



Promoting Healthy Eating and Nutrition In Education and Care Services

Child Australia is the Professional Support Coordinator in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. This resource was funded by the Australian Government under the initiative of the Inclusion and Professional Support Program to support Australian Government Approved Child Care Services.

Researched and written by: Lynne McCormilla, Child Australia

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the assistance and contribution of the staff and children from:

- Woodroffe Child Care Centre, Northern Territory
- Maranatha Early Learning Child Care Centre
- Sudbury Community House Child Care Centre
- UWA Early Learning Centre, Nedlands
- Como Children

© Child Australia, 2012

All rights reserved by Child Australia. Material herein may not be reproduced in any other form without permission.

Disclaimer

This resource is based on the most current information available in July 2012.

In developing this resource we have referred to legislation and regulations, sought advice from professional organisations and reviewed contemporary research. This document should be used as a guide to compliment and develop service's existing practices, policies and procedures. Services should always check the currency of information at the time of use and consider the information in this booklet in the context of their particular service.

This booklet can be accessed online at:

www.pscalliance.org.au



Contents

About the How to series	2
Introduction	3
How this resource can help you	3
Definitions and Abbreviations	4
The importance of healthy eating and nutrition	5
Healthy eating and the National Quality Framework	6
What is nutrition?	7
Why do children need good nutrition?	7
Essential nutrients for children	8
What foods do children need and how much?	8
Foods children need everyday	9
National Quality Standard	9
If food is coming from child's home	9
Activity: Thinking about my practice	10
Daily recommended dietary intake for children	11
Special dietary needs of children	12
Cultural traditions and religious beliefs	13
Example 1: Food Customs	14
Activity: Thinking about my practice	15
What your service can do	16
Key things to consider	17
Best practice guidelines	18
Philosophy, policies and procedures	18
Curriculum ideas – planned and unplanned experiences	21
Environment – physical and social	23
Partnerships with families and the community	25
Practices of educators	27
Summary of recommendations	28
Conclusion	28
References	28

About the *How To* series

The **How To** series has been created to offer professionals working in the education and care sector in Australia practical support to implement the National Quality Framework. The **How To** series consists of seven booklets promoting key areas of quality provision. Throughout each booklet, there are references to national legislation (the Act and Regulations), the National Quality Standard, the Early Years Learning Framework (Belonging, Being and Becoming) and the Framework for School Age Care (My Time, Our Place). The **How To** series can be used by a variety of professionals working in education and care services across Australia.

The introduction of the National Quality Framework marks a significant change in the way we, as a community, see children and their place in society. All professionals working in the education and care services are responsible for continuous improvement to ensure the best possible outcomes for children.

Whāia te iti kahurangi - Ki te tūohu koe, me he maunga teitei.

‘Pursue excellence – should you stumble, let it be to a lofty mountain’ (Māori proverb)



Introduction

Most children attending an education and care setting sit down together and share food, either a small snack or a meal, provided by the service or coming from the child's own home. Whilst meal times provide a break from play, they are not a break from learning. It is important for educators to understand the learning potential for children during snack/meal times and recognise that this activity deserves as much attention to detail and planning as any other activities. Young children are acquiring new skills and learning about the world around them and this includes establishing healthy eating habits. The eating habits formed in early childhood significantly influence our eating habits as adults

Good nutrition underpins children's holistic development. Research on children's brain development shows that good nutrition, health, and exercise are critical to brain development and learning (MCEECDYA, 2011).

How can this resource help you?

This booklet will provide you with practical information and best practice guidelines on how to promote healthy eating habits and good nutrition for children in your education and care service. This resource also provides links to the National Quality Framework, which applies to all sector types. (For State/Territory specific requirements, you will need to consult with your local regulatory authority).

Although the area of focus for this resource is healthy eating and nutrition, we acknowledge the importance of regular physical activity in order for children to maintain a healthy, well-balanced lifestyle. For more information on physical activity for young children go to Australian Government Department for Health and Aging website (www.health.gov.au) for the National Physical Activity Recommendations for children 0-12 years.

