**Healthy Eating and Oral Care Policy for Abbeymead Under 5s Playgroup**

At Abbeymead Under 5’s Playgroup, we are committed to fostering the health and well-being of all children in our care. We believe that promoting healthy eating habits and good oral hygiene at an early age plays a vital role in establishing lifelong health practices. This policy outlines our approach to healthy eating, snacks, and oral care, to support both the physical and dental health of every child.

**Healthy Eating and Snack Guidelines:**

To promote good nutrition and a balanced diet, we ask all parents and caregivers to provide their child with a **whole piece of fruit** for snack time. This can include apples, bananas, oranges, or any other fresh fruit. We kindly ask that snacks are not brought in containers, snack boxes, or pre-packaged items. Whole fruits provide essential vitamins, minerals, and fibre that support the child’s growth and energy levels.

**Why Whole Fruit?**

* Whole fruits contain vital nutrients, such as vitamin C, which support a strong immune system.
* They are rich in fibre, which promotes healthy digestion and helps maintain stable energy levels throughout the day.
* Whole fruit offers a natural, low-calorie option, free from added sugars and preservatives found in packaged snacks.

**Hydration:**

We also encourage parents and caregivers to provide a **water-filled drinking bottle** for their child. Water is the best drink for hydration and supports healthy development. Whenever possible, we ask that **squash, sugary drinks, or juices** are avoided, as these can contribute to tooth decay and unhealthy weight gain.

**Why Water?**

* Water helps maintain hydration and supports proper body function.
* It is the healthiest drink option, free from added sugars and artificial sweeteners.
* Sugary drinks, such as squash, can contribute to the development of cavities and other dental issues.

**Sugar and Its Effects on Teeth and Health:**

Consuming too much sugar, particularly in drinks and snacks, can have a harmful effect on children's teeth. The sugar in foods and drinks fuels harmful bacteria in the mouth, which produce acids that erode tooth enamel and lead to cavities. In addition to oral health, excess sugar consumption can negatively impact overall health, contributing to obesity, diabetes, and other long-term health concerns.

**The Role of Diet in Dental Health:**

* Sugar in snacks and drinks can lead to tooth decay and cavities.
* Good oral hygiene practices, such as regular brushing and flossing, are essential, but diet also plays a critical role in preventing tooth damage.
* Healthy eating helps maintain strong teeth, gums, and overall well-being.

**Why We Support a Healthy Lifestyle:**

As early childhood educators, we recognise that the habits and choices children make in their early years shape their long-term health outcomes. By promoting healthy eating, good oral hygiene, and regular hydration, we are not only supporting children’s physical health, but also setting a strong foundation for a future of healthy lifestyle choices.

**Benefits of Supporting Healthy Habits:**

* **Stronger Immune Systems**: Proper nutrition supports immune health, helping children stay well and feel their best.
* **Improved Focus and Energy**: A balanced diet helps children maintain energy levels and focus throughout the day.
* **Positive Habits for the Future**: Establishing healthy habits early in life encourages children to continue making positive choices as they grow.
* **Prevention of Long-term Health Issues**: Healthy eating and oral care help to prevent diseases such as obesity, heart disease, and dental decay.

**Conclusion:**

At Abbeymead Under 5’s Playgroup, we strive to create an environment where healthy eating and oral care are part of every child’s daily routine. Through the partnership with families and caregivers, we aim to instil habits that promote optimal growth, development, and well-being for all children. We appreciate your cooperation in supporting these healthy lifestyle practices.

If you have any questions or would like additional information about healthy eating or oral care, please do not hesitate to speak with a member of our team.