



Effective From	AY 2024/25 (Fall term)
Compliance From	AY 2025/26 (Fall term)

## EARLY EDUCATION INSTITUTION **POLICY**

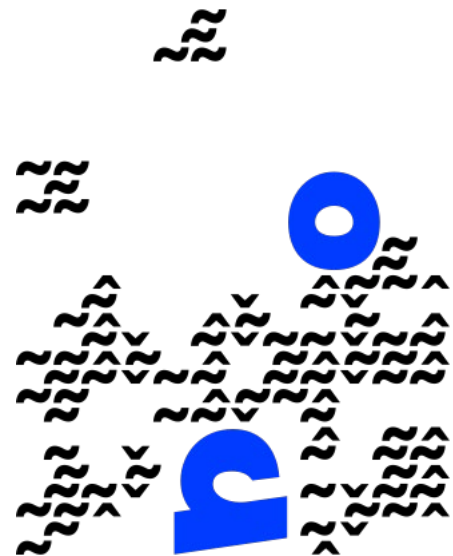
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# FOOD AND NUTRITION

### Purpose

This policy sets out a clear framework for the provision of food and nutrition to children at Early Education Institutions (EEl)s. It standardizes nutritional guidelines and offerings across EEl)s with the necessary requirements and actions to establish and implement a comprehensive food and nutrition policy considering the individual needs and requirements of children, as well as the engagement of parents in the decisions and processes relating to their children's nutrition.



## Definitions

<b>Child</b>	A person under the age of 4 years, as per Federal Decree Law No. (51) of 2022 Regulating Nurseries.
<b>Early Education Institutions (EIs)</b>	All ADEK-licensed institutions that offer early years service (e.g., nurseries).
<b>Food Groups</b>	Food families that share common characteristics. Common food groups are grains, dairy, fats, meats, vegetables, and fruit.
<b>Food Service</b>	Meal offerings by the EEI, not food brought from home by children.
<b>Food Types</b>	Specific food items under each food group. For example, common food items under the "dairy" food group are milk, eggs, and cheese.
<b>Food Handling</b>	The preparation, cooking, heating, serving, and feeding of packaged or unpackaged food directly as well as the cleaning and sanitizing of equipment and utensils used to prepare or serve food and/or surfaces that come into contact with food.
<b>Inconsistent Eating</b>	Behavior displayed by children when they do not eat regularly or consistently (e.g., fussy eating or fear of new foods).
<b>Infant</b>	Child between 0-12 months of age.
<b>Meal</b>	Eating occasions that consist of a reasonably large portion of food for children (e.g., breakfast, lunch).
<b>Onsite Food Preparation</b>	Any food service in which food is prepared through kitchens on the EEI premises.
<b>Offsite Food Preparation</b>	Any food service in which food is not prepared on the EEI premises - normally through an external service provider or central kitchens (associated with the EEI).
<b>Snack</b>	Any food eaten between meals.



# Policy

All EEIs shall develop and implement a Food and Nutrition Policy, which outlines all processes, procedures, and guidelines to be followed regarding:

1. The food and drinks provided for meals and snacks
2. The eating environment and social aspects of mealtimes
3. Rewards, celebrations, and special occasions
4. The identification of foods prohibited in the EEI
5. The management of dietary restrictions
6. The management of inconsistent eating
7. Bringing food and drink from home (food guidelines for parents)
8. Learning about food and cooking with children
9. Food safety, storage, and hygiene
10. Staff training
11. Specific practices relating to infants (including support for bottle-feeding and breastfeeding)

## 1. General Principles

### 1.1 Children's Right to Food

EEIs shall ensure that children receive enough nutritious food while in their care and explicitly include this commitment in their Food and Nutrition Policy.

### 1.2 Food Service Menu

EEIs that offer food services shall develop a weekly menu, which meets the minimum requirements. The weekly menu shall:

- a) Be developed jointly between the EEI and a licensed dietitian, nutritionist, or food service provider.
- b) Align with the food and nutrition requirements set by relevant authorities in Abu Dhabi.
- c) Feature multiple options for meals and snacks for children to choose from.
- d) Feature Emirati dishes and local seasonal produce.
- e) Include multiple options of equivalent nutritional value.
- f) Include meal options that accommodate all dietary restrictions of the children receiving the food.
- g) Provide nutritional value and total calories for every meal or snack provided in alignment with the "Sehhi" program.
- h) Be revised and adapted in line with feedback from both parents and children.

