




FOOD SAFETY AND ACTIVITIES

This section contains activities for early childhood services professionals. Activities in this section may be more effective if implemented with the help of a local community dietitian.

It contains information on how to make healthy eating appealing to your community and the families you support through local services.

It includes the following sections:

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How to use the food safety and activities section

This section of *What's there to eat?* contains information about food safety and handling of food - which is particularly relevant to the food-based activities that are outlined in the following pages.

The food safety pages contain one page with information that is more relevant to early childhood centres and services. Corresponding pages on food safety in the home are featured here so that you can copy them and hand them out to parents you come into contact with.

The food activities featured here are for those with the time and energy to organise some practical healthy eating group activities. These activities are likely to work better if you link up with a local community dietitian or a cook / chef in your area who is willing to donate their time. The idea is that you can get a group of parents / families together to actually show them new healthy eating and cooking ideas they can use at home in a relaxed, friendly and fun environment.

These activities might form an end of year event, or something that could be adapted during a local community festival.

Each of the activities also contains a paragraph that explains how you might scale down the activity to better suit limited capacity in terms of kitchen space, time or capability.

Food safety for centres and services

The following information is taken from publications and brochures produced by Food Safety Victoria. It is published here to give you an outline of what food poisoning is, and how to begin thinking about food safety in work you may do that involves food.

As an early childhood service provider, or someone who works closely with them in your community, you should also be aware that a specific set of guidelines has been produced for the early childcare /centre and kinder settings.

The *Code of Conduct for Food Safety in Children's Services* is a 31 page document that can be ordered by phoning Food Safety Victoria on 1300 364 352 or by down loading it from the Food Safety Victoria website at www.foodsafety.vic.gov.au .

This document is easy to read and canvasses a wide range of issues relevant to this setting including: cleaning up blood and faeces, toileting and nappy changing, food allergies and intolerances, involving children in cooking, and golden rules for running barbecues and sausage sizzles to minimise outbreaks of food poisoning.

It is highly recommended that you obtain this document and file it in this binder for easy reference.

About food poisoning

Why does food poisoning happen

Food poisoning bacteria are often present naturally in food, but in spite of the small numbers, bacteria can multiply very quickly. In the right conditions, a single bacterium can multiply into more than two million bacteria in just seven hours.

This is why it is so important not to give bacteria the right conditions to multiply in.

Temperature

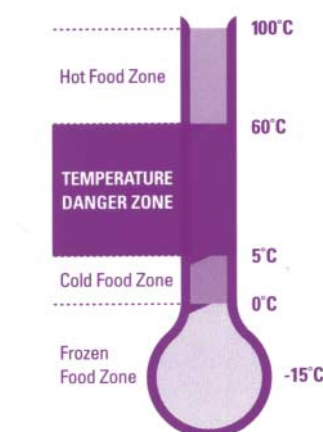
Bacteria grow best when the temperature is between 5 and 60 degrees Celsius. Make sure any food in this temperature zones stays there for as little time as possible.

Food type

Bacteria grow and multiply in some types of foods more easily than on others. The foods bacteria prefers include:

- meat
- poultry
- dairy products
- eggs
- smallgoods
- seafood.

These are know as *high risk foods*. If a *high risk food* is contaminated with food poisoning bacteria and then left in temperatures between 5 and 60 degrees Celsius, then food poisoning can occur.



Water

Bacteria need moisture to grow. If there is no moisture present, the growth of bacteria may slow down or stop. Drying is an effective way to preserve food because of this reason.

Some common food poisoning bacteria

Bacteria type	Where it is found in food	Symptoms	When can symptoms typically occur	Special problems
Salmonella	Meat, poultry, eggs and egg products	Nausea, stomach cramps, diarrhoea, fever and headaches	Six hours to three days after eating contaminated food. Symptoms can last three to five days	
Bacillus cereus	Cereals, rice, meat products, packet soups	Nausea, vomiting and stomach cramps	One to six hours after eating the contaminated food. Symptoms usually last no more than 24 hours	These bacteria produce spores, which are not killed during cooking. When cooked food containing these spores is left in temperatures between 5 and 30 degrees Celsius, the spores produce toxins (poisons) which can cause food poisoning
Staphylococcus aureus	Meat and poultry dishes, egg products, mayonnaise based salads, cream or custard filled desserts	Acute vomiting, nausea, occasionally diarrhoea and cramps	Thirty minutes to eight hours after eating contaminated food. Symptoms usually last about 24 hours	These bacteria produce toxins in food. The toxin is not destroyed during cooking so correct storage of food before and after cooking is essential

Food safety in the home

About 1.5 million Australians are afflicted by food related illnesses each year. There is a lot you can do to prevent this happening to you or your family at family meals.