Definitions

Overweight and Obesity

Overweight and obesity are both labels for weight greater than what is generally considered healthy for a given height. The terms also identify ranges of weight that have been shown to increase the likelihood of certain diseases and other health problems. (www.nych.org.au, 2012)

Abbreviations and Acronyms used in this booklet

ACECQA - The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority established under the National Quality Framework www.acecqa.gov.au

Legislation - In this booklet, the term legislation encompasses the Education and Care Services National Law Act (2010) and Education and Care Services National Regulations (2011) as applied in each State or Territory through an applied law system. Explained further on the ACECQA website www.acecqa.gov.au

Law/Act - Education and Care Services National Law Act (2010)

Regulations - Education and Care Services National Regulations (2011)

NQF - National Quality Framework www.acecqa.gov.au

NQS - National Quality Standard www.acecqa.gov.au

EYLF - Early Years Learning Framework (Belonging, Being and Becoming)

FSAC - Framework for School Aged Care (My Time, Our Place)

QIP – Quality Improvement Plan, required as part of the National Quality Framework

The importance of healthy eating and nutrition

Australian children are in relatively good health compared to other developing countries. However, there are a number of areas for concern – *diabetes and dental decay are on the rise, and too many children are spending more than the recommended number of hours in front of a TV or electronic device, are overweight or obese and are not eating the recommended amount of vegetables needed.* (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2010)

According to Victorian government figures, the number of overweight children in Australia has doubled in recent years with a quarter of children being considered obese. Overweight and obese children are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, poor body image and they are at risk of long-term health problems. (Better Health Channel, 2012).

Causes of obesity in children include unhealthy food choices, lack of physical activity and family eating habits.

Considering the length of time some children are in their education and care service, this places significant responsibility on the provider, food coordinator and all educators working in services to ensure children are receiving healthy food choices and thus develop long term healthy eating habits.

This places considerable responsibility on services to know exactly **what foods to offer children** and **how much** (to ensure they are receiving the adequate amount of nutrients their body needs).

National Quality Standard

Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety

Standard 2.1 Each child's health is promoted.

Element 2.2.1 Healthy eating is promoted and food and drinks provided by the service are nutritious and appropriate for each child.

Healthy eating and the National Quality Framework

Education and care services are legally obliged to have a healthy eating / nutrition policy in place which must meet the requirements of the National Quality Framework. (See links to the national law and regulations list below). Any food and drinks provided by the service must be consistent with the recommended guidelines for education and care services in Australia. For example, the Get Up and Grow Guidelines or the Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia.

National Quality Framework

The National Quality Framework establishes the standards and learning frameworks to provide high quality inclusive education and care settings.

The NQF makes explicit references to children's health and nutrition in the:

- National law (E.g, Part 5)
- National regulations (77 – 80, 168)
- National Quality Standard (QA 2)
- Belonging, Being and Becoming (The Early Years Learning Framework and / or
- My Time, Our Place (The Framework for School Age Care)

(All services must read each of the NQF components for specific requirements applicable to their service type)

To access these resources, go to:

www.acecqa.gov.au (for the NQF Resource Kit, National Law / Act, Regulations, NQS and related articles)

www.deewr.gov.au (for learning frameworks and more info)

What is nutrition?

The term *Nutrition* describes how the food you eat meets your body's dietary needs. If children have good nutrition, they are eating the right type of foods and the right amount of them so that they stay healthy. If children's nutrition is poor, then the foods they are eating are not providing their body with the right nutrients. Some foods contain more nutrients than others so a varied diet is essential to ensure healthy eating and adequate nutritional intake.

Good nutrition as the foundation for good health requires an adequate, well balanced diet combined with regular physical activity. Poor nutrition can lead to reduced immunity, increased susceptibility to disease, childhood obesity, impaired physical and mental development, and reduced productivity. (World Health Organisation, 2010).

Why do children need good nutrition?

Good nutrition is essential for:

- growth and physical development
- healthy brain functioning
- prevention of illness
- repair of cells / recovery from illness
- good concentration
- maintaining energy
- overall wellbeing



Essential nutrients for children are:

- ✓ Protein
- ✓ Carbohydrates
- ✓ Vitamins
- ✓ Minerals (such as calcium and iron)
- ✓ Water
- ✓ Fats and oils

Children need a varied diet to get the right nutrients for their **age, size,** and **activity level** and to meet any **special dietary needs**.

What foods do children need and how much?

The essential food groups are:

1. Grains (wholemeal mostly, cereal, breads)
2. Dairy (milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives)
3. Lean meat, poultry, fish, eggs
4. Fruit
5. Vegetables
6. Fats

Foods children need everyday

Quality Area 2 of the NQS places requirements on education and care services to promote healthy eating and good nutrition for children by meeting the requirements outlined below.

