



Active Belfast

Promoting healthier food choices
in physical activity and sport

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<https://www.makinglifebettertogether.com/active-belfast/>

Acknowledgements:

With thanks to Kim Kensett, Senior Health & Social Wellbeing Improvement Officer, Active Belfast Team; Serena Barr, Dietitian, Community Dietetic Health and Wellbeing Team, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust; Dr. Hannah Dearie, Public Health Agency; Paula Bleakley, Environmental Health Department, Belfast City Council and Iris McIlroy, Academy Secretary, Albert Foundry Football Club, Belfast, for their assistance.

April 2021

Being active combined with a healthy diet are two important lifestyle factors to improve health and wellbeing.

The aim of this guide

The guide aims to provide guidance to physical activity leaders and coaches on healthier food and drink options in settings where physical activity or sport is taking place or is being promoted. This includes both indoor and outdoor activities for example in community centres, leisure centres, sports clubs and activity centres. Getting active can be a great opportunity to promote healthy eating and drinking habits and as people become more active they may also be keen to improve their diet. The nutrition information in the guide is aimed at healthy adults, young people and school aged children.

We encourage coaches and group leaders to find opportunities to discuss and promote healthy eating and drinking. These may naturally arise before or after a physical activity session. Even if food is not provided, often drinks are as participants may become thirsty during the activity.

Food/drink may be eaten/drunk before or after activities. It might be brought by participants themselves or it can be provided as part of programmes, events or celebrations by the organisers. This can be a great opportunity to provide healthier food and drink choices and highlight important key health messages.

People may be taking part in physical activity to improve their health and wellbeing and this can be a good time to raise awareness of healthier food and drink choices. In the sports setting there is the added incentive of performing at your best too.

The guide provides practical guidance on

- a) Drinks**
- b) Healthy snacks**
- c) Celebrations**
- d) Food allergy**
- e) Preparing food safely**
- f) Cooking programmes**

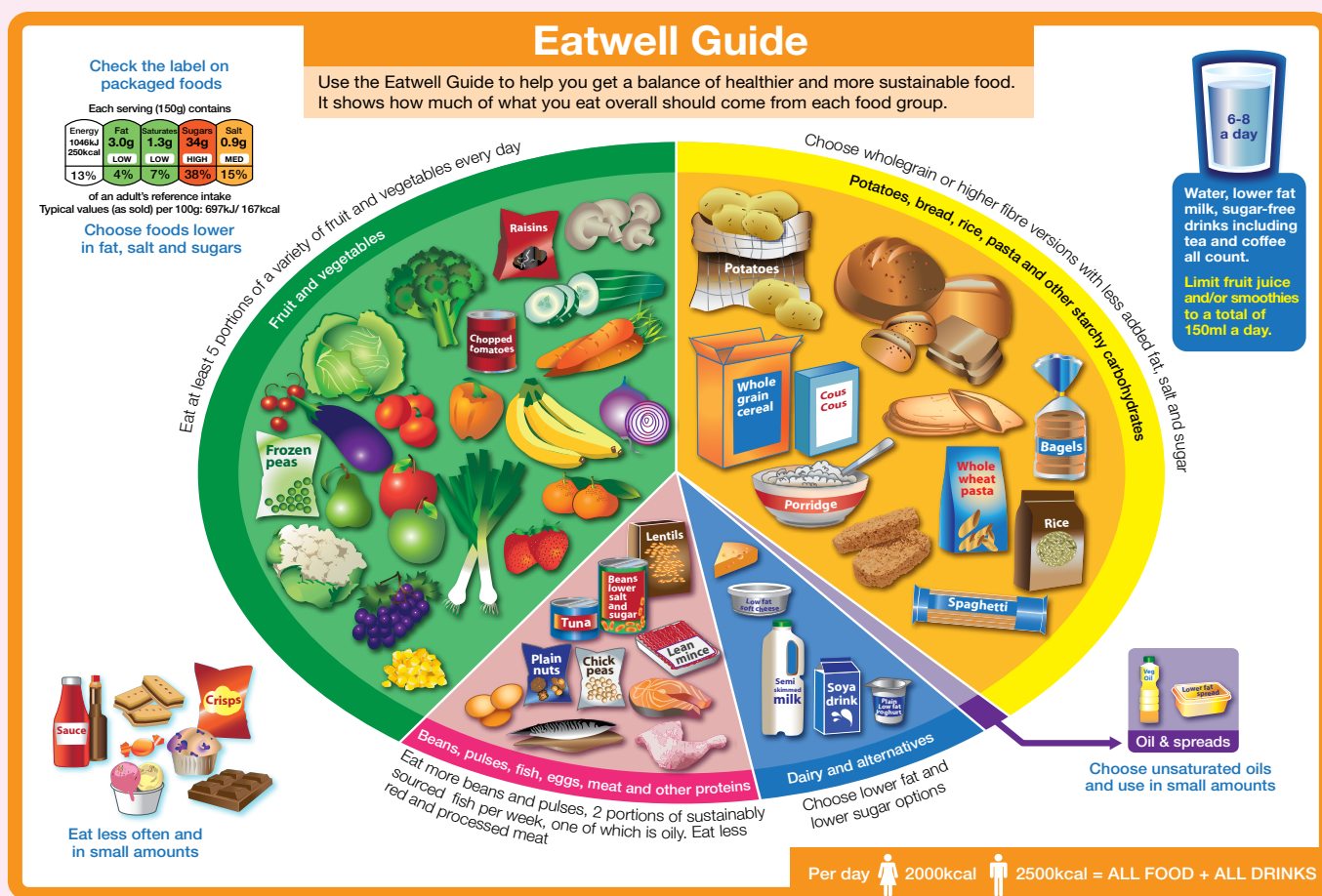
Who is this guide for?

