawberry ice lolly, mini twister, fab</li> <li>• 1 low calorie chocolate drink</li> <li>• 1 slim-a-soup</li> <li>• Diet fruit yoghurt</li> <li>• 1 fruit portion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 ginger nut or rich tea</li> <li>• 2 tuc / hovis crackers or water biscuits</li> <li>• 1 fig roll or fruit shortcake</li> <li>• 1 meringue nest</li> <li>• 1 packet of sugar free polo mints</li> </ul>
100-150 calories	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 treat size chocolate bar</li> <li>• 1 small kitkat or curly wurly</li> <li>• 3 after eight mints</li> <li>• 1 scotch pancake or crumpet</li> <li>• 1oz brie, camembert or edam</li> <li>• 1 slice of toast (spread from allowance)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1oz boiled sweets/fruit gums/pastilles</li> <li>• 1 chocolate teacake</li> <li>• 1 harvest chewy bar</li> <li>• 1 packet of wotsits, quavers, skips or twiglets</li> <li>• 1 pot of fromage frais</li> <li>• 3 tablespoons of dry cereal</li> </ul>
150-200 calories	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 bread roll or English muffin</li> <li>• 1oz milk, white or plain chocolate</li> <li>• 1 pot (150g) custard or rice pudding</li> <li>• 1 packet of hula hoops</li> <li>• 1 solero or choc ice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1oz peanuts</li> <li>• 1 currant bun</li> <li>• 1 chocolate biscuit bar</li> <li>• 1 fruit corner yogurt</li> <li>• 1 extra meat portion</li> </ul>
200 + calories	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 slices of toast with spread</li> <li>• 2 crackers with 1oz cheese</li> <li>• 3 tablespoons of cereal with 1/3 pint of semi-skimmed milk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scone with spread</li> <li>• Small slice fruit cake or sponge</li> <li>• 1 normal size chocolate bar</li> <li>• Nobbly bobbly lolly</li> </ul>

## Healthy Packed Lunch Guide


What does a healthy packed lunch look like?




Based on a  
starchy food



Include  
fruit and  
vegetables



Include a  
portion of  
protein



Include a  
drink

### Starchy food

Bread, rice, pasta, cous cous, wrap, chapatti, rice, noodles, pitta, bagel (wholegrain is a better choice)

### Protein Portion

Beans/pulses, fish, meat, eggs, cheese

i.e. tuna, ham, chicken, falafel, hummus, low fat soft/grated cheese, mixed beans

### Fruit & Vegetables

Chopped vegetable batons (carrot, cucumber, pepper), cherry tomatoes, salad garnish (on sandwich) grated carrot (mixed with falafel/hummus) sweetcorn (with tuna or as part of a pasta salad), chopped fruit (often easier to eat than the whole fruit)

### Drink

Water or semi-skimmed milk is the best choice for children's teeth. Small smoothie or diluted fruit juice (150ml) occasionally