National Quality Standard

Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety

The NQS Assessment Guide (element 2.2.1) states that Authorised Officers (from your regulatory authority) may **observe the food** children are given in the setting to ensure they are consistent with the Australian Government's:

- Get Up and Grow Guidelines: Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for Early Childhood, and / or;
- The Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia.

(The Guide to the National Quality Standard, p.65)

Other NQS requirements include:

- ✓ Food and drinks provided by the service must be nutritious and adequate in quantity, and take into account dietary requirements appropriate to each child's growth and developmental needs, and any specific cultural, religious or health requirements.
- ✓ Healthy food snacks and drinks will be available throughout the day.
- ✓ An accurate weekly menu must be displayed at the service's premises and available for families to see.
- ✓ No food high in fat, salt or sugar will be given to children.
- ✓ Only water and milk will be offered as they are the most tooth friendly.

If food is coming from a child's home

If your setting has a healthy eating policy then it is important that this is clearly communicated to families especially when food is coming from the child's own home. Families need to understand what is being asked of them and why. For example, you might explain at enrolment that your healthy eating policy states that all snacks provided to children will be healthy and nutritious regardless of whether they are offered by the service or coming from the child's own home. Simply explain to families that your service recognises the importance of healthy eating for children so as they can learn and develop to the best of their ability. Offer families suggestions for healthy snack choices / recipes.

The table below outlines half (50%) of the recommended daily servings from each of the different food groups which children need per day.

Daily recommended dietary intake for children







Essential Food group	Minimum number of serves during child care hours (= 50% of overall daily intake)	Average serve per child
Grains (mostly wholegrain), bread and cereals 	2	1 serve = 1 slice bread or 30 g or ½ cup breakfast cereal or 30 g dry or ½ cup cooked rice or 30g dry or ½ cup cooked pasta
Dairy foods & alternatives 	2	1 serve = 100ml milk or 15g cheese or 100g yoghurt or 100ml calcium fortified soy/rice milk (calcium fortified) These are modified child serves*
Meat & meat alternatives 	1	1 serve = 50g raw red or white meat or 35g cooked or 40g cooked fish 60g raw or 85g cooked legumes (baked beans, lentils, chickpeas) or 30g dry or 1 egg (60g) or 85g tofu These are modified child serves*
Fruit 	½	1 serve = ½ cup of fruit fresh, tinned or frozen or 1 medium piece of fruit (150g) or 30g dried fruit
Vegetables 	1	1 serve = 75g (1/2C) of cooked vegetables including green, orange and starchy or 75 g (1 C) raw green leafy, other salad type vegetables
Fat 	1 ½	1 serve = 1 t or 5g margarine or cooking oil or 3 t or 15ml cream or sour cream or 3 t or 15 ml coconut milk

Table adapted from the draft *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating* available from the Australian Government, National Health and Medical Research Council and Department of Health and Ageing <https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au>

It is important to note that many children are in their education and care service for more than 50% of their day so they need to be provided with an adequate amount of nutrients **for the length of time** they are in the service. (For more detailed information go to *Nourish - The Complete Guide for Food Coordinators in Education and Care Services* by Child Australia).

Special dietary needs of children

If any child has special dietary requirements, ask their family for information to cater for the child's needs. Some dietary requirements such as nut free, milk free, gluten free (coeliac) or diabetic can be quite complicated. Ask families to share with you the dietary guidelines for their child provided to them by a health professional such as a dietician. You may also need to consult with other relevant professionals depending on how much information families give educators about the children's needs.

It is **not** a good idea to limit certain food choices for a child without medical assessment and specific information about the child. If a food allergy is suspected, talk with the child's family and encourage them to seek medical advice.

For guidance on special diets such as food allergies or intolerance, lactose intolerance, coeliac disease, diabetes and hyperactivity, go to *Managing Food Allergies in Childcare and OSHC*, by Nutrition Australia (2009) or visit www.allergyfacts.org.au/ or www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au



Cultural tradition and religious beliefs

Some families, depending on their cultural traditions or religious beliefs, may have different food customs than the staff working in the setting. These customs might include **what foods** are eaten, **how** and **when** they are eaten, how different foods are prepared and what combinations of foods are eaten. Talk to families to ensure that their food preferences and customs can be respected in the setting. This may mean adjusting a child's food intake or snack time in the service.

