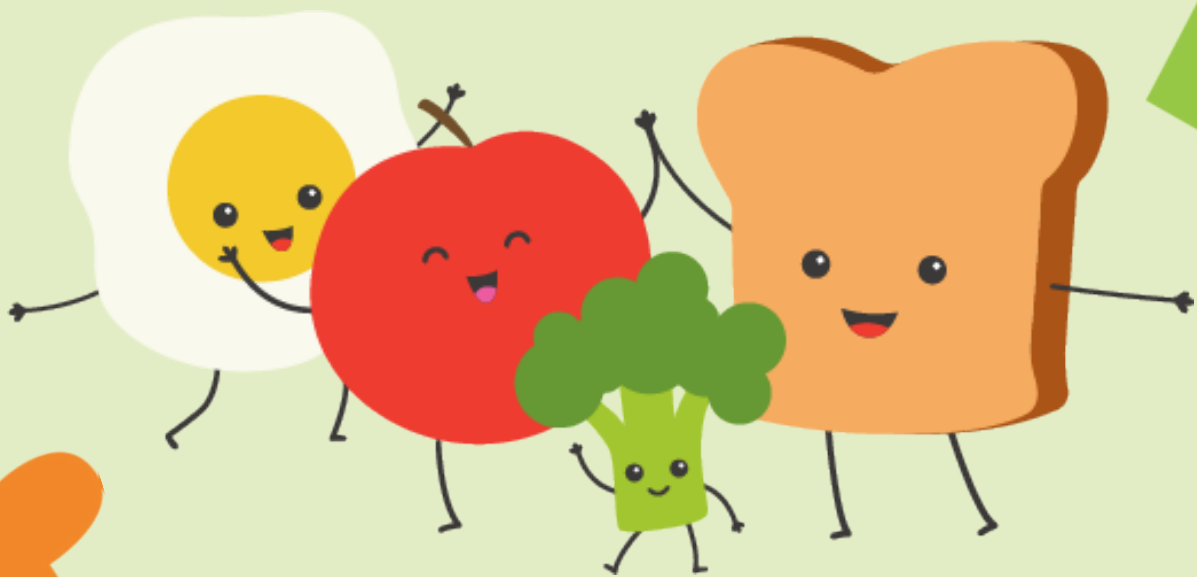




Nutrition SUPPORT



Louise Mercieca



Why work with me?

About me

Even though I had been a Nutritional Therapist for years, I only became fascinated by the influence nutrition has on early childhood whilst studying some fun CPD on Advanced Child and Brain Development Nutrition. I was so inspired following this course I set off to write my award winning book 'How Food Shapes Your Child'.

Children deserve to be aware of the impact that food has on their developing bodies, plus how food and movement in their childhood impacts their adult health outcomes.

I spend my time writing, speaking, training and campaigning to give children the future they deserve when it comes to food-related health and avoiding a range of preventable illnesses.





What's the Problem?

Health Outcomes

The stark reality is that a generation of children are growing up in an incredibly unhealthy age for humans. Between the age of 0–5 we have a unique biological window of opportunity to shape future health outcomes by laying down strong foundations.

If you work in early years you have an amazing opportunity to help shape the health and life outcomes for a generation of children.

Read on to see how you and your organisation can help make this change, as we are highly unlikely to see a seismic change coming from anywhere, but ourselves.

"For the first time in living memory, the coming generation is likely to find itself physically, mentally and economically worse off than its predecessors"

The Voice for Children 2023

What can we do?

Early Years Sector can make an impact

The early years sector is uniquely placed to influence and shape the health of a generation.

As early years professionals, it's important to understand the vital links between the foods we provide and the impact these have on early childhood development.

When we feed a child, we are not simply filling them up.

- ✓ When we feed a child in the early years, we are laying down the biological foundations to support them through life.
- ✓ When we feed a child in the early years, we are influencing how their palate and taste preferences develop, thus impacting on their food relationship for life.

Let's look at three of the ways in which food influences early childhood development.



1. Building a Brain

Early childhood is a unique window of opportunity for many areas of biological development, including brain development and laying down strong foundations, including habits and behaviours.