Germs don't discriminate between food prepared at home and food bought at a restaurant. In fact, almost all raw food has some bacteria on it, and if you don't treat it right, the result can be food poisoning.

There are some simple rules that you can follow to lessen the chance of food poisoning at home.

Storage

- Store ready to eat food separately from raw food and cooked food.
- You should store food in containers that are clean, non-toxic, easy to wash, have tight fitting lids or are covered with foil or plastic film.

Out shopping

- Always buy your food from a reputable supplier.
- Always take fresh and frozen food straight home after buying it, particularly in summer.
- Think about using an insulated cool bag to protect food from summer heat and prevent germs from multiplying until you get home.
- When you get home, place fresh and frozen food straight into the appropriate compartment of the fridge.

Fridge

- Check the temperature of your fridge from time to time using a fridge thermometer. If it's between 0°C and 5°C, the germs that can cause illness can't readily multiply. Some councils have fridge thermometers that you can borrow.
- Hot foods should be cooled quickly before placing in the fridge or the fridge temperature will rise.
- All food in the fridge should be covered.
- Store raw and ready to eat food separately with raw foods on the bottom shelves and ready to eat above.
- Food should be eaten before its 'Use by' or 'Best before' dates.
- Once a food with a 'use by' or 'best before' date is opened, it should be used as soon as possible.
- Defrost your fridge regularly to help it operate efficiently.



Freezer

- Check the temperature of your freezer from time to time using a freezer thermometer. The best temperature to hold food is -15°C or less. Some councils have freezer thermometers you can borrow.
- NEVER refreeze foods that have been thawed.
- If you're freezing cooked food, smaller containers will freeze and thaw faster, which can help protect against food poisoning.
- Marking the date on cooked food you're freezing will help you keep track of what's in your freezer.
- Don't freeze food unless it's completely fresh, because germs that are in it can start multiplying while it's thawing.
- Plan to defrost your freezer. The best time to defrost is when freezer stocks are low.



Cleaning

- Wash all work surfaces well with hot soapy water.
- Dirty dishes should be washed in warm soapy water and rinsed in hot water. It is preferable to leave dishes to air dry but don't place a tea towel over them as this will only spread bacteria from the tea towel to the dishes.
- Change your tea towel regularly or when it becomes wet or soiled.
- Change your dish cloth /sponges regularly.
- Clean fridges and cupboards regularly to remove crumbs and spills - bacteria can thrive on them.

Home truths to live by

- Always wash your hands before preparing food.
- Don't use the same utensils for raw and ready to eat food unless they have been thoroughly washed in hot soapy water first.
- Don't prepare food if you are feeling sick.
- Keep pets out of the kitchen.
- Thaw frozen food on the bottom shelf of the fridge.
- Cook meats, especially minced meats, until the juices run clear, and there are no pink areas.
- Don't reheat food more than once and when reheating make sure food is piping hot.
- If using the microwave to thaw food, cook thoroughly straight away.



Healthy eating in action

Setting up activities such as recipe clubs, food displays, food tastings and cooking demonstrations provides an opportunity for people to experience food and nutrition guidelines in a very practical way.

Learning is enhanced with interactive activities such as these, and is no doubt more enjoyable because it offers social interaction in a non-threatening environment. People are also more likely to try the recipes at home or buy the food again, once they have tasted them.

People who come together for these activities naturally have at least one thing in common. In the case of parents – their children. They also share the experience of being a parent, so there are some topics they can chat about, as ice-breakers.

Make the sessions as accessible and enjoyable as possible.

Plan the sessions at a time convenient to as many people as possible. Advertise the sessions widely through established and informal networks. Ensuring there is adequate parking close by will make attending the session/s much easier and more enjoyable.