EEIs shall communicate the menu to parents at least once a week and inform them immediately of any amendments.

### **1.3 Food Guidelines for Parents**

EEIs shall provide parents with guidelines for sending food with their children set by the relevant authorities in Abu Dhabi and in alignment with the minimum standard shown in the [ADEK EEI Food and Nutrition Policy Guide](#).

### **1.4 Specific Dietary Restrictions**

EEIs shall take all necessary steps to meet children's individual dietary requirements in line with the nutritional and food safety requirements of relevant local authorities and the minimum steps outlined in the [ADEK EEI Food and Nutrition Policy Guide](#).

### **1.5 Prohibited Food and Drinks**

EEIs shall ensure that food and drinks offered as part of the food service, brought from home, or consumed during special occasions and celebrations pose minimal risk to children's health, wellbeing, and development. Thus, EEIs shall include a list of prohibited food and drink items in their Food and Nutrition Policy, which include – but are not solely restricted to – the following items:

- a) Sugar-sweetened drinks:
  - Fruit juices made from syrups
  - Soft drinks
  - Energy or sports drinks (except for isotonic sports drinks)
- b) Caffeinated drinks:
  - Hot or iced coffee
  - Hot or iced tea
- c) Food with added sugars:
  - Candies, sweets, marshmallows, caramel, cotton candy, lollipops, jelly/jellies, and chewing gums
  - Chocolates (except dark chocolate)
  - Ice cream, slushies, and other processed frozen desserts
  - Flavored or sweetened milk and yogurt
- d) Foods excessively high in salt (sodium):
  - Fried foods (including foods such as fried chicken, chicken nuggets, falafel, and samosas)
  - Fried and baked potato-based and corn-based snacks (including puffed corn balls, potato chips, and sticks)
  - Processed meats (including hotdogs, deli meats, sausages, etc.)
  - Pickled vegetables
- e) Ultra-processed foods:
  - Foods containing artificial sweeteners, preservatives, colors, or flavors manufactured from chemicals
  - Foods to which monosodium glutamate (MSG) is added

- Food containing the following food additives: Sunset yellow (E110), Quinoline yellow (E104), Carmoisine (E122), Allura red (E129), Tartrazine (E102), and Ponceau 4R (E 124)
  - Sauces including mayonnaise, liquid and dried chili sauces, ketchup (except for low-salt and sugar ketchup), and ready sauces (e.g., ranch sauce, jalapeno sauce, Italian sauce, etc.)
- f) Pork-based products or foods containing pork derivatives
  - g) Foods with added alcohol (ethanol) or one of its products
  - h) Foods containing hydrogenated fats
  - i) Honey for infants (below 12 months)
  - j) Unpasteurized drinks or food
  - k) Soy milk and sauces that contain soy or any of its derivatives
  - l) Nuts
  - m) Foods that may pose choking hazards

EEIs shall clearly communicate the list of prohibited food and drink items to staff and parents.

EEIs shall establish a regular monitoring process, conducted by an assigned staff member (including the Nurse and/or the Health and Safety Officer), to ensure that prohibited food and drinks are not served to children, whether as part of the food service or brought from home. The process shall include a method of recording violations and the course of action to be followed in case of recurring violations of the EEI's Food and Nutrition policy.

## **1.6 Availability of Drinking Water**

EEIs shall ensure that children always have access to free, clean, and safe drinking water.

## **1.7 Special Occasions and Celebrations**

EEIs shall put in place clear guidelines about food and drinks offered on special occasions and celebrations to ensure it is:

- a) Prepared and stored under the appropriate health, safety, and hygiene conditions.
- b) Regulated in terms of quantity and quality.
- c) Aligned with requirements set by the relevant authorities in Abu Dhabi.

## **1.8 Parental Engagement**

EElS shall include parents in decision-making around children's nutrition at the institution.