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Healthy Snack

Bread sticks, rice crackers, popcorn, banana bread, malt loaf, fruit jelly

Dairy Source

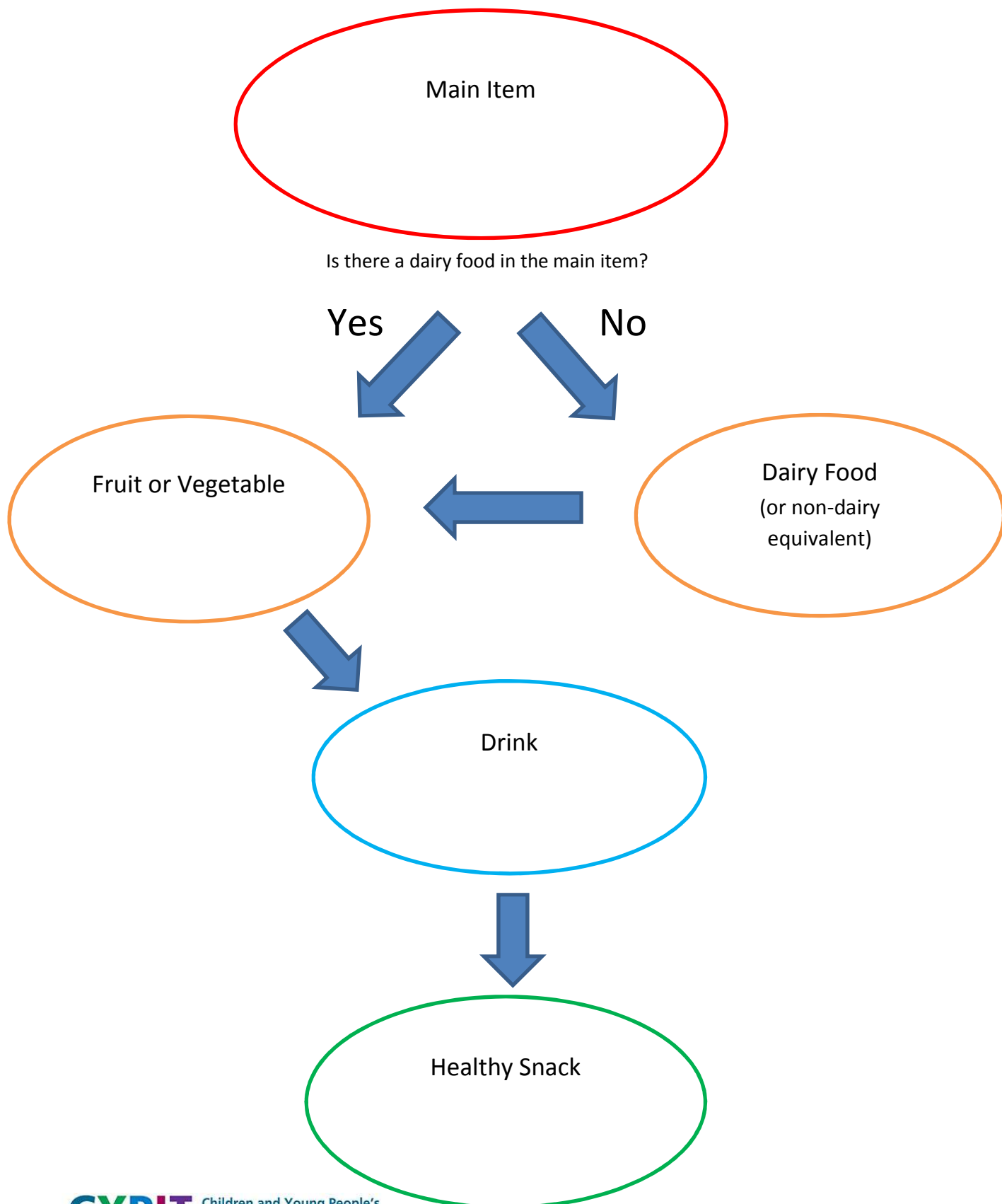
Either in main item or as an extra

Yogurt, custard, rice pudding, small piece of cheese (if no cheese in sandwich)

On the next page is a planner to help with this



Write in each box some ideas for the week and then you can pick out of each group every day



## Additional Information for Fussy Eaters or Overweight Children with ASD

If your child has a very limited diet and you want to try to introduce new foods these are some strategies that might help. Keep trying, it might eventually work and sometimes trying a new food in a different environment can help.

- Give your child warning that you are going to try this eg within their social story, use a timer so they know it is going to end.
- Read/look at pictures in books about food.
- Always talk about food in a positive manner – you might not like some healthy foods but try not to let your child see/sense this.
- Talk about food in the supermarket – what it is, where it comes from, what it is used for.
- Encourage your child to pretend to eat toy food / real food.
- Play with food if they are willing to touch it, or use a kitchen utensil to move the food. Make art with food. Use a rolling pin to crush dry items. Use a cookie cutter to cut bread/ jelly/ pancakes/ meat. Pour/ scoop/ stir foods, but use a small amount so they don't get overwhelmed with too much mess.
- Use pictures, supermarket adverts, google images, plastic foods, food packaging to talk about foods.
- If your child won't allow a new food on their plate, put it on a side plate away from them on the table and then each day move it nearer.
- When they are happy to have the food near them try to encourage them to pick it up/ kiss it, but don't put pressure on them, allow them to do it in their own time.
- If they do taste the food allow them to spit it out if they want to.
- It is not always a good idea to try to 'hide' new foods in foods that are accepted e.g. adding vegetables to Bolognese. The risk here is that you may then put your child off eating that food.
- It may be helpful to ask for an Occupational Therapist to assess your child. They may be able to develop a plan to help desensitise your child to help improve their receptiveness for eating and drinking.
- Try to follow similar patterns for eating and drinking at home and school.

**Food Chaining:**

This has the goal of introducing a new food over a long stretch of time that is very similar to a food that they will already accept.