The information in this guide is for physical activity leaders and coaches delivering programmes with adults, school age children or young people of all abilities.

The dietary advice is based on the Eatwell Guide which applies to most people regardless of weight, dietary restrictions/ preferences or ethnic origin. The Eatwell Guide applies to adults, young people and most children over 5 years old. Children under 2 years have different nutritional needs but between the ages of 2 and 5, children should gradually move to eating the same foods as the rest of the family, in the proportions shown on the Eatwell Guide.

Anyone with special dietary requirements or medical needs is advised to check with a registered dietitian on how to adapt the Eatwell Guide to meet their individual needs.

This guide is not specifically targeted at people participating in high performance level sports activities, but much of the information is still applicable.



Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

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Why do we need this guide?

Physical activity and sport can be an ideal opportunity to raise greater awareness of the benefits of eating a well-balanced diet for good health as well as sporting performance.

It is well recognised that a healthy diet combined with regular physical activity can help maintain good health and prevent disease. A healthy diet can help achieve or maintain a healthy weight, prevent heart disease, stroke, diabetes, tooth decay and some cancers.

Northern Ireland has high rates of death and disability from diet related diseases like cancer and heart disease. The most recent Health Survey in Northern Ireland¹ showed that rates of overweight and obesity in both adults and children in Northern Ireland continue to be a cause for concern. Sixty five percent of adults and 1 in 4 children in Northern Ireland are overweight or obese. Not only is this a concern in terms of health, the self-esteem and self-confidence of children who are overweight or obese can be affected.

The Belfast Agenda² is the city's first community plan and it has identified what areas we need to focus on to provide a better quality of life for all citizens of Belfast. One area is to reduce by 33

1 <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/hsni-first-results-19-20.pdf>

2 https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/getmedia/9d8e1a2b-ec8a-4c4a-a54e-056b25606668/AD003_BA.pdf

per cent the life expectancy gap between the most and least deprived neighbourhoods. Improving nutrition and increasing physical activity can contribute to helping achieve these targets. This guide includes useful information and links to help you promote healthy eating within your group or club in practical ways. Those attending virtual physical activity sessions can also benefit from the information provided.

a) Drinks

Physical activity or exercise sessions are an ideal time to encourage healthier drinking. Participants often come with drinks to a session or some groups provide a drink. Unfortunately group leaders often see high sugar, acidic drinks or energy drinks being brought for hydration. Regularly consuming foods and drinks high in sugar increases the chances of tooth decay and drinking sugary drinks is linked with excess weight gain in children. Some drinks are also acidic and can cause erosion of the enamel of teeth.