The way that children traditionally eat food may differ from the expectations of the service for the child to use a knife and fork. For example, at home a child might use their hands or other implements. It is important to invite families to share with you what their children eat at home and how they eat to ensure that the child's traditions are continued as far as possible during mealtimes in your setting. Remember that **cultural competency** is one of the eight key practices outlined in the EYLF and FSAC. Educators in your service have a responsibility to role model culturally competent practices and respect the diversity that exists within families and the wider community.

Promote learning outcome 2 (from the EYLF) by asking families to share traditional food recipes or invite siblings, elders, grandparents to share their recipes from home and to visit the service and make food with the children. (See National Regulation 77 also for requirements for meeting children's specific cultural and religious needs).

Belonging, Being and Becoming (EYLF)

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- ✓ Exploring the culture, heritage, backgrounds and traditions of each child within the context of their community (p.27)

Some food customs are listed below. This is not a comprehensive list and there may be differences in food choices between families of the same ethnic community.

Example 1 – Food customs

FOOD	JEWISH	SIKH	MUSLIM	HINDU	BUDDHIST
Eggs	No bloodspots	Yes	Yes	Some	Some
Milk / yogurt	Not with meat	Yes	Not with rennet	Not with rennet	Yes
Cheese	Not with meat	Some	Some	Some	Yes
Chicken	Kosher	Some	Halal	Some	No
Mutton / lamb	Kosher*	Yes	Halal	Some	No
Beef	Kosher*	No	Halal	No	No
Pork	No	Rarely	No	Rarely	No
Fish	With scales, fins & backbone, no shellfish	Some	Halal	Some	No
Nuts, pulse, fruit & veg	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

***Kosher** – food that is prepared in accordance to Jewish Law.

***Halal** – food and preparation methods permitted under Islamic Law.

Source: *Multicultural Foods in Britain*. Leeds Metropolitan University. Feb 1993. Teaching Pack and video by June Copeman, Sarah Hirst, and Pinki Sahota.

Thinking about my practice

1. How do you manage children’s specific dietary needs and what practices do you demonstrate to ensure those children do not feel different from their peers?
2. How do you practice cultural competency in relation to food preparation, storage and how it is eaten?
3. How are children and their families encouraged to share their cultural or religious beliefs about food?

Brainstorm

QIP TIP

By answering the questions above you may have identified some areas for improvement, if so, record them in your Quality Improvement Plan. Then outline the steps you will take to improve this area of provision. For example, it could be to update your allergy management system or up skill on some area of practice like cultural competency. (Do not forget to save **each** version of your QIP as you add or change something; this is evidence of continuous improvement).

What your service can do

In education and care services, there are many opportunities to help children:

- learn healthy eating habits and behaviours;
- make healthy food and lifestyle choices;
- feel good about themselves and care for their body; and
- enjoy physical activity through play.

To promote healthy eating and good nutrition for children, it is important to think about how you can do this across different areas of provision. For example, you might have a healthy eating policy stating that all children will be given healthy food options but that may be as far as it goes. Children are more likely to achieve the outcomes (listed above) if you embed them into all aspects of service delivery. Such as philosophy, staff practices, policies and procedures, the curriculum and your work with families. In order to do this a 'whole team' approach is required. The entire staff team need to be consistent in their practices in supporting children's healthy eating habits and good nutrition.



Key things to consider

When promoting healthy eating and nutrition in your service, some things to consider include:

- ✓ **Legal requirements**
 - Understanding the legal obligations for your service under the NQF (including national law, regulations, NQS and learning frameworks).
- ✓ **Policies and procedures**
 - Your healthy eating policy and other relevant policies need to be up to date and in line with current needs of children and legal requirements.
- ✓ **Healthy food choices**
 - Food offered to children in the service must be adequate in nutritional value and in keeping with the recommended quantities for their age, size, activity level and dietary needs as per recommended dietary guidelines.
 - Foods coming from child's own home must be healthy also.
 - Discuss amongst educators what intentional teaching strategies (for example, demonstration and role modelling) could be adopted to further encourage children to make healthy food choices for themselves.
- ✓ **Partnership with families**
 - Ensure that all families know about what and how your service promotes healthy eating and good nutrition for children. Share relevant information, policies and procedures at enrolment.
- ✓ **Equity**
 - Foods offered to children should be reflective of their cultural, religious beliefs and specific dietary requirements.
- ✓ **Curriculum**
 - Think about ways to engage children in planned and unplanned play experiences, conversations and routines that could promote healthy eating and good nutrition.