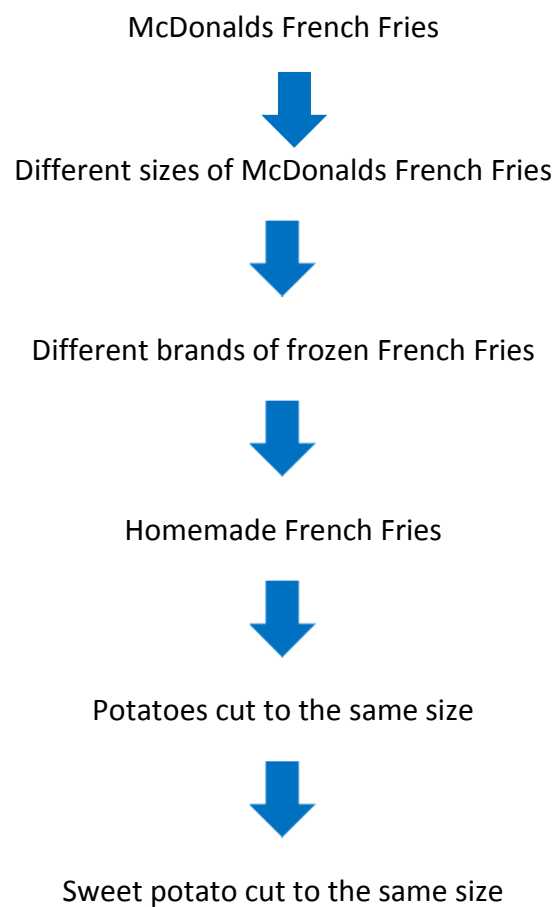
Some ASD children find mealtimes overwhelming due to the sensory overload.

This could be due to:

- Their surroundings – lights, noise, the different table, smells
- The feel of the foods they put in their mouths, which is not what they were expecting, and the fear this gives them
- If a child is forced to have a food they do not want this might make their fear even greater

Some children will only eat the food that they know and feel comfortable with.

An Example of Food Chaining



- Starting by putting the food item on a separate plate, then over time move it nearer. Then when your child is comfortable consistently try the food for 15-25 times
- *Keep trying!!*
- This doesn't have to happen at every meal
- Try to ignore negative behaviour

#### Vitamins and Minerals for Overweight Children with Limited Diets

- If your child is overweight and eats a very limited selection of food it might be worth filling in the Assessment grid for selective eating (next page). If your child eats something from every food group every day this might be reassuring for you to see that their diet is more balanced than you think.
- If your child only has foods from 1 or 2 of these food groups then they might benefit from a multivitamin and mineral supplement.
- You can buy an Over The Counter (OTC) version from a pharmacy or your GP may prescribe you a suitable version. Ensure the supplement is age appropriate. Your pharmacist can assist you.

#### Helpful websites:

National Autistic Society - <http://www.autism.org.uk/about/health/eating.aspx>

If you click on this link this web page is really useful.

## Assessment Grid For Selective Eating

Go through your child's daily intake and put the food they are eating into each group

Eg Breakfast: 2 x Weetabix, 1 x brown toast with butter  
Lunch: toast brown x 1 with butter, packet of quavers  
Evening meal: smiley faces x 4, fish finger x 3

This may reassure you that although your child seems to have a very restrictive diet if they eat something in each of these categories there is an element of variation, which provides nutrition from each food group.

Milk and Dairy Products	Breads and Cereals
<p><b>Butter on toast x 1</b> <b>Butter on toast x 1</b></p>	<p><b>Brown toast x 1</b> <b>Brown toast x 1</b></p>
Fruit and Vegetables	Meat and Alternatives
<p><b>Banana x 1</b></p>	<p><b>Fish finger x 3</b></p>
Snack Foods – Sweet and Savoury	
<p><b>1 x pack of Quavers</b></p>	

## Assessment Grid For Selective Eating

List the foods your child eats into each group

You can then also add in if your child has introduced a new food and celebrate this.