## **1.9 Discipline and Reward Using Food**

EElS shall never use food for punishment or reward and include this commitment in their Food and Nutrition Policy.

## **2. Learning About Food**

### **2.1 Integrating Nutrition into Education Programs and Children's Learning Experiences**

EElS shall integrate nutrition education into children's learning experiences (see [ADEK EEI Food and Nutrition Policy Guide](#) for further information).

### **2.2 Learning about Food Waste and Sustainable Food Practices**

EElS shall integrate sustainable food practices into the learning experiences of children while serving as role models. EEI staff shall ensure that children are never allowed to discard leftover food or witness adults throwing away leftover food.

### **2.3 Cooking with Children**

EElS shall prepare thoroughly for cooking activities with children to ensure their safety and wellbeing, while at the same time making it an accessible and enjoyable learning experience for all children.

## **3. Children's Dietary Requirements**

### **3.1 General Principles**

EElS shall take all necessary measures to ensure that children have sufficient nutritious food at regular intervals. The Food and Nutrition Policy shall mandate the provision of regular food and water breaks within the daily timetable, depending on each child's schedule of attendance:

- a) Children in care for up to 4 hours shall have a minimum of 1 snack or 1 meal depending on the schedule.
- b) Children in care between 4 and 7 hours shall be offered 1 snack and 2 meals.
- c) Children in care for more than 7 hours shall have at least 2 snacks and 2 meals.

In addition, EElS shall ensure that children are encouraged to consume at least 6 cups of fluids per day to replenish lost fluids and prevent constipation. Sweet drinks (e.g., diluted natural fruit juice) shall only be offered occasionally and in small amounts.

### **3.2 Dietary Requirements of Children Aged Below 2 Years**

EEIs shall not provide solid food, water, or any other food item to children aged 6 months or below unless otherwise advised by the child's pediatrician. For children older than 6 months, EEIs shall follow the dietary recommendations provided by the child's pediatrician when introducing solid foods and water into their diets. Further information on appropriate food intake for children up to 2 years old is outlined in the [ADEK EEI Food and Nutrition Policy Guide](#).

### **3.3 Dietary Requirements of Children Aged 2 Years and Above**

EEIs shall follow the recommended food intake for children aged 2 years and above set by the relevant authorities in Abu Dhabi. Further information on the dietary requirements of this age group is outlined in the [ADEK EEI Food and Nutrition Policy Guide](#).

### **3.4 Growth Monitoring**

EEIs shall ensure that children's height and weight measurements are regularly taken by health professionals.

## **4. Meal Provision**

### **4.1 Bottle-Feeding for Infants (Below 6 Months of Age)**

EEIs shall set staff guidelines for bottle-feeding covering all aspects from the preparation of bottles to adapting to individual feeding technique preferences.

- a) Staff shall be vigilant to infants' feeding cues so that each infant's emotional and nutritional needs are met promptly.
- b) Staff shall be aware of, and at all times follow, recommended infant bottle preparation practices as outlined in the [ADEK EEI Food and Nutrition Policy Guide](#).
- c) Staff shall follow feeding practices that meet children's emotional needs.
- d) Staff shall safeguard children's health and wellbeing in line with the minimum requirements outlined in the [ADEK EEI Food and Nutrition Policy Guide](#).
- e) Staff shall be aware of the last feed before the infant is dropped off at the EEI every morning.
- f) Staff shall log and record all bottle feedings in line with the minimum outlined requirements in the [ADEK EEI Food and Nutrition Policy Guide](#) and communicate these, in particular the last feed, to parents at pick-up time.

## 4.2 Supporting Breastfeeding

EEIs shall support breastfeeding mothers and encourage them to continue providing breastmilk for their infant while in childcare by:

- a) Providing a space for breastfeeding and a facility to warm breastmilk.
- b) Ensuring that expressed milk is properly labeled, prepared, handled, and stored.
- c) Providing or arranging for the provision of expert advice on breastfeeding practices for parents and staff, should they seek it.

Further information on breastfeeding and support for mothers is outlined in the [ADEK EEI Food and Nutrition Policy Guide](#), and guidance issued by the relevant authorities in Abu Dhabi.