✓ **Environment of the service**

- Mealtime environments need to be set up in a way which is inviting to children.
- Remember the potential learning which could take place during mealtimes so take time to set it up like any other activity.

✓ **Food safety**

- Food safety practice must be in line with current regulatory requirements and all staff must adhere to food safety measures.
- Ensure that your Food Safety Plan is up to date (and aligned with your State / Territory / council requirements). Your plan should always reflect your actual practices.

✓ **Staff practices**

- All educators need to understand the healthy eating (and related) policies and procedures.
- Eating habits and attitudes to foods greatly influence the children so ensure all educators are working from the same philosophy which values children's health as part of their overall wellbeing and development.
- Identify any training needs of staff, for example, food handling, food storage or menu planning. (See your local PSC for a full list of Professional Development).



Best practice guidelines

This next section offers you best practice guidelines and more ideas for practice on how to promote good eating habits and nutrition amongst children in your service. These guidelines are divided into 5 main areas of provision:

1. Philosophy, policy and procedures (NQS - QA 2 & 7)
2. Curriculum – planned and unplanned experiences (NQS - QA 1)
3. Environment – physical and social (NQS - QA & 5)
4. Partnership with families and the community(NQS - QA 6)
5. Practices and behaviours of educators (All Quality Areas)

1. Philosophy, policies and procedures

National Regulation 168 (2 - A)

Policies and procedures are required in relation to nutrition, food and beverages, dietary requirements. (p.177)

Philosophy

- ✓ Ensure that your philosophy reflects your service's values and beliefs and that it guides all aspects of service provision including health promotion practices.

Outline in the policy:

- ✓ How your philosophy emphasises the importance of health.
- ✓ How the meal time environment reflects family and multicultural values.
- ✓ How the curriculum promotes healthy food and lifestyle choices, activities and play experiences to teach children about the importance of staying healthy.
- ✓ The dietary guidelines adhered to by your service.
- ✓ Inform parents and new staff members of the policies and procedures and reasons for it and encourage staff to follow the same healthy eating policy.
- ✓ Your expectation of families, for example, if your service is implementing a healthy eating policy then foods coming from home will need to be healthy too.
- ✓ How families can be involved in developing, implementing and evaluating policies and procedures.
- ✓ Where families can access information on nutrition, health and support services available to them in their local community.

- ✓ How your service encourages and facilitates breastfeeding. Services can become breastfeeding accredited with the National Breastfeeding Association, for more information go to, www.breastfeeding.asn.au.
- ✓ Your commitment to be positive role models and demonstrate good eating habits and food choices to children attending the service.
- ✓ Your safe food practices, including handling, storage and temperatures of food (in keeping with legal requirements).

Share your policies and procedures with all stakeholders (management and all staff, families and children where possible). For further support in developing policies and procedures, see the *How to Develop and Update Policies Successfully (without the stress)* available from the PSC Alliance website (www.pscalliance.org.au).



2. Curriculum ideas

National Quality Standard

Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety

Standard 2.2 Each child's health and physical activity are embedded in the program for children.

Healthy eating habits and good nutrition can be embedded into the curriculum and everyday learning environment for children (NQS - Standard 2.2).

Your curriculum should support learning outcome 3 in the EYLF *"to engage children in experiences, conversations and routines that promote healthy lifestyles and good nutrition."* (Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing). The curriculum you offer to children will be made up of planned and unplanned experiences. With this in mind, below are some ideas for practice.

Planned experiences

- ✓ **Home corner/ pretend play area** – For example, add a variety of pretend food from varying cultures and add appropriate cooking utensils (wok, saucepans, ladle, mixing bowls, weighing scales, chop sticks, cutlery). Divide food up into 'sometimes' food and 'everyday' foods. Turn the home corner area into a restaurant, café, health nurse's office or supermarket. Add recycled / reused items for children to play with and extend activities further. For example, include empty cartons, boxes, lids etc. these could also be used for creative play.
- ✓ **Storytelling** – For example, picture books of foods for babies and toddlers and for older children, add books about growing own foods, where different food sources come from and recipes books with a variety of foods from other cultures.
- ✓ **Sand / water** – For example, reuse old food containers, tubs and bottles to encourage children's explorative skills and learn new language whilst learning to pour, weigh, measure etc. Add spoons, chopsticks or other everyday objects associated with food, to the sand or water area. This could also be extended to activities about recycling and sustainability for older children.
- ✓ **Music and movement** – For example, use fun, interactive songs, music and rhymes about foods, different food groups, foods that are good for your body. For ideas go to - www.bigeyedowl.co.uk