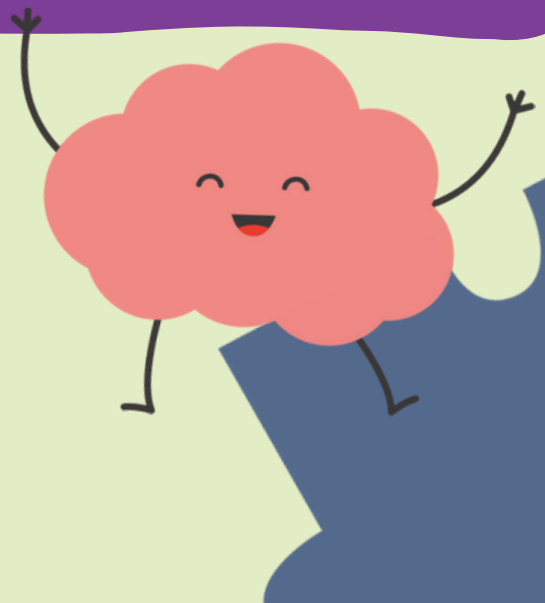
Good nutrition during this time is the foundation for early cognitive abilities, motor skills and emotional development, this is all largely due to the incredibly impressive rapid growth and development of the human brain.

Due to the rapid pace of development within the brain (age 0-3), there is an optimal window to maximise the early brain's potential to increase the brains' connections – (the synapses and fibres).

Whilst much of the development at this age is linked to positive experiences and feeling safe, nutrition has a part to play too.

- ✔ Biologically certain foods specifically support the growth and development of the brain.
- ✔ Habitually, we can influence food connections.

Ensuring your menu is packed with brain-building nutrients is vital to support the rapid pace of growth and development.



2. Building a Skeletal frame

Early childhood is a unique window of opportunity for many areas of biological development, including skeletal development and laying down the foundations for peak bone mass.

With developing a skeleton and building strong, healthy bones we can consider childhood as a time to invest in skeletal health – rather like a bone-bank.

There are two factors we need to invest in for a strong skeleton.



Nutrition



Movement

There's a special group of vitamins and minerals which support our bone development. These are similar to the nutrients needed to build and look after our teeth, ensuring your early years menu has bone-building nutrients on is vital to support peak bone mass formation.





3. Emotional Connections

When we eat food, it does a lot more than fill us up.

Food creates memories, associations, forms habits and changes our mood, it is our role to understand that food has this link as this enables us to support emotional regulation on a biological level.

One important factor is the introduction of sweet foods. Does your menu have cakes, biscuits or puddings on? Could I ask why? Is this purely habitual?

Under the age of 5 any introduction of sugar/artificial sweeteners can have a detrimental effect on the developing palate and taste preferences.

These sugary foods can also impact on brain development and how the brain sees food and reward and food and repetition, remember everything in early childhood is creating connections.

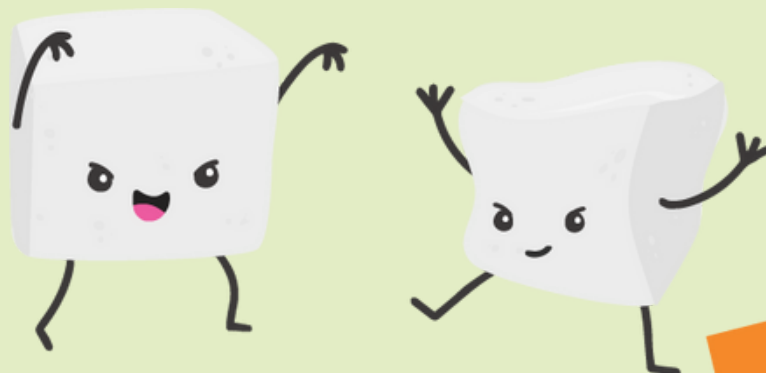


We are responsible for the introduction of sugary foods to children. Children are not born expecting cake and biscuits (a sweet tooth can be formed based on the third trimester but that's for another day).

Children will naturally prefer sweet foods once they have been introduced and have no concept of 'moderation'. Our big responsibility is to influence the developing food relationship.

What food patterns and repeat behaviours are we forming?
What emotional connections are we placing on foods?