What to choose

Tap water is the ideal choice as it provides fluid without calories or the sugars that can potentially damage teeth. Water should be freely available to those attending the session or if this is not possible encourage your group to bring water in a refillable water bottle.

The amount of fluid needed each day depends on many things including the weather, how physically active someone is and their age. The Eatwell Guide recommends 6-8 glasses of fluid each day. If the weather is hot or if someone is exercising more or sweating more they may need more to drink. It is not necessary to promote excessive water drinking.

What to avoid

Sugar containing drinks

Sugar containing drinks should be strongly discouraged in favour of water. Sugar causes tooth decay and extra sugar provides extra calories too. Avoid offering sugar-sweetened drinks, such as juice drinks, flavoured milks, sports drinks and energy drinks. If you have to provide a squash choose a sugar free option and serve it well diluted.

Sports drinks

These usually contain sugar and are not needed for most people taking part in physical activity. These drinks may have a place in some sports where people are exercising at higher levels and for a longer time.

In sports where mouth guards are used they should be rinsed with water only and not sports drinks or other sugary drinks as this can lead to tooth decay.

Energy drinks

These contain high levels of caffeine and can also contain high levels of sugar. Energy drinks can increase heart rate to a level which may be harmful and can also increase blood pressure. They should not be consumed before or during physical activity. Energy drinks can affect how the brain and heart develop in children and adolescents. They are unsuitable for those under 16 years and for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Fruit juices and smoothies

Although fruit juices and smoothies provide vitamins & minerals, they also contain free sugars and can be acidic which can cause dental decay and erosion. It is advised to limit these to one small 150ml glass per day which counts as 1 portion of the recommended 'at least 5 portions of fruit and veg per day'.

Protein drinks

Protein drinks or protein shakes are not recommended for people taking part in physical activity as most people get enough protein through a balanced and varied diet.

Tips

- Make sure your group know where drinking water is available from for example an accessible tap, water fountain or provide a jug of water. Check if you need to provide cups for participants to use.
- In virtual sessions encourage participants to have water nearby to drink
- Try serving water flavoured with fruit, vegetables or fresh herbs for example slices of orange, lemon, apple, cucumber or fresh mint.
- At events or celebrations if an alternative to water is preferred:
 - Low fat milk for example semi-skimmed or 1% fat milk
 - Tea and coffee could be offered to adults with a decaffeinated version also. Consider if someone attending may require a non-dairy alternative drink to milk as part of a special diet.



Key message for group leaders

- Encourage your group to drink enough fluids to stay hydrated-aim for 6-8 drinks per day.
- Water is an ideal choice – it's kind to teeth and calorie free
- Sugary drinks including energy drinks are not recommended
- Sports drinks are not suitable as an everyday drink.

Useful resources

- **A healthy hydration guide for adults and teenagers**
<https://www.nutrition.org.uk/healthyliving/hydration/adults-teens.html>
- **Safefood guide- replacing sugary drinks**
<https://www.safefood.net/family-health/sugary-drinks>
- **A guide to how much fluids to drink and healthier drinks options**
<https://www.safefood.net/healthy-eating/drinks>
- **Safefood- sugar and caffeine in energy drinks - poster**
https://www.safefood.net/getmedia/19edba78-39cd-47de-a887-62175a13198f/energy_drinks_poster.aspx?ext=.pdf

b) Snacks

Although not necessary at many physical activity sessions, participants may bring along snacks. They may also be provided by leaders for longer sessions or where physical activity is combined with another activity. If snacks are provided they can be a useful practical way to promote healthy and nourishing choices.

Many snacks that children or adults bring to sessions or eat before or afterwards are low in nutrients and high in calories from fat and/or sugar and can be high in salt. Examples are crisps, sweets, chocolate or biscuits bars.

With thought and planning healthier snacks can make a valuable contribution to a healthy diet. Coaches and leaders can help promote healthier snacks.

Fruit and vegetables are a healthy snack option as they contain fibre, vitamins and minerals that are essential to promote health and reduce the risk of developing diet related illnesses. The current recommendation is to eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables each day but the recent Health survey for Northern Ireland¹ found that only 38% of people living in Northern Ireland are meeting this.