## 4.3 Effective Supervision During Mealtimes (for Children Above 6 Months of Age)

EEIs shall set guidelines for staff to supervise children effectively during mealtimes. These shall include all leading minimum practices outlined in the [ADEK EEI Food and Nutrition Policy Guide](#).

## 4.4 Utensils and Equipment

EEIs shall provide age-appropriate furniture, reusable utensils (e.g., cutlery, cups, bottles, etc.), and equipment for children to eat and drink in a comfortable and safe environment at their best skill level.

# 5. Food Preparation

## 5.1 Food Storage Provisions and Practices

EEIs shall have adequate facilities and equipment to keep food safe for consumption and at optimum temperatures until it is served.

EEIs shall put in place a set of food safety standards and procedures, in line with those mandated by the relevant authorities in Abu Dhabi and the minimum requirements outlined in the [ADEK EEI Food and Nutrition Policy Guide](#) and train all staff accordingly.

## 5.2 Food Preparation

In case of onsite food preparation, EEIs shall adhere to all food safety standards related to the preparation, handling, and serving of food set by Federal Law No. (10) of 2015 Concerning Food Safety as well as any requirements set by the Abu Dhabi Public Health Center (ADPHC), the Abu Dhabi Agriculture and Food Safety Authority (ADAFSA), and the Abu Dhabi Quality and Conformity Council (QCC) to obtain an operational food services license.

In case of offsite food preparation, EEIs shall contract a commercial food caterer with valid licenses from all relevant authorities in Abu Dhabi (including ADAFSA, ADPHC, and QCC, where applicable). Any other arrangement for catering services,



such as contracting individuals or organizations without a license, is strictly prohibited.

In both cases (onsite and offsite food preparation), all meals provided shall align with the nutritional guidelines for children set by the relevant authorities in Abu Dhabi.

### **5.3 Heating of Food and Leftovers**

EELs shall have in place a set of food safety practices for handling leftover food, ensuring that meals provided in hot boxes do not exceed 45 degrees Celsius when served. Reheating of children's food in microwaves or stoves is prohibited. Please refer to the minimum standards outlined in the [ADEK EEI Food and Nutrition Policy Guide](#).

### **5.4 General Hygiene Practices Related to Food Handling and Preparation**

EELs shall establish practices for maintaining a hygienic environment in which food is prepared, handled, and eaten. These practices shall align with the minimum standards outlined in the [ADEK EEI Food and Nutrition Policy Guide](#) and anchored in the Food and Nutrition Policy.

### **5.5 Staff Training on Food Handling**

EELs shall ensure that all staff handling food are appropriately trained, certified, and/or licensed in food safety and handling relevant to their duties and in line with the requirements set by the *Abu Dhabi Guideline for Food in the Educational Institutions in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi* (QCC, 2022).

## **6. Compliance**

- 6.1** This policy shall be effective as of the start of the Academic Year 2024/25 (Fall term). EELs are expected to be fully compliant with this policy by the start of the Academic Year 2025/26 (Fall term).
- 6.2** Failure to comply with this policy shall be subject to legal accountability and the penalties stipulated in accordance with the ADEK's regulations, policies, and requirements, notwithstanding any other penalties imposed by Federal Decree Law No. (31) of 2021 Promulgating the Crimes and Penalties Law and its amendments or any other relevant law. ADEK reserves the right to intervene if the EEL is found to be in violation of its obligations.

## References

- Abu Dhabi Public Health Center (ADPHC). (n.d.). Sehi Program. <https://www.adphc.gov.ae/en/Public-Health-Programs/SEHHI-program>
- Abu Dhabi Quality and Conformity Council (QCC). (2022) *Abu Dhabi Guideline for Food in the Educational Institutions in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi*. (ADG 2, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.).
- Federal Law No. (10) of 2015 Concerning Food Safety
- Federal Decree Law No. (31) of 2021 Promulgating the Crimes and Penalties Law and its amendments

### Publication

2024 (September) ADEK\_EEI\_Food and Nutrition Policy\_v1.0

Department of Education and Knowledge, Abu Dhabi (ADEK)

This policy applies to Early Educational Institutions (EEI) in Abu Dhabi.

