

School Dinner Services

When a child attends school it is essential that there is close co-operation between the parents, school, school dinner service and health professionals.

It is important to provide the teachers with information about galactosaemia (*separate download*); about a low galactose diet (*separate download*) and the potential impact of galactosaemia on learning ability (*separate download*).

The school is likely to need written evidence that the child is on a low lactose/galactose diet, from a health professional and you should take this with you. Some schools require this letter to be from a medical consultant only; others will accept the letter from a dietitian

Ask for an appointment to meet with your child's class teacher, SENCO teacher (with responsibility for special needs), class room assistants, school cook and midday supervisors. If all these people are unable to attend a single meeting, ask about the school communication plan to ensure that all members of staff have been informed appropriately. Your dietitian should be able to support you with this process, with phone calls or emails, but it is not usually possible for dietitians to visit schools.

Ask to see and approve an individual healthcare plan for your child, drawn up by the SENCO teacher. This should contain all the necessary information to manage the child's galactosaemia effectively, including dietary and learning needs. They should provide an action plan if lactose is given accidentally to your child. Request an annual review to ensure that the school have considered all aspects of care.

Low galactose school dinner

School dinner service provision is different from area to area and each authority may do things differently. Ask the school to provide you with a milk free menu plan. If they are unable to do this, ask to see the menu and modify this accordingly (ask your dietitian to help if necessary). The menus are usually on a 3 weekly or 4 weekly cycle and most schools produce new winter and summer menu's each year. You can ask to see an ingredient list of any recipe or food item that has been purchased from a supplier. It is mandatory by law that schools and other establishments can provide this information. You can ask to be notified of any recipe or any food source changes. The school cook should have received special diet training but check that this has been the case.

Ask to liaise directly with the school dinner service on a regular basis and that suitable training, supervision and information is evident for any "covering cook". Ask if you can have the direct email contact of the school cook so that you can communicate any direct issues with them.

If school meals are provided from another site, communication between the school and school dinner service will need to be excellent to ensure that error is not made. You should ask the SENCO teacher to explain the procedure for how they communicate.

Ask the school dinner service if they will consider purchasing special items e.g. vegan cheese like Violife, oat milk for custards and coconut yoghurts.

Remember to talk to the school about special meals such as Christmas lunch or parties provided by the kitchen and to advise how to adapt meals.

If there is any doubt about the ability of the school dinner service to provide a low galactose school dinner, provide your child with a packed lunch.

Monitoring school lunch

It is essential that when children queue for their meal during the busy lunch time service that they are clearly identified by the catering staff to ensure that the correct meal is handed to the child. Ask if a photo of your child with details of their low galactose diet can be displayed in the kitchen and kept behind the servery and kitchen. Alternatively, children could be escorted by a school member of staff or served at the start of the school sitting.

Ask the midday supervisors to encourage your child to eat their school lunch and they should provide a written daily diary of all food eaten that should be returned home with your child each day. They should also check that food is not eaten from peers at school.

If your child takes a packed lunch to school, the midday supervisors should still encourage your child to eat their school lunch, provide a written daily diary of all food eaten and check that food is not eaten from peers. Any uneaten food should be returned in the lunch box.

Other food in school

Advise the teachers to give water or soya or plant milk at break time with fresh fruit or vegetables e.g. mange tout.

If there are any school day trips, provide a low galactose packed lunch.

Remember to talk to the child's teacher about their policy on the use of rewards in the classroom eg. sweets rather than chocolate. Provide the teacher with a small box of suitable treats in case other children bring in chocolate for birthdays.

Ask to be informed about any cooking in class (one week in advance), so you can provide suitable ingredients and recipes.

Socialising with other children

When your child is invited to birthday parties or invited home for tea with a friend, remember to educate other parents and school friends about the diet. Start early in educating as many people as possible so it is normal for your child to see this and become involved.

KEY POINTS

- Obtain a medical letter to show your child has galactosaemia
- Organise a meeting with your child's SENCO teacher, class teacher and school cook (minimum) to explain about galactosaemia, the diet and any implications of galactosaemia.

- Download all the information on galactosaemia, potential learning issues at school and dietary guidance from the GSG website.
- Ask for an individual health care plan to be drawn up by the SENCO teacher for you to approve.
- Ask to see school menus, check food ingredients, systems for any 'covering cooks' and maintain regular email or face to face contact with the school cook.
- Check the system for ensuring the right meal is given to your child at lunch time.
- Ask that all meal times are supervised for both school and packed lunches.
- Meet with the school at least annually.