Food for Growing Minds: A Practical Nutrition Guide for Parents

Recipes: Cook with Kids

sodexo

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Foreward

At Sodexo, we don't just teach children about what to eat—we help them understand why. This section is all about cooking with children, not just for them. Inspired by our workshops and classroom sessions, these recipes promote real-life skills, gut health awareness, and the joy of food.

Every recipe here is built around participation, sensory engagement, and learning. You'll find simple tasks for all age levels—from sprinkling and mashing to rolling and layering—and dishes that prompt conversations about fibre, gut health, and food waste.

Recipes that encourage hands-on learning:

- **Layered Vegetable & Lentil Lasagne** – Builds confidence with chopping, layering, and recognising plant-based proteins. Great for learning structure and flavours.
- **Rainbow Rice Paper Rolls with Satay Dip** – A no-cook recipe that brings colour, knife skills, and discussion about "eating the rainbow."
- **Mini Veggie Pizza Scrolls** – Introduces rolling, spreading, and basic oven skills, plus the concept of using up leftover veg in a fun format.
- **Frozen Berry Bark** – A beginner-friendly sweet that teaches patience (while freezing!) and encourages sensory exploration with toppings.
- **Air Fryer Halloumi & Veggie Nuggets** – A crunchy, calcium-rich alternative to processed snacks, made with dipping and coating that kids love.

These recipes align with guidance in our blog around food confidence, gut health, and independence. They also connect to our classroom work, from *junior gut health games to Transition Year workshops on meal planning*. By encouraging small wins in the kitchen, these recipes build lifelong skills while also making memories.

– from the Sodexo Irish Culinary Team

Meet the Team

Niall Hill

Sodexo Ireland Head of Food

Niall has over 30 years' experience working as a chef at the highest levels both nationally and internationally, across a variety of sectors. As head of food at the award-wining food company The Butler's Pantry for 16 years, Niall won numerous awards including the Great Taste Awards, Small Business Award and Blas na hEireann. In addition to having a huge passion for quality local and Irish ingredients, Niall has an MSc in Applied Culinary Nutrition and a BA in Botanical Cuisine and has completed a postgraduate in Sustainability Leadership in Business.

Niall combines knowledge and passion with a highly strategic and practical approach to drive the highest food quality and delivery on an ethos of local, seasonal, nutritious, and sustainable food. Niall joined Sodexo as Head of Food for the Island of Ireland in February of this year and will be actively involved in the development & implementation of food offers & marketing initiatives, while driving a culture of excellence in food service delivery across the Island of Ireland.

John Core

Culinary Nutrition Lead

John Core serves as the Culinary Nutrition Lead for Sodexo, bringing over 25 years of professional culinary experience to the role. He holds a Master of Science degree in Applied Culinary Nutrition and utilizes his extensive academic and practical expertise to create dishes that are both delicious and nutritionally balanced for Sodexo's clientele. John delivers promotional pop-up restaurant concepts, culinary based nutrition seminars and one to one clinics for Sodexo client catering program.

Recently, in recognition of his contributions to the field of culinary nutrition, John was honoured with the Paula Mee Applied Culinary Nutrition Award.

Glen Stewart

Mobilisation Catering SME / Regional Development Chef

Glen has nearly 30 years' experience as a chef. Working through the years in Switzerland and Austria as well as in a number of seafood restaurants, hotels and gastro pubs between England and Ireland, he joined Sodexo nearly 13 years ago.

Glen has won several awards in competition and still maintains a passion for French cookery, as well as making novelty and formal celebration cakes in his spare time.

Cathy Adamson

Craft Development Chef

Cathy has been working with Sodexo for 30 years in various sectors of the business and has spent many years being an active member within the UK&I Culinary teams. Cathy has also spent time working with world class chefs & competing at National level to obtain several awards and accolades.

Cathy is committed to developing the culinary talents within our teams and is actively involved with the Northen Ireland Schools Programmes such as 'Future Chef' to encourage young people into the business. Cathy has a real passion for food and loves working with a product or dishes to obtain the best possible flavours, whilst maximising quality.

David Sayce

Regional Development Chef

Chef David Sayce is a seasoned professional with over 25 years of experience in the culinary industry. His career has spanned a wide range of roles, with a significant focus on 5-star hotels and fine dining restaurants.

One of the greatest privileges of his career has been the opportunity to combine his passion for food with travel. His work has taken him across the globe, including stints in Austria, South Africa, Australia, and Hong Kong, where he expanded his culinary repertoire and embraced new cultural influences.

