

Medical Diet Policy (Primary, Diner, Feeder and Through Schools)

Frequently asked questions

What is the difference between a nutritionist and a dietitian?

Dietitians are the only nutrition professionals qualified to assess, diagnose and treat dietary or nutritional issues, both at an individual or public health level. Dietitian is a legally protected title, and only those registered with the Health & Care Professions Council can use the title of dietitian. Dietitians must undergo rigorous training, the minimum requirement is a BSc Hons in Dietetics, or a related science degree with a postgraduate diploma or higher degree in dietetics. All courses include a period of supervised practice in the NHS, where individuals must demonstrate clinical and professional competence before being able to apply for registration. This contrasts with Nutritionists, whose title is not protected and are not required to be registered in order to work in the UK, meaning the title can be used by anyone, including those without any nutrition qualifications.

What is a medical diet?

A medical diet is a medically prescribed therapeutic diet as a treatment for a medical condition. Our medical diet procedure also includes special diets required for pupils with food allergies or food intolerances.

What is not a medical diet?

Medical diets do not include diets required for religious, cultural or personal requirements/preferences and dietary trials or elimination diets. These diets can all be met through our standard menus.

How do I get a medical diet for my child?

Speak to your child's school to get a medical diet request form. Complete this in full and sign and return it to school with a copy of your child's medical evidence. This will be passed on to us to process.

Why do I need to provide medical evidence?

Medical confirmation is required so that our dietitians have all necessary information to safely prepare a medical diet menu for your child.

What is classed as medical evidence?

Medical evidence is a letter from your child's paediatric consultant or dietitian that outlines their medical condition and/or their need for a medical diet. In some circumstances the Nutrition and Dietetic team will accept evidence from a GP or specialist nurse.

What is not classed as medical evidence?

Any letter that has not come from a recognised medical professional with the scope to diagnose and advise on medical diets, for example, including but not limited to a nutritionist, nutritional therapist, chiropractor, Food intolerance 'testing' that is not completed by a paediatric consultant, for example IgG testing, is also not accepted as valid evidence of an allergy or intolerance.

How long does the medical diet process take?

For new children starting in September requiring a medical diet, the Medical Diet Request form and Medical Evidence needs to have been provided to the school and forwarded to the Nutrition and Dietetic Team before the end of the Summer term in order to be processed and in place for a September start. Any requests received after that date will be processed in time for the new menu cycle starting after October Half-term.

New Medical diet requests that occur mid menu cycle, and are not complex in nature, will be processed within 2 weeks.

How often will my child's medical diet change?

If your child has a medical diet menu in place, our Education Dietitians will provide a new medical diet menu for your child at each menu change. The menu changes twice a year, at the beginning of the summer term and following October half term.

My Child has a nut allergy. Why do I have to request and sign for a medical diet if my child's school is nut free?

Whilst we do not knowingly include nuts in our recipes or use ingredients containing nuts within the education sector, there may be occasions where an ingredient with a 'may contain traces of nut/peanut' may be used. For children with allergies to tree nut or peanut these 'may contain' items are removed from their medical diet menu. We are unable to take responsibility for any foods brought in by children in packed lunches that may contain tree nuts or peanuts.

My child doesn't have an allergy but another medical diet need, can you cater for this?

Our Education Dietitians currently cater for conditions such as Type 1 Diabetes, PKU and Ketogenic diets, amongst others. These medical diet menus are often created alongside the support of your child's specialist dietitian. If your child has a condition other than an allergy that requires medical diet, please follow the medical diet process and a dietitian will contact you if necessary.

I don't have medical evidence of my child's allergy, what do I do?

We are unable to provide a medical diet without the required medical evidence. If you suspect your child has an allergy/ intolerance, please approach your GP.

Partial reintroduction - my child can eat some things that contain their allergen but not others. Why do your medical diets remove all items?/ My child is partially reintroducing allergens back into their diet – do you cater for this?

Due to varying degrees of tolerance when reintroducing allergens and the reintroduction process requiring parental monitoring in order not to cause unnecessary harm, we are unable to safely cater for partial reintroductions of any kind.

My child has an appointment to see the consultant, but my GP has told me to remove an allergen from my child's diet in the meantime. Can Elior provide my child with a medical diet menu whilst we wait to see the consultant?

Yes, on receipt from a letter from your GP explaining this along with a completed medical diet request form, Elior's dietitian can put in place a provisional medical diet. The Nutrition and Dietetic team will require a copy of your child's consultant letter

confirming diagnosis following your appointment in order to ensure provision of the correct medical diet menu for your child.

My child's meal is very different from what the other children are eating, why is this?

Although our Education Dietitians try to ensure medical diet meals reflect the wider menu wherever possible, it may be that your child's allergens are such that they require an alternative meal to be made on a specific day.

As the medical diet menus are based on the standard primary menu meals, if your child's school has opted for a dish that is not on the standard primary menu it is likely that the dish on the medical diet menu will not reflect the dish served in your child's school that day.

Why does my child have specialist products on their menu that are not related to their allergen (i.e. gluten free products but they are not allergic to gluten)?

If there is an alternative option to a dish on your child's menu it is because the standard option is not suitable. In order to provide your child with an alternative that reflects the school menu it may be we have used a specialist product in order to do this. It also enables us to most safely provide consistency and inclusivity across medical diet menus so that, where possible, children with medical diet menus are provided with the same dish, particularly in relation to deserts.

Why can my child only eat from their medical diet menu and not join in Theme days?

Due to the complexity of creating medical diets it is not possible for our Education Dietitians to investigate the ingredients of all the recipes across all the different theme days held across all sites nationwide and create specific medical diets accordingly. Your child's medical diet menu has been checked for allergens and for us to ensure we are safely providing a suitable meal for your child it is important that their medical diet menu is followed for all meals.

My child no longer needs a medical diet, what do I do now?

Please provide your school with a letter from your GP, paediatric consultant or dietitian specifying that your child is no longer allergic/intolerant to their allergen(s)

and that it can now be reintroduced in full into your child's diet. Following this the Nutrition and Dietetic team will authorise the termination of your child's medical diet.

Why are some dishes repeated across my child's medical diet menu?

Although our Dietitians aim to provide as much variety as possible, where a child has multiple allergies it may be that their options are restricted and repeated across a week to ensure that a suitable meal can be provided. Recipes can only be created using a pre-determined list of ingredients available to our schools. and they do not have access to alternative ingredient options..

To what degree is my child's medical diet free from allergens?

All of our kitchen staff are allergen trained, including specific training on medical diets. They follow best practice procedures to minimise the risks of foods coming into contact with other food products, including allergens. However, due to the presence of ingredients that contain allergens that are routinely used in our kitchens (for example, gluten, milk and eggs), and that normal operations may involve shared cooking and preparation areas, we can never guarantee that a dish is completely free from any allergens/specific ingredients.

What food will my child eat whilst waiting for their paperwork to be processed?

A suitable jacket potato option will be available whilst awaiting your medical diet.

How do I make meal choices for my child from their medical diet menu?

Please inform your school of the choices you would like to make for your child so they can inform your kitchen manager. The simplest way to do this is by circling your child's options on the medical diet menu sent to you and providing that to the school.

My child has Type 1 Diabetes can you provide a carbohydrate count?

Yes, please follow the medical diet menu process and a carbohydrate count will be provided.

My child has autism and will only eat certain foods, does my child need a medical diet menu?

No, your child will not require a medical diet menu as this can be successfully managed locally. If you feel your school requires support with understanding your child's condition, please ask the school to contact their dedicated operations manager who will be able to request support from our Education Dietitians.