A recent 'Food and you' Survey³, showed that people living in Northern Ireland regularly eat snack foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt, approximately three quarters of respondents said that they ate biscuits, pastries and cakes at least once per week and a third of those taking part said they ate these foods each day.

³ <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you/food-and-you-wave-five>



What to choose

- Fruit and vegetables should be the main choice for snacks.
- Try easy to eat/ peel varieties of fruit for example bananas, mandarins, apples, grapes or plums.
- Try chopped vegetable sticks like celery, cucumber, carrot or cherry tomatoes

Other healthy snacks include:

- Yogurt - low-fat Greek yogurt, diet or natural yoghurts (made from milk or a dairy alternative like soya) or plain fromage frais
- Bread for example wheaten, wholegrain, sliced loaf, pitta bread, bagel or wheaten scones, with low-fat spread or a little unsaturated margarine
- Breadsticks, crackers, oatcakes, rice cakes, corn cakes, crispbreads or plain popcorn
- Dips for breadsticks and vegetables for example salsa, low-fat dips, low-fat hummus, and cottage cheese (plain or with chives or pineapple)
- Unsalted nuts served in individual portions

Tips for including fruit and vegetables

- Depending on the type of session you could offer fruit platters, fresh fruit skewers or fruit salad - fresh or tinned in its own juice
- Create interest and variety by including fruits or vegetables people may not have tried before.
- In virtual sessions encourage fruit or vegetables as a healthier snack choice.

What to avoid

Avoid snacks high in sugar and/or fat and salt.

Crisps or savoury snacks like corn snacks or tortilla chips

Sweets or chocolate

Cake, buns or biscuits

Granola or cereal bars

Protein bars

8 Active Belfast

Key messages for group leaders

- Fruit and vegetables are healthy snack options
- Advise your group on the importance of healthy snacks and encourage healthier snack choices
- Avoid offering biscuits, sweets, chocolate and crisps
- Encourage participants to wash their hands after exercise and before eating food especially if they have been using sports/ exercise equipment or balls.

Useful resources

- **Healthy snacks factsheet (for adults)**
<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/healthy-snacks.html>
- **Healthy snacks for children**
<https://www.safefood.net/family-health/kids-snacks>
- **A report on high protein snack foods (Safefood)**
<https://www.safefood.net/research-reports/high-protein-snack-survey>

Safety note:

Due to a higher risk of choking in the under 5's, do not offer nuts or whole small fruits/vegetables such as grapes, berries and cherry tomatoes. Small fruits and vegetables such as grapes should be cut into quarters. Offer finger foods such as small pieces of banana or foods that have been well-cooked and finely cut up.

c) Celebrations

Celebrations are often used to mark the end of a physical activity programme or a special occasion. Food and drinks are often served at celebrations, but traditionally foods offered are high in fat and/or sugar or salt. Often there is no healthier choice. With some thought and planning this could be a great opportunity to include healthy choices and promote healthy eating. You will also be supporting those attending who are there because they want to improve their health.

It is also important to plan ahead and ensure food provided for celebrations is safely prepared, cooked and stored.

What to choose

- Healthier food and drinks options should be provided at celebrations-use the ideas in the sections on drinks and snacks above.
- You could include sandwiches, rolls or wraps with a variety of lower fat fillings such as chicken and salad, tuna and sweetcorn, humus and carrot. Choose wholegrain or granary breads as well as white bread and go easy on mayo or spreads.
- Offer fresh fruit, plain unsalted nuts or plain low-fat yogurts.
- If biscuits are served, choose plain ones like Rich Tea, Marie or Digestives.
- If serving foods that are high in sugar, salt or fat keep portions small.

What to avoid

Fried foods such as chips, burgers or fried sausages
Pastries or pies
Dishes with cream based sauces
Mayonnaise and high fat dressings
Sweets, chocolate, cake or fancy biscuits
Desserts high in fat and sugar

Tips

- Include healthy choices throughout your menu at celebrations
- Involve your group or team and plan healthier choices together. Be aware of any religious or cultural food preferences.
- Offer smaller portions of high fat or high sugar foods
- Offer water, low fat milk, tea or coffee as drinks
- Plan ahead to prepare, cook, store and serve foods for celebrations safely.