For nearly two years, Chef Sayce has been part of the Sodexo team, initially serving as a hospitality chef for private corporate events, including luncheons and dinners. Over the past eight months, he has taken on the role of Regional Development Chef, a position that has brought new and exciting challenges. He enjoys finding innovative solutions while supporting his district, striving to help and contribute wherever possible.

Gordon Carberry

Regional Development Chef

Gordon Carberry, currently a Craft Development Chef with Sodexo, brings a wealth of experience and passion to his role. Since joining Sodexo as Head Chef in 2022, Gordon has made a significant impact through his dedication to culinary excellence. He is actively involved in the competitive cooking scene, participating in prestigious events such as CATEX, the Culinary Olympics, IFEX in Belfast, and HRC in London.

With a background rooted in the high standards of Michelin-starred kitchens, Gordon's expertise spans fine dining, comfort food, and everything in between. His deep understanding of both refined techniques and hearty, approachable dishes allows him to craft memorable culinary experiences. As a proud member of the Panel of Chefs Ireland, Gordon continually seeks to elevate his craft, blending creativity with the rich traditions of Irish cuisine.

Layered Vegetable & Lentil Lasagne

Serves: 6
Prep Time: 20 minutes
Cook Time: 40 minutes

Ingredients:

- 9-12 sheets Lasagne sheets (wholemeal)
- 1 tbsp Olive oil
- 1 Onion (chopped)
- 2 cloves Garlic (crushed)
- 1 Carrot (grated)
- 1 Courgette (grated)
- 400g Tinned green lentils (drained)
- 500ml Passata
- 1 tsp Mixed herbs
- 250g Ricotta or cottage cheese
- 50g Grated mozzarella

Method:

Preheat oven to 190°C. In a large pan, sauté onion and garlic in olive oil.
Add carrot, courgette, lentils, passata and herbs. Simmer for 15 minutes.
In a baking dish, layer lentil mix, lasagne sheets, and ricotta. Repeat, finishing with lentil mix and mozzarella on top.
Bake for 35-40 minutes until golden and bubbling.

Tips:

- Great way to introduce lentils in a familiar format.
- Use leftover vegetables or add mushrooms or spinach.
- Makes excellent leftovers for lunch the next day.

Chicken Shawarma Wrap

Serves: 4
Prep Time: 1 hour (plus marinating)
Cook Time: 30 minutes

Ingredients:

For the chicken

- 1 tsp Fennel seeds
- 1 tsp Cumin seeds
- 1 tsp Coriander seeds
- 1 tsp Ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp Allspice
- 1 tsp Smoked paprika
- 2 Garlic cloves
- 4 tbsp Natural Greek yoghurt
- 2 tbsp Olive oil
- 4 Boneless chicken thighs

For the wraps

- 4 Flatbreads
- 1 head Baby gem lettuce
- 4 tbsp Hummus
- 1/4 Cucumber
- 4 Tomatoes

Tips:

- Marinate overnight for deeper flavour.
- Use mushrooms as a vegetarian swap.
- Wrap tightly in foil for a mess-free lunchbox filler.

Method:

Toast fennel, cumin, and coriander seeds in a dry pan for 1-2 minutes. Grind to a fine powder. Mix with cinnamon, allspice, garlic, yoghurt, and olive oil. Coat the chicken thighs and marinate for at least 2 hours or overnight. Grill or pan-fry the chicken for 5-7 minutes per side until fully cooked.

To assemble, spread hummus on the flatbread, add lettuce, cucumber, and tomatoes, then top with sliced chicken. Add a drizzle of yoghurt if desired

Mission Burrito with Pico de Gallo & Tortilla Crisps

Serves: 6
Prep Time: 15 minutes
Cook Time: 30 minutes

Ingredients:

For the Burritos

- 600g Prepared beef chilli
- 6 Tortilla wraps
- 3 Avocados
- 300g Monterey Jack cheese
- 300g Rice
- 100ml Natural yoghurt

For Pico de Gallo

- Tomatoes
- Red onion (diced)
- Jalapeño (diced)
- Fresh coriander
- Lime juice
- Salt & pepper

For Tortilla Crisps

- Tortilla wraps
- Olive oil
- Paprika

Method:

Cook the rice until tender and set aside. For the pico de gallo, mix tomatoes, onion, jalapeño, coriander, and lime juice in a bowl. Season to taste.

Cut tortillas into wedges, brush with oil, sprinkle with paprika, and bake at 180°C until crisp.