- ✓ **Outdoor** – Encourage children's sense of responsibility to engage in sustainable practices by introducing or developing your veggie patch, herb garden, wormery, compost heap (which could be used for vegetable garden), fruits and plants. Other ideas include adding a bird bath / feeder and developing an outdoor area where children are encouraged to appreciate the natural world and everything in it. Food is an integral part of this.
- ✓ **Art / creative** – For example, play dough experiences could include real cooking utensils and dishes. Cooking / baking demonstrations for snacks or to take home, will also bring about much discussion and opportunity for children to explore different food types, tastes and textures. Have taste testing activities where children get to taste a wide variety of foods.
- ✓ **Treasure baskets** – promote investigative skills by adding cutlery (safe for babies), cooking utensils of all different shapes and sizes, pots, pans, wooden spoons to make plenty of noise – to a basket and encourage babies to investigate. Other ideas include discovery food baskets where you can include a variety of different foods, textures, smells and tastes for babies and toddlers to explore. (Good active supervision will be required at all times and developmentally appropriate materials).
- ✓ **Food preparation** – Involving older children in picking, choosing, washing and preparing food is important. Such experiences offer you with opportunities to promote children learning and development even further. For example, develop children's mathematical skills by discussing size, shape, weight of different food types in a fun and enjoyable way. Or classifying different food groups.
- ✓ **Growing food** - the FSAC encourages older children to develop an understanding and responsibility for sustainable practices so use spontaneous opportunities to talk to children about growing food, what it means to be sustainable and how healthy food can be grown inexpensively. Look through recipe books with older children or access healthy food recipes online.
- ✓ **Science** – plan experiences for children to experiment and explore food science and the composition of different food types. Make links between healthy and unhealthy food choices where possible. For more ideas on experiments for children visit, www.kidspot.com.au or www.sciencekids.co.nz/experiments

Unplanned experiences

- ✓ **Time to explore** – Babies learn through sensory experiences so giving them **time** to explore, taste and feel food is an important part of their curriculum (and an integral part of their daily routine). Recognise that mealtimes for babies are a very important learning experience and deserve attention. So sit down whenever possible with them and use it as a means of promoting their learning and development and not simply eating to fulfil a physical need.
- ✓ **Everyday conversations** – make the most out of conversations with children which occur naturally. For example, use morning tea - time as an opportunity to sit with children and ask open ended questions, they may give you some ideas for future curriculum plans.

For more ideas on healthy eating activities for children, go to:

- www.nourishinteractive.com (offers games and ideas to promote healthy food choices)
- www.wiggleintohealth.com (offers healthy nutrition and tips for developing healthy eating habits in children)
- www.coolkidscooking.com (offers games, fun recipes and cooking tips)

3. Environment – physical and social

- ✓ **Tables** - ensure the tables are visually appealing to children. Add flowers, candles and tea lights (battery operated), tablecloths, soft music and lighting. (Ask the children what you could do to make your current mealtime environment better).
- ✓ **Equipment** - Cutlery and utensils must be manageable for all children and respectful of cultural differences and religious ways of eating food. Plates, bowls - is everything plastic? If so, why have you made this choice? Use real items as often as possible (think about EYLF and FSAC principle of having high expectations of children). Jugs and glasses must be a suitable size and assist with children's self-help skills.
- ✓ **Indoor space** - If children eat indoors then consider the colours of the walls and the displays. What atmosphere is created as a result? It is essential to create a warm, inviting atmosphere so children will enjoy eating in that space. This can be achieved by adding natural lighting (where possible), good ventilation, soft furnishings and a happy, relaxed atmosphere. The physical design and colour of the room influences the way in which children act in that space.
- ✓ **Outdoor space** – if children are eating outdoors then similarly it needs to be in a relaxed, pleasant space where time and effort has gone into setting up the tables and equipment appropriately.



Social environment – during mealtimes:

- ✓ Independence and self-help skills – encourage children’s self-help skills by encouraging them to choose the amount of food they want to eat. This will foster their self-regulation skills also. Offer facilities that will allow children to easily clean up after meals.
- ✓ Interactions and relationships – use mealtimes with children as an opportunity to promote NQS QA 5 (*Relationships with children*). For example, 5.1.2 states that ‘every child is able to engage with educators in meaningful, open interactions that support the acquisition of skills for life and learning.’ (The Guide to the National Quality Standard, 2011)
- ✓ Bonding with babies - This is particularly important for babies and younger children where so much of the learning occurs around their daily routine, like feeding time. Babies need to feel safe and secure and connected to the person feeding them so ensure the same educator per feed for babies with minimal interruptions.
- ✓ Communication - Allow time for children to communicate with each other through facial expressions, talking, watching and socialising with each other.