Key messages for group leaders

- Always provide healthy food and drink choices at celebrations
- If you serve high fat and/or sugar food and drink options reduce the portion size.
- Sandwiches should be prepared by an appropriately trained person following good hygiene practices in an area suitable for the preparation of such foods. If possible, sandwiches should be made on the same day they are to be consumed. Sandwiches should be covered and stored in the fridge until they are served
- Consider providing tongs for the service of foods

d) Food Allergies

If you are serving food as part of a session you need to be aware of the risks associated with food allergy. Although food allergy is relatively uncommon, sometimes it can lead to a potentially life threatening reaction.

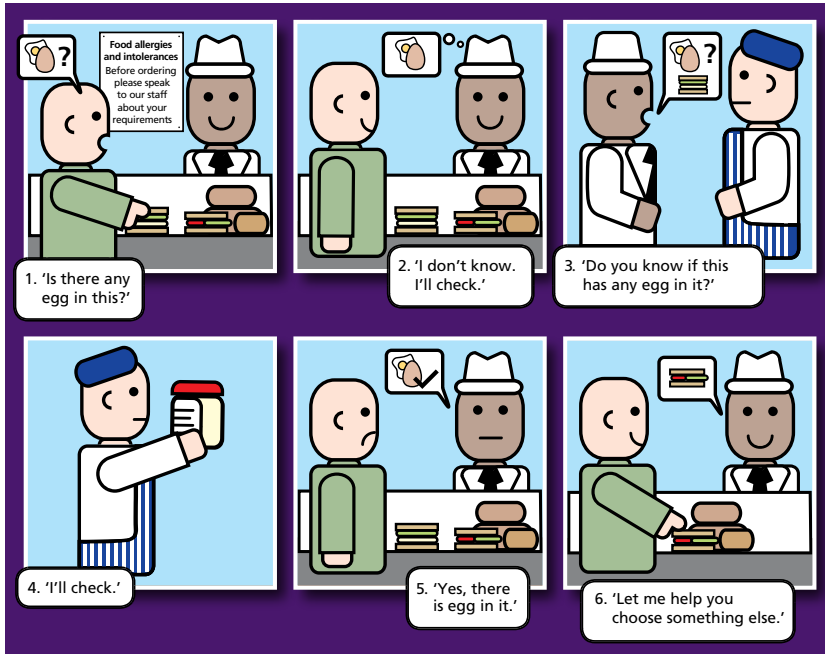
If you will be providing food, when preparing for your session you should, where possible, contact the attendees in advance and ask them if they have any known food allergies or food intolerances. This means you can be aware in advance if there are any special dietary needs.

Food allergy, coeliac disease and food intolerance are different types of food hypersensitivity. Food allergy is when the immune system which helps your body fight infection mistakes the protein in food as a threat. Food allergy symptoms can range from mild to life threatening. See information below on what to do if you suspect someone is having an allergic reaction to a food. Food intolerance does not involve the immune system and is never life threatening. The symptoms can develop hours after consuming the food or drink.

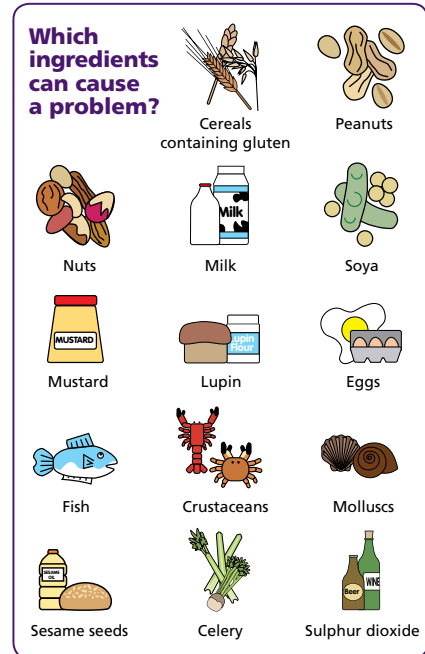
Coeliac disease is an autoimmune condition caused by a reaction to gluten found in grains such as wheat. The immune system attacks the small intestine. Following a strict gluten free diet can help prevent long term health conditions.

