



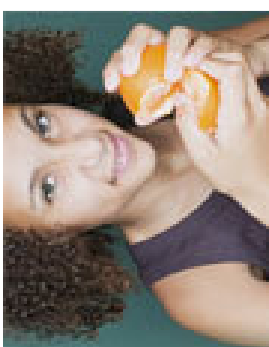
Eating Matters in Special Schools in the West Midlands

Eating well for children and adults with learning disabilities

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Carefree Eating



improving public health
through good food





Eating well:

children and adults
with learning
disabilities

Nutritional and practical guidelines



THE CAROLINE WALKER TRUST

Key nutritional issues for children with learning disabilities

- Many children with learning disabilities may also have physical disabilities
- Many of the issues around food and drink are equally applicable to children with learning or physical disabilities
- The main nutritional messages are of course the same for all children, regardless of their disability

What do we want to achieve?

- Children who grow and develop well
- Children who reach their physical and mental potential
- Children who are prepared for healthy adult life
- Children who will stay well and have strong immune function
- Children who can be as active as they are able to be

What do we know about the nutrition of children with learning disabilities?

- There is a lack of good information on nutritional status
- There is some evidence of stunting and wasting caused by insufficient energy intake
- Micronutrient deficiencies of calcium, vitamin C, vitamin A, riboflavin and thiamin have been reported among children with developmental disabilities
- The more severe the disability the greater the likelihood of malnutrition

Health issues

- Underweight
- Overweight
- Oral health
- Gastrointestinal disorders

Underweight

- A significant number of people with LD are underweight
- This is often not recognised and acted upon
- Underweight is related to increased mortality and morbidity
- There is a typical cycle of poor food intake, inactivity, low appetite, illness and infection, and further reduced food intake that often leads to extreme thinness

Overweight

- The rate of obesity among children with LD is also higher than for the population as a whole
- Obesity contributes to a range of health problems and also burdens an already vulnerable child or young person with more negative views from society
- Obesity development is likely to have been multifactorial – it is important that everyone understands the factors that contribute
- Support for staff in understanding and being sensitive to weight issues is essential

Oral health

- Oral health is often neglected among children and young people with special needs
- Poor oral health impacts on food choice and quality of life
- Those who snack regularly, have sweetened supplements, regularly have sweetened medicines or have frequent fruit based or fizzy drinks are at particular risk
- Mouth pain may also be poorly communicated and may cause behaviour problems or food refusal

Gastrointestinal difficulties

- Constipation is a common complaint and may be a particular problem for some children and young people with LD who take regular medication and children with some disabilities
- Regular fluid intake is essential and constipation should be managed with care
- Diarrhoea may also be common
- Coeliac disease is common among people with Downs or Turner Syndrome

What is likely to contribute to poor eating?

- Poor appetite
- Eating and drinking difficulties
- Swallowing difficulties
- Poor teeth
- Difficulty with hand to eye coordination and using cutlery
- Food aversion

Managing eating difficulties

- There are many strategies that can be used when there are eating and drinking difficulties
- Most of them take time, sensitivity, training, patience, trial and error, listening and more time
- Support is needed for those who need help and those that support them
- Multi-disciplinary work is often essential

Food issues

- Predominantly milk based diets
- Diets which are low in meat, fruit and vegetables
- High sugar/frequent soft drinks
- Faddy eating
- Snacking
- Eating out

Key priorities

- Training of support staff
- Increased priority for nutritional health promotion
- New tools and resources
- Working in partnership with families and other carers
- Ensuring that nutrition advice is given by those who are qualified to give it

Importance of food skills





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