4. Partnership with families

- ✓ Families need to know how your service promotes healthy eating habits and good nutrition amongst children and what their role is in supporting this. Share your service's philosophy, your healthy eating policy and explain how healthy eating and good nutrition are integral part of the curriculum for children.
- ✓ Provide families with up to date information on ways to promote good nutrition at home. For example, see useful resources for families from www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-strateg-food-resources.htm
- ✓ Show families that cultural traditions and religious values are respected and valued in the service and encourage them to share information about their culture and traditions with you. Explain why you are inviting them to share such information with the service.
- ✓ Invite other professionals such as a child health nurse, dietician, or nutritionist, to speak at information nights for families to promote healthy eating and good nutrition or write a piece for your newsletter.
- ✓ Explain to families the type of foods that are being served in the service and the eating habits which you encourage in children. Share menu ideas.
- ✓ Display weekly menus where families can see them and highlight the nutritional value when and where possible.
- ✓ Share information with families about where to get good fresh produce. New families may not know about things like this.
- ✓ Offer information to families and anyone entering the setting about local services, agencies and other resources in the community which promote healthy lifestyle. For example, talk to local Community Development Officer about health promotion initiatives in the area.

For more information on lunchbox ideas for families, go to:

- www.nutritionaustralia.org
- www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au
- www.freshforkids.com.au

5. Partnership with the community

- ✓ Make community connections – with the school and other services locally, the wider and more integrated the partnerships, the more likely children and families will be supported to choose healthier foods.
- ✓ Talk to the local Community Development Officer or Health Promotion unit about initiatives in the area – walking school bus, walking to work, obesity prevention programs, lunchbox guidelines given by schools. Find out who else is talking about health in the area.
- ✓ Get involved in any food projects run by the department of health (See list of contacts at end of booklet).
- ✓ Visit the local supermarket / grocer and / or community gardens etc.



6. Practices of educators

“How can children trust us about the benefits of healthy eating and exercise if we don’t choose to practice what we preach?” Rosenow (2012)

Often children learn through watching and imitating those around them; and by being active and doing. Albert Bandura (1970), a Social Learning Theorist, highlights the importance of role modelling positive behaviours to children as he too concluded that children learn by watching and imitating those around them. All professionals working with children have a responsibility to demonstrate healthy eating habits and positive attitude to food.

Educators need to take some time to *sit down* with children, at their level and role model good eating habits and appropriate social skills. (Miller and Pound, 2011).

Belonging, Being and Becoming (EYLF)

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- ✓ Modelling and reinforcing health, nutrition and personal hygiene practices with children (p.32)



Summary of recommendations

1. Know what NQF requirements apply to your service.
2. Ensure that all children are receiving adequate nutrients in the correct quantities for their age, size, activity level and specific dietary needs.
3. Promote healthy eating and good nutrition for children across all areas of service delivery (for example, through your policies and procedures, curriculum, environments and partnership with families).
4. Use mealtimes as an opportunity to promote children's learning and development and progress toward the EYLF and FSAC learning outcomes.
5. Role model healthy eating practices and behaviours.
6. Be extra careful when buying food – always read the label so you can avoid foods high in salt, sugar and saturated fat.

Conclusion

In early and middle childhood, children undergo significant social, emotional, physical and intellectual changes and this is when they form the eating habits that will stay with them for life. Their eating behaviours and choices are learned through their family, their education and care setting and their community. This places significant responsibility on you as educators to promote healthy eating habits and good nutrition to make lasting contribution to children's longer term health and wellbeing.

References

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority. (2011). *The Guide to the National Quality Standard*, ACECQA, NSW.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, (2009). *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, ACT.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2011). *My Time, Our Place, the Framework for School Age Care*, Commonwealth of Australia, ACT.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2010). *The Educators Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, ACT.

MCEECDYA - Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (2011). *Engaging Families in the Early Childhood Development Story*, Department of Education and Children's Services, South Australia.

Child Australia, Nourish - The Complete Guide for Food Coordinators in Education and Care Services (2012), WA

Australia's Health, (2010). the twelfth biennial health report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Retrieved from <http://www.aihw.gov.au>.