Think Allergy

When someone asks you if a food contains a particular ingredient – always check. From 13 December 2014, food businesses will need to provide information about allergenic ingredients in the food they serve.



For more information and advice about allergy, visit: food.gov.uk/allergy
A booklet **Allergen information for loose foods** is also available to download.



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By law food manufacturers must indicate on the label if their product contains one of the 14 main allergens. Keep food packaging of the foods being provided so attendees with a known food allergy / intolerance can check that the food is suitable. You must signpost attendees to where they can obtain the allergen information for the foods you are serving. This can be done by placing a sign where the food is being served. Suggested wording can include; "Food allergies & intolerances: Please speak to a member of staff about the ingredients in the food. Here is a sample sign you can use to create your own version

<https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/allergen-signage.pdf>.

Key messages for group leaders

- Be aware of food allergies and the 14 allergens that are identified in legislation
- Be aware of what to do in an emergency
- Check if attendees have any food allergies or intolerances and consider if it is safe to serve them food
- Retain food packaging for participants to check labels if necessary

What to do in an emergency

If you suspect that someone in your group is having an allergic reaction to a food, you should leave someone with the person while you ring 999 for an ambulance and give the following information:

- It's an emergency;
- The patient is suffering from suspected anaphylaxis;
- The address and postcode where the ambulance is needed.

Someone should wait outside the building to direct the ambulance crew to the patient.

For more information read the NHS guidance on anaphylaxis

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/anaphylaxis/>

For more information on food allergy:

Living with a food allergy

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/living-with-a-food-allergy.html>

Food Standards Agency guidance on food allergy

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-labelling-for-food-manufacturers>

Food allergen checklist

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-checklist-for-food-businesses>

e) Prepare food and drinks safely

If providing food and drinks as part of your activity it is important to be aware of food safety. To minimise the risk of food poisoning plan ahead.

Hand washing is essential before preparing, serving and eating food. Make sure you have access to soap, paper towel/ clean towel and running water.

Planning

Think about the cooking and food storage facilities available to you when planning what foods and drinks to provide.

Consider how you are going to store, prepare and serve food to ensure the safety of those attending. If you are cooking food there may be additional considerations.

Preparing food

If you are preparing food, the four main things to remember for good hygiene are the 4Cs: cleaning, cooking, chilling and avoiding cross-contamination. It's very important to store food properly to keep it safe. Storing food in sealed containers and at the correct temperature protects it from harmful bacteria, stops objects falling into it, and avoids cross-contamination with other ingredients.

Practical Tips:

- wash your hands regularly with soap and water
- always wash fresh fruit and vegetables before cooking or eating them
- ensure participants wash their hands before eating
- keep raw and ready-to-eat foods separate
- do not use food past its use-by date
- always follow cooking / heating instructions
- make sure food is properly cooked before you serve it
- ensure that food preparation areas are suitably cleaned and sanitised after use, and wash any equipment you are using in hot soapy water
- ensure frozen food is safely defrosted in a fridge before you use it
- keep refrigerated food out of the fridge for the shortest time possible.

For more detailed advice on how to cater safely for groups:

Catering for large events

<https://www.safefood.net/food-safety-events/large-groups>

Food Standards Agency- Providing food at community and charity events

<https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/providing-food-at-community-and-charity-events>

f) Cooking groups

Some organisations run cooking groups as part of a wider programme that includes physical activity. Cooking groups can be a great way to improve cooking skills and confidence as well as providing an opportunity to cook from scratch and learn about healthy eating. They can also be a useful way of meeting others and having fun.



Before you start

If you plan to run a cooking group there are some important things to consider:

- A suitable venue with adequate insurance in place for the activity and venue
- Full risk assessment (for example for the cooking activity and venue)
- Funding and associated costs
- Childcare or if children are taking part adequate supervision of children
- Who will deliver the programme and any support or training needed.