Milk and Dairy Products	Breads and Cereals
Fruit and Vegetables	Meat and Alternatives
Snack Foods – Sweet and Savoury	

## Increasing Activity

### Tips for Introducing Exercise

- 1) Make it fun – choose activities your child enjoys (for example have a disco dancing session every evening with a disco light)
- 2) Use a social story or other behavioural techniques to prepare your child for the activity however small it is
- 3) Plan for safety – then try to relax and enjoy
- 4) Allow your child to get it wrong – that's ok. If you are prepared that it might not go to plan and control your expectations, then the next time they might get on better (do not give up at the first pitfall)
- 5) Reduce time spent sitting in front of a screen – using timers, social stories
- 6) Involve peers – can you or any friends/siblings do the activity with your child. This may help motivate your child.
- 7) Build an activity into daily life – start with small errands, eg park a little further away so you need to walk a little bit extra, include children in household tasks eg helping in the garden/cleaning/washing the car
- 8) Prepare for all the seasons –keep going even if it is dark or wet-we can still wrap up warm/put on waterproofs

### **Information for Children with Special Needs Activities**

Change4 life Website: <https://www.nhs.uk/change4life-beta/activities/accessible-activities>

MENCAP -

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/search/groups?search=&submitted=&location=rg15aq&x=7&y=15>

Family lives - <http://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/your-family/special-educational-needs/fun-things-to-try-with-disabled-children/>

The National Autistic Society - <http://www.autism.org.uk/>

Autism Berkshire - <http://www.autismberkshire.org.uk/leisure-and-social-activities/>

ABLEize - <http://www.ableize.com/Disabled-Groups-and-Clubs-by-County/Berkshire/>

## Goal Sheet

Try using this sheet to make goals that you can achieve.

Even if you only make 1 or 2 goals every month this might make tasks more achievable rather than having a long list of things that can be overwhelming.

Example

Goal	How are you going to know if you've done it?	Is this is something you can definitely do?	How are you going to achieve this goal?	When are you going to have achieved it by?
Making a social story about choosing healthy snacks	Show my mummy and daddy, share with MENCAP	Yes	Help from school support staff	2 weeks from now
Learning a song about healthy foods	Show my mummy and daddy, share with MENCAP	Yes	With help from my friends	Half term

Goal	How are you going to know if you've done it?	Is this is something you can definitely do?	How are you going to achieve this goal?	When are you going to have achieved it by?



## Information for Health Professionals and School Staff Using This Resource

### Working together

There are a number of health professionals who are likely to be involved in the support of your child. It might be that school staff are best placed to give support to parents when it comes to helping with behaviour or developing a visual timetable, but then this information then has to be passed to carers, other support workers at locations such as MENCAP or other respite providers, family members and anyone else working with the child.

We recommend organising a meeting with all those involved to make sure the information discussed can be provided to everyone.

If there is a support worker that can liaise between home and school it would be useful to get them involved. They can help to support the parents/carers to make sure the advice provided is being followed and, if not, identify how everyone can be supported further to achieve this.

Communication is the key (as with most things!). If you know the child has had a big lunch and eaten well with higher calorie snacks at school/ after school care/ school club, let those at home know, so they can make sure the child has a smaller meal later in the day.

Try to encourage non- food based treats/rewards.

### Building up resources

When talking about healthy eating and the Eatwell Guide it might be useful to collect some empty food packets to help show staff/parents/carers information on labels, portions, high salt levels.

You might be able to develop resources for the child and their family including posters that can be stuck on the kitchen cupboards to help with healthy choices/ social stories with mealtimes/ snack times added, so they don't ask for meals at other times.

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## Resources for Teachers

The British Nutrition Foundation

[www.nutrition.org.uk](http://www.nutrition.org.uk)

Provides scientifically-based advice on nutrition and health-related matters. Publishes a wide range of teaching materials which are useful for Science, Design and Technology, and Personal, Social and Health Education.

FACE

[www.face-online.org.uk](http://www.face-online.org.uk)

*Food - a fact of life* provides a wealth of free resources about healthy eating, cooking, food and farming for children and young people aged 3 to 18 years.

The resources are progressive, stimulate learning and support the curriculum throughout the UK. All resources are designed to ensure that consistent and up-to-date messages are delivered.

<http://www.foodafactoflife.org.uk/>

### Special needs

Council for Disabled Children

8 Wakley Street

London EC1V 7QE

T: 020 7843 1900

[www.ncb.org.uk/cdc](http://www.ncb.org.uk/cdc)

Working together for disabled children and their families. Offers a forum for discussion and dissemination of policy and good practice.

Disabled Living Foundation

380 Harrow Road

London W9 2HU

T: 020 7289 6111

Helpline open Monday to Friday 10.00am –

4.00pm: 0845 130 9177

[www.dlf.org.uk](http://www.dlf.org.uk)