Better Health Channel, (n.d). Retrieved from http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Obesity_in_children

Copeman, J., Hirst, S., Sahota, P. (1993). *Multicultural foods in Britain: Teaching Pack and Video*. Leeds Metropolitan University.

National Physical Activity Recommendations for Children 0-5 years old. (2010). Australian Government Department for Health and Ageing. Retrieved from <http://www.health.gov.au>.

Food and Nutrition guidelines for Pre-School services. (.n.d). Department of Health and Children, Ireland.

Healthy Kids: Get Active Each Day.(n.d). Retrieved from <http://www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au>

MCEECDYA - Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (2011). *Engaging Families in the Early Childhood Development Story*, Department of Education and Children's Services, South Australia.

Miller, L. and Pound, L. (2011), *Theories and Approaches to Learning in the Early Years*, Sage, London.

Rosenow, N. (2012). *Heart Centred Teaching Inspired by Nature: Using Nature's Wisdom to bring More Joy and Effectiveness to Our Work with Children*. Dimensions Educational Research Foundation US.

Nutrition Australia, (2009) *Managing Food Allergies and Intolerances in Childcare and OSHC*

Useful websites

www.acecqa.gov.au – Australian Children's education and Care Quality Authority

www.pscalliance.org.au - PSC Alliance

www.childaustralia.org.au - Child Inclusive Learning and Development Australia (Child Australia)

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au – Early Childhood Australia

Contacts

For information on jurisdiction specific provisions that apply, contact:

Australian Capital Territory: Children's Policy and Regulation Unit
Community Services Directorate
GPO Box 158
Canberra City ACT 2601
Phone: (02) 6207 1114
Fax: (02) 6207 1128
Email: OCYFSCchildrensServices@act.gov.au
Website: www.dhcs.act.gov.au

New South Wales: NSW Early Childhood Education and Care Directorate
Department of Education and Communities
Locked Bag 5107
Parramatta NSW 2124
Phone: 1800 619 113
Fax: (02) 8633 1810
Email: ececd@det.nsw.edu.au
Website: www.dec.nsw.gov.au

Northern Territory: Quality Education and Care Northern Territory
Department of Education and Training
GPO Box 4821
Darwin NT 0801
Phone: (08) 8999 3561
Fax (08) 8999 5677
Email: qualityecnt.det@nt.gov.au

Queensland: Department of Education and Training
PO Box 15033
City East QLD 4002
Phone: 1800 637 711
Fax: (07) 3234 0310
Email: ecec@deta.qld.gov.au
Website: www.deta.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood

- South Australia:** Department of Education and Children's Services
Licensing and Standards
Level 15, 31 Flinders Street
Adelaide SA 5000
Phone: (08) 8226 0085
Fax: (08) 8226 1815
Email: decldchildcarelicensing@sa.gov.au
Website: www.decld.sa.gov.au/ybsproviders/
- Tasmania:** Department of Education
GPO Box 169
Hobart TAS 7001
Phone: 1300 135 513
Fax: (03) 6233 6042
Email: childcare.comment@education.tas.gov.au
Website: www.childcare.tas.gov.au
- Victoria:** Department of Education and Early Childhood
Development
GPO Box 4367,
Melbourne, VIC 3001
Phone: 1300 307 415
Fax: (03) 9651 3586
Email: licensed.childrens.services@edumail.vic.gov.au
Website: www.education.vic.gov.au
- Western Australia:** Department for Communities
Childcare Licensing and Standards Unit
Level 1, 111 Wellington Street
East Perth WA 6004
Phone: (08) 6210 3333 or 1800 199 383
Fax: (08) 6210 3300
Email: ccluinfo@communities.wa.gov.au
Website: www.communities.wa.gov.au

Professional Support Coordinators National Alliance
www.pscalliance.org.au

Australian Capital Territory
Communities@Work
www.actpsc.com.au

New South Wales
Children's Services Central
www.cscentral.org.au

Northern Territory
Child Australia
www.childaustralia.org.au

Queensland
Health and Community Services Workforce Council Inc.
www.pscq.org.au

South Australia
Lady Gowrie Child Centre
www.pscsa.org.au

Victoria
Gowrie Victoria
www.gowrievictoria.org.au

Western Australia
Child Australia
www.childaustralia.org.au

Tasmania
Lady Gowrie Tasmania
www.psctas.org.au