- ✘ Food is not a reward, treat, bribe or comfort.
- ✔ Food is to nourish and support biological development.



There's so much more

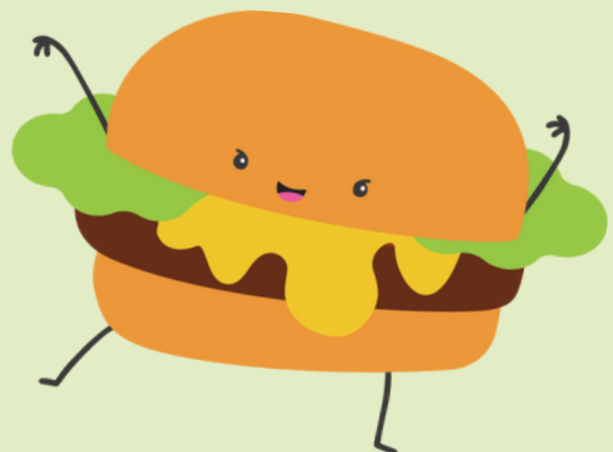
As you can see, there's a lot involved in understanding the impact of early food influences on childhood development and adult health.

Children today are growing up with a broken food landscape, a food industry that favours artificial ingredients over whole foods. You may hear a lot about UPF/Ultra Processed Foods but the true impact of these is much worse than you may think.

Over consumption (which we in the UK are at) of UPF's are contributing to noticeable changes, including:

- Changes in human face shape and jaw structure
- Changes in oral health
- Changes in speech and language development

Consider this in your setting with children, is the food landscape something you consider when looking at speech and language development concerns?



We owe it to children

Children are growing up in a food landscape that, at best is not supporting their health and development, at worst it is hindering it.

How can we, as parents, as educators as professionals who care about children, how can we influence their health and development?

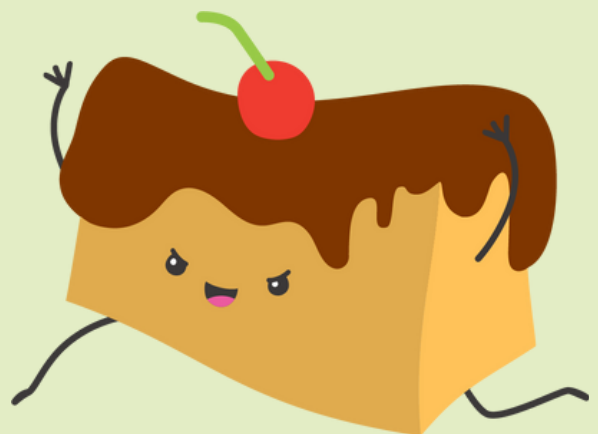
By fully understanding the impact of food. The food we eat impacts on everything we do, think and feel.

Early childhood is a time where everything is new, connections are formed linking patterns of behaviours and creating emotional connections.

How are we helping to shape those connections and patterns of behaviour with the foods we provide?

Nothing in childhood is momentary
- there's no rationale such as
"a little cake won't do any harm."

Everything forms a connection.



I can help you to shape the health of a generation

Every positive change you can make will cause a ripple effect on the child, the child's siblings and wider family. Consider how many children you have in your setting or across multiple settings and consider what impact you can have on this generation of children, who are very much in need of our help.

Take a look at the range of services I offer to support you on this journey.



Our packages are completely unique, so we don't publish a price. This depends on how many days support that you need and how that support looks from organisation to organisation can be very different.

Consultancy

Consultancy Packages

Consultancy support ranges from a one-off project to longer-term work with you to fully embed a company-wide nutrition message.

Early years nutrition is not just about how good your menu is, although that is a very good start. It's about understanding the unique window of opportunity we have in the early years to lay down strong biological foundations, such as building a brain and a skeleton, both which have huge impact on adult health and life outcomes.

Early years nutrition is also about understanding the unique time we have to shape taste preferences and develop healthy food patterns and behaviours via the language and food-connections we (the grown-ups) make.

Consultancy packages are usually a mix of:

- ✓ Menu Design/Review
- ✓ Recipe creation working alongside Chefs
- ✓ Policy writing/review
- ✓ Marketing Communications
- ✓ Staff Training





Get in touch!



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