Warm the wraps and beef chilli. To assemble: add cheese, chilli, rice, avocado, pico de gallo, and yoghurt. Wrap tightly into burritos.

Tips:

- Large wraps help prevent tearing.
- Mix crunchy and creamy textures.
- Wrap in foil to keep warm and mess-free.

Frozen Berry Bark with Fruit & Chocolate Chips

Serves: 4
Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cook Time: 2 hours

Ingredients:

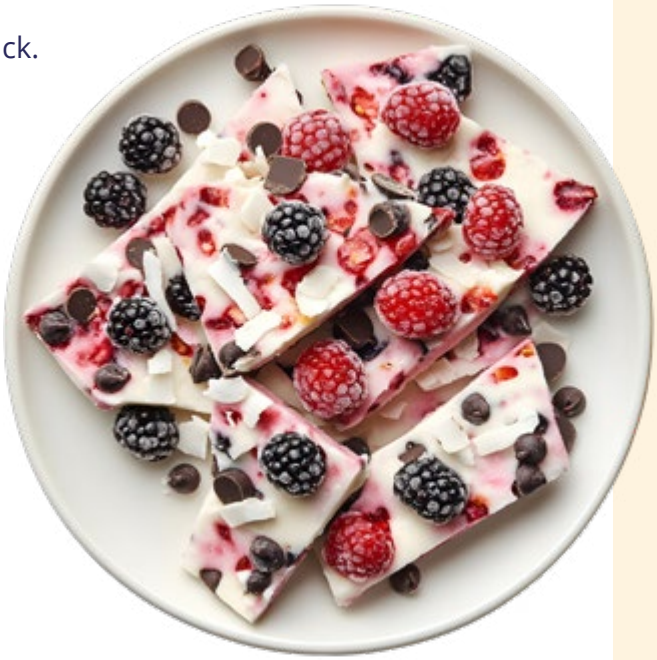
- 500g Vanilla yoghurt
- 2 tbsp Honey
- 200g Mixed berries
- 150g Chocolate chips

Method:

Line a baking tray with parchment paper - let the kids help. In a bowl, stir together the yoghurt and honey (a great mixing job for little ones). Spread the mixture onto the lined tray like you're painting a picture - aim for about 1 inch thick. Let kids decorate the top with berries and chocolate chips, making patterns or smiley faces. Freeze for at least 2 hours. Once solid, break into bark-style pieces and enjoy!

Tips:

- Great healthy dessert or after-school snack.
- Can be made dairy-free with plant-based yoghurt and maple syrup.
- Kids can practise spreading, pattern-making, and safe scooping.
- Store bark in a freezer bag for up to 2 weeks.



Mini Veggie Pizza Scrolls

Serves: 8 scrolls
Prep Time: 15 minutes
Cook Time: 20 minutes

Ingredients:

- 1 sheet Ready-rolled puff pastry
- 3 tbsp Tomato passata or purée
- 75g Grated cheese (cheddar or mozzarella)
- 1/2 medium Grated courgette
- 1/2 Finely diced red pepper
- 1/2 tsp Dried oregano or basil
- 1 tsp Olive oil (for brushing)

Method:

Preheat the oven to 200°C (fan) and line a baking tray with parchment. Unroll the puff pastry and spread with tomato passata, leaving a 1cm border around the edge. Sprinkle over grated cheese, courgette, pepper and herbs. Roll the pastry tightly from the short side into a log shape. Slice into 8 rounds and lay flat on the tray. Brush the tops lightly with olive oil and bake for 20 minutes until golden and bubbling.

Food learning & tasks:

• Ages 3–5 can help sprinkle cheese and herbs and brush with oil.

• Ages 6–9 can help roll the pastry, spread the sauce and slice with supervision.

• Chat about the colours of veg and how they help different parts of the body.

Tips:

• Great for lunchboxes or as an after-school snack.

• Can freeze before baking - just cook from frozen with 5-10 minutes extra time.

Rainbow Rice Paper Rolls with Peanut-Free Satay Dip

Serves: 4 (makes 8 rolls)
Prep Time: 20 minutes
Cook Time: None

Ingredients:

- 8 Rice paper sheets
- 1/2 Red pepper (finely sliced)
- 1 medium Carrot (finely sliced)
- 1/4 Cucumber (finely sliced)
- 50g Cooked vermicelli noodles
- 50-100g Shredded cooked chicken or tofu (optional)

For the Satay Dip

- 2 tbsp Sunflower seed butter
- 1 tbsp Soy sauce (reduced salt)
- 1 tsp Honey
- 1 tbsp Lime juice

Method:

Lay out a damp tea towel on the counter. Soak each rice paper sheet briefly in warm water, then place on the towel. Let children layer the veg, noodles, and optional protein in the centre. Fold the sides and roll tightly like a burrito. For the dip, whisk together sunflower seed butter, soy, honey and lime juice until smooth.

