

The Gentle Table

A calmer note for parents navigating restricted eating



THIS MONTH

Sparklers, bird feeders & cosy evenings

Does my child need vitamin D? • messy play for the birds • a build-your-own jacket potato night • Bonfire Night and party season • cosy food play for dark evenings



Hello again

And a warm welcome if you've joined since last month.

November is when the evenings draw in and the invitations start to arrive: fireworks, school fairs, the first Christmas parties. For a child who finds food hard, that can mean more noise, more new food and more people watching their plate. For you, it can mean more planning and more worry.

This issue is about getting ready gently, so the next few weeks feel a little calmer for everyone. As always, nothing in here is something your child *has* to eat.

IN THIS ISSUE

Vitamin D

what the NHS advises, and why it matters for selective eaters

Things to try

bird feeders, a jacket potato bar and cosy evening ideas

Party season

Bonfire Night, Christmas parties, and something just for you

Small, calm steps, at your child's pace.



Does my child need vitamin D?

From October to early March, the sun in the UK isn't strong enough for our bodies to make vitamin D. That means it has to come from food or a supplement. Vitamin D helps keep bones, teeth and muscles healthy.

WHAT THE NHS ADVISES

- **Children aged 1 to 4:** 10 micrograms every day, all year round
- **Children over 4 and adults:** consider 10 micrograms a day in autumn and winter
- **Breastfed babies:** 8.5 to 10 micrograms a day from birth
- **Formula-fed babies** having more than 500ml of formula a day don't need extra, because formula already contains vitamin D

WHY IT MATTERS FOR SELECTIVE EATERS

Very few foods contain much vitamin D. The main ones are:

- oily fish, like salmon or sardines
- egg yolks
- red meat
- fortified cereals and spreads

These are often not on a sensory eater's safe list, and children who spend a lot of time indoors miss out on summer sunshine too.

DIETETIC VIEW

Supplements come as **drops, sprays, gummies and chewable tablets**. If one texture or taste is a no, try another, or add drops to a familiar drink. Check whether a multivitamin your child already takes contains vitamin D, so you don't double up.

Your pharmacist can help you choose. Families who qualify for **Healthy Start** can get vitamins for children under 4 free. If your child has a medical condition, follow your doctor's advice.



Pine cone bird feeders

Start with a walk to collect pine cones, then make a treat for the birds. It's **messy food play with nothing they have to eat**. Peanut butter is sticky, smelly and a food many sensory eaters avoid, so touching it for the birds, not for themselves, is a lovely gentle step.

There's no pressure here, because nobody expects anyone to eat it. That freedom is often what lets a cautious child put their hands in.

Sight

Brown scales, speckled seeds

Touch

Rough cone, sticky peanut butter, gritty seeds

Smell

Woody pine, nutty peanut butter

Sound

Seeds rattling, cones crunching underfoot

HOW TO MAKE THEM

- 1 **Collect.** Gather a few open, dry pine cones on your walk. Tie a long piece of string around the top of each one.
- 2 **Spread.** Spread smooth peanut butter into the gaps (unsalted is best for the birds). Fingers, a spoon or a blunt knife: whatever your child is comfortable with.
- 3 **Roll.** Roll the cone in a tray of birdseed until it's covered.
- 4 **Chill and hang.** Pop them in the fridge for an hour, then hang them where you can watch from the window.

NOT KEEN ON MESSY HANDS?

Offer tongs or a spoon, or let your child be in charge of the string. **Watching is taking part.**

A QUICK SAFETY NOTE

- If your child has a peanut or nut allergy, use softened lard or suet instead
- Birdseed isn't for eating, so stay close with little ones who put things in their mouths
- Wash hands well afterwards



Bonfire Night jacket potato bar

A familiar base, with every topping in its own small pot so nothing touches. Your child decides what goes on their plate, and a plain potato with butter counts.

YOU'LL NEED

- 1 baking potato per person (add a sweet potato or two if you like)
- butter
- grated cheese
- baked beans, warmed
- sweetcorn
- anything else your family enjoys, in small separate pots

METHOD

- 1 Scrub the potatoes and prick them all over with a fork.
- 2 Bake at 200°C (180°C fan) for about 1 hour 15 minutes, until soft inside. Short on time? Microwave for 8 to 10 minutes, then crisp in the oven for 20 minutes.
- 3 Put each topping in its own pot and let everyone build their own.