Training and support

Cook it! programme- Where possible access cooking and nutrition education training from your local Public Health dietitian. Cook it! is the recognised nutrition and cooking skills programme for adult groups in Northern Ireland with useful lesson plans and resources. The materials have been adapted for online delivery too. Contact your local Public Health dietitian for details. Belfast HSC Trust Public Health dietitians email: CDHWteam@belfasttrust.hscni.net

Food hygiene training

It is suggested that anyone preparing high risk / ready to eat foods complete food hygiene training to a level equivalent to the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) Basic Food Hygiene Certificate which is Level 2. A number of courses are available online. Alternatively, you can contact your local Environmental Health department for a list of training providers.

Registration

If you are planning to run a cookery group on a regular basis you must register with the Environmental Health Department of your Local Council. In Belfast City Council area registration can now be completed online at <https://register.food.gov.uk/new/belfast> .

Healthy cooking

If you do not have a recognised training in nutrition and healthy eating you can still choose a recipe or dish to reflect healthy eating.

This should include:

- Using less fat in cooking
Stew, casserole or bake instead of frying; avoid cream in sauces and soups; avoid pastry toppings; always measure the amount of oil added with a spoon.
- Using less sugar
Avoid recipes which use a lot of sugar and where you can, add less sugar. For example try baking scones or wheaten bread instead of brownies or tray bakes.
- Using less salt
Add less salt or stock cubes/powder, use herbs and spices to add flavour instead.
- Including more fibre rich foods like wholegrains, fruit and vegetables.
Use wholegrain rice or pasta instead of white versions; include more vegetables and pulses in curries, soups and stews; try fruit based desserts like fruit crumbles.

For tips on healthier cooking:

<https://www.safefood.net/Healthy-Eating/How-to/Cooking>

How to make your dishes healthier

<https://www.safefood.net/healthy-eating/how-to/how-to-make-your-dishes-healthier-with-ten-simple>

Tips

- Food hygiene and handwashing should be an important part of every session, especially your first session
- Kitchen safety is essential. Before you start and during the programme ensure you highlight potential risks to your group and how they can cook safely
- Ensure children are appropriately supervised to prevent accidents
- Choose dishes and cooking equipment appropriately depending on the age group and ability of your group
- Choose recipes that are affordable and suitable for the type of group
- Consider the religious and cultural preferences of your group

For recipes ideas:

Let's get cooking - Recipes suitable for teaching children how to cook and help enjoy food

<https://www.bda.uk.com/food-health/lets-get-cooking/recipes.html>

101 square meals-Easy recipes for everyday

<https://www.healthpromotion.ie/hp-files/docs/HPM00196.pdf>

Safefood recipes- A variety of recipes for meals and snacks

<https://www.safefood.net/recipes>

14 Active Belfast

World Cancer Research Fund 'Eat Move Learn'

Guidance for cooking with children plus links to recipes and fruit and veg growing ideas.

<https://www.wcrf-uk.org/eat-move-learn/grow-it>

Further resources and information

Nutrition Programmes

Cook it!

fun, fast food for less



This is a 6 session practical nutrition programme for groups of adults (16 years +). It is aimed at encouraging those cooking on limited budget. It helps participants to enhance cooking skills and learn more about a balanced diet. The *Cook It!* programme is delivered locally by trained tutors. The two day tutor training is provided by dietitians. Tutors then go on to deliver the programme to their own group as 6 sessions.

I can

Cook it!

fun, fast food for less



I can Cook it! is an 8 session programme for groups of adults (16 years +) who would benefit from a more accessible format who want to enhance their cooking skills and are interested in healthier eating, especially where cost is a consideration. The two day tutor training is provided by dietitians. Tutors then go on to deliver the programme to their own group as 8 sessions.

Useful links

- **Nutrition resource links**

<https://www.makinglifebettertogether.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Nutrition-Resource-Links-August-2020.pdf>

- **Communication Resource and Information Service** - Health Promotion library and free resources on a range of topics

<https://crishealthinfo.co.uk/contact/>

Nutrition and sport information

- **Fuel your body for the teenage sports person**

<https://www.safefood.net/education/fuel-your-body>

- **NHS choices Livewell- food and drinks for sport**

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-and-drinks-for-sport/>

- **British Dietetic Association-Sport and exercise**

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/sport-exercise-nutrition.html>



For further information on this document or any of the work of Active Belfast, please contact:

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