Tips:

- This no-cook meal builds knife and rolling skills.
- Encourage kids to explore colours and textures - “Eat the rainbow!”
- Use dipping as a hands-on way to engage fussy eaters.

Baked Banana & Oat Fingers

Serves: 10 bars
Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cook Time: 20 minutes

Ingredients:

- 2 Ripe bananas (mashed)
- 150g Rolled oats
- 1 tbsp Chia seeds
- 1/2 tsp Ground cinnamon
- 1 handful Raisins

Method:

Preheat oven to 180°C (fan). In a mixing bowl, mash the bananas and stir in oats, chia seeds, cinnamon and raisins. Press the mixture firmly into a lined baking tin. Bake for 20 minutes until lightly golden. Allow to cool fully before slicing into fingers.

Tips:

• Naturally sweet - no added sugar needed.

• Great for gut health highlight fibre and wholegrain benefits.

• Can be frozen and popped into lunchboxes.

Air Fryer Halloumi & Veggie Nuggets

Serves: 4
Prep Time:15 minutes
Cook Time: 10 minutes

Ingredients:

- 200g Halloumi (cubed)
- 1 small Courgette or red pep-per
- 50g Plain flour
- 1 Egg (beaten)
- 100g Panko breadcrumbs
- 1 tsp Dried oregano

Method:

Slice the halloumi and veg into nugget-sized chunks. Set up three bowls: one for flour, one for beaten egg, and one for breadcrumbs mixed with oregano. Dip each piece into flour, egg, then breadcrumbs. Air fry at 180°C for 10 minutes, shaking halfway through, until golden and crispy.

Tips:

- Serve with yoghurt-herb dip or mild salsa.
- Discuss calcium and protein in cheese vs ultra-processed snacks.
- Let children do the dipping - it's messy but fun.

Kimchi Cheese Quesadillas

Serves: 2
(makes 4 wedges per quesadilla)
Prep Time: 5 minutes
Cook Time: 10 minutes

Ingredients:

- 4 Wholemeal tortillas
- 100g Grated mild cheddar
- 2 tbsp Mild kimchi (chopped)
- 1 handful Baby spinach

Method:

Lay out two tortillas. Sprinkle one half with cheese, a spoon of kimchi, and some spinach, then top with the other tortilla. Toast in a dry frying pan over medium heat for 2–3 minutes per side until golden. Slice into wedges to serve.

Tips:

- A gentle intro to fermented foods - great gut health chat.
- Add cooked chicken or black beans for extra filling.
- Mild kimchi is best for young palates.

One-Bowl Sweetcorn & Chive Fritters

Serves: 8 small fritters
Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cook Time: 10 minutes

Ingredients:

- 150g Tinned sweetcorn (drained)
- 1 tbsp Chopped chives or spring onion
- 1 Egg
- 75g Flour or chickpea flour
- Splash (approx. 2 tbsp) Milk
- 1 tbsp Oil (for frying)

Method:

In a bowl, mix sweetcorn, chives, egg, flour, and just enough milk to create a thick batter. Heat a non-stick pan with a little oil and spoon in small portions. Fry 2-3 minutes each side until golden.

Tips:

• Can be served hot or cold with yoghurt or salsa.

• Easy to pack into lunchboxes.

• Use chickpea flour for a gluten-free, protein-boosted version.

Pancake Faces

Serves: 4
Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cook Time: 20 minutes

Ingredients:

- 140g Plain flour
- 200ml Milk
- 2 Eggs
- As needed Oil (for fry-ing)

Suggested Toppings

- Lemon juice and sugar
- Nutella or chocolate sauce
- Berries, sliced banana
- Maple syrup or honey
- Chopped nuts, sprinkles
- Icing tubes for decorating

Tips:

- Let kids mix the batter and decorate with toppings.
- Use squeeze tubes of icing to make pancake faces.
- Pancakes can be stored in the fridge and reheated in the toaster.

Method:

In a bowl, combine flour, milk, and eggs. Whisk or blend until smooth. Heat a non-stick frying pan with a little oil until hot. Pour in a ladle of batter, tilt to spread, and cook for 30-45 seconds on each side until golden. Flip with a spatula or try tossing for fun! Repeat until all batter is used.

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