A small change: a sweet potato on the table is a gentle bridge from a safe food. It's the same shape and the same way of eating, just a new colour.

JOBS YOUR CHILD MIGHT ENJOY

Scrubbing the potatoes

Pricking them with a fork (with you close by)

Filling the topping pots

Grating cheese (older children)

Choosing the pots

Setting the table

Tasting is optional. Filling a pot, smelling the potato as it comes out of the oven, or just sitting at the table are all wins. Hot potatoes stay hot inside for a long time, so let them cool before little hands dig in.



Bonfire Night & party season, without the overwhelm

Fireworks and parties bring noise, crowds, dark evenings and unfamiliar food, all at once. A little planning ahead takes a lot of the pressure off.

Bonfire Night

- Have a familiar meal **before** you go, and pack a safe snack
- Bring ear defenders and agree a "**we can leave any time**" plan
- Watching from a window at home counts too

Christmas parties

- Let your child eat before the party, so they're not arriving hungry
- Bring a safe food, and a quick word with the host helps: "*She'll bring her own snack, no need to worry.*"
- Party food doesn't need to be eaten. Being at the party is the goal.

School Christmas lunch

This is usually in early December, so it's worth **talking to school now**. Ask whether your child can have a packed lunch that day, or a safe food on the side, so they can join in with their friends.

A QUICK SAFETY NOTE

Sparklers aren't suitable for children under 5. For older children, use gloves, hold them at arm's length and keep a bucket of water nearby.



Cosy food play at home

When it's dark by teatime, these are gentle ways to spend time near food indoors. No one has to eat anything.



Kitchen floor picnic. A blanket on the floor with safe foods, plus one new food that just sits nearby. Eating somewhere different often feels lower pressure.



Torchlight food explore. Turn off the lights and shine a torch on a satsuma, an apple or a pepper. What colour is it now? Does it look bigger, or shinier?



Hot chocolate bar. Your child chooses the cup, the sprinkles and the marshmallows. Keep it warm, not hot.



Shop role play. Line up real packets and tins from the cupboard, then take turns being the shopkeeper. Reading labels and handling packaging is a gentle first step.



Bake something simple. Apple muffins or plain biscuits. Weighing, stirring and smelling all count, and nobody has to taste.

FOR A DRY WEEKEND

Leaf colour match. Collect leaves on a walk, then find foods in the same colours at home: a red apple, an orange satsuma, a yellow pepper, brown bread. Spotting counts.

Flask picnic. Take a warm drink and a safe snack and eat together on a bench. Side by side, with no plates or table, eating can feel relaxed.

A QUICK SAFETY NOTE

Dried pasta, rice or lentil trays are lovely for messy play, but stay close with children under 3 who might put things in their mouths.



For you this month: you don't have to say yes to everything

Party season can feel like a lot, especially when food is hard at home. This month, I'd love you to give yourself permission to do less.

IT'S OKAY TO

- leave early, or arrive late
- skip an event that you know will be too much
- say *"we'll come for the first hour"*
- bring your child's safe food without explaining why

WHEN SOMEONE COMMENTS ON YOUR CHILD'S PLATE

A short, calm phrase ready in your pocket can make all the difference. Try one of these:

- *"We're doing it our way, and it's working for us."*
- *"She'll eat what she's comfortable with today."*
- *"Thanks, we've got it covered."*

A GENTLE REMINDER

Protecting your child's calm, and your own, is a good reason. It doesn't need explaining to anyone. **You know your child best.**



UNTIL NEXT MONTH

Small steps count.

Next month: Christmas dinner, without the pressure.

Free guide

Download my free guide at
thesensorydietitian.com

Instagram

Short, practical videos at
[@sensorydietitian](https://www.instagram.com/sensorydietitian)

Find out more

Visit my website at
thesensorydietitian.com

If you would value a dietitian's view of your child's nutrition and eating pattern, start with the suitability check for my six-week programme.

CHECK PROGRAMME SUITABILITY

Warmly, Iwona

This newsletter is general information and isn't a substitute for individual advice. If you're worried about your child's eating, growth or health, please speak to your GP, health visitor or a registered dietitian.