Planning effective activities

1. What are the aims and objectives of the activity/ies?
2. What resources do you have to support the activity/ies?
 - Facilities – suitable venue and amenities
 - Equipment – tables, chairs
 - Kitchen facilities – bench space, sink, refrigerator
 - Time – time to plan, promote and publicise, prepare notes and hand outs, photocopy/print handouts for participants
 - In-house services such as desktop publishing
 - Budget – for out-of-pocket expenses such as photocopying/printing services, purchase of ingredients, payment of guest speaker/s
 - Staff - to provide administrative support, assist with promotion and publicity, assist with setting up the activity, assist with taking down and cleaning after the activity/ies
 - Other supportive people:
 - local service providers
 - parents and relatives of children
 - local businesses that may offer support 'in kind' by providing equipment of products, or who may provide financial sponsorship
3. How many people will attend?



4. What are the needs of those attending?

- Educational/literacy levels
- Cultural
- Language
- Expectations of demonstration and how it will help them

5. How can you respond to the participants' needs?

- Suitable day
- Suitable time
- Appropriate duration
- Appropriate level of difficulty
- Specific theme
- Appropriate cost



Join forces

Early on in the planning phase, pool resources, join forces and enlist the support of others, such as:

- Service providers in your area
- Parents
- Other family members such as grandparents, aunties and uncles
- Local businesses
- Food companies
- Equipment companies



Recipe Clubs

In your centre or setting

These are great for providing a forum for parents to get together and exchange healthier food and recipe ideas - especially those that work with children! Recipe clubs don't need a lot of your attention - it could be that your centre or setting simply provides space on a noticeboard for members to post meeting times. A recipe club could be developed out of a new parents' group in which members have an interest in cooking, or among parents of kinder children. The aim is to get people talking and learning from each other.

Usually it's the kind of activity that begins with a bit of coordination, and then gets left to the participants to hold informal meetings over coffee mornings or afternoons.

Recipes collected over a period of time can be collected into a photocopyable booklet and used as a fundraiser. With the support of local businesses (or club members) the booklet could take on a more professional look or made popular through local media (individual recipes from the group could also be sent to local media to help promote the centre / service - and healthy eating in the community!).

Venue facilities & equipment

A warm and inviting venue is needed, so participants can 'feel at home'. People should be able to relax, move around and mix. Make tables and chairs or couches available and provide tea and coffee making facilities.

Recipe clubs could also meet at a different restaurant from time to time. They may even like to request a recipe from chefs and cooks at local restaurants to include in the community cookbook.

Recipe sharing

Recipes that the participants have enjoyed, family favourites or new food ideas could be shared. Participants could also bring along and swap food magazines.

Participants could also be asked to prepare a 'plate' of their favourite savoury or sweet food to share with the others. Participants from different cultures - or with a special interest - could be invited to be guest speakers at the meetings (they may like to bring along some unusual ingredients, prepared dishes and recipes to share with the rest of the participants).

Developing and reproducing recipes

1. Present recipes in a simple, clear format.
2. Provide the following information:
 - Snappy title
 - Introductory paragraph with information about history of the dish, specific ingredients and serving suggestions
 - Ingredients should be listed in the order in which they are used
 - The method is easier to follow if in point form
 - Cook's tips, variations and nutritional notes could be added.



Food displays

These communicate messages quite dramatically. Brochures, leaflets and books are valuable, but are somewhat limited in their impact.

1. Food should be displayed with care and flair.
2. Cover tables with plain, smart tablecloths.
3. Ensure that safe food hygiene practices are followed.
4. Food that has been displayed in the open air should be disposed of immediately, especially perishable goods like meat, fish and poultry and dairy products.
5. Assemble simple displays and avoid over-crowding.
6. Produce small display cards that have the key messages you wish to communicate by the display - include short dramatic messages.



In your centre or setting

- Food displays are powerful in the messages they convey.
- In kinder and childcare settings, children could be involved by allocating each an item of healthy food to bring along to the display while the 'fast foods' could be represented by wrappers or made as a part of an art activity.
- Using the 'fast versus fresh' idea, in a couple of days the children will have made a display they can show (and explain) to their parents.
- Another display idea could be simply to make a simple display of a fruit or vegetable. It could be accompanied by some information about how to use it and how much it costs locally to buy - a great way to get children and parents talking about some unfamiliar fruit and vegetables.

Use real food samples

To educate about the ingredient labels on processed foods, provide actual products for people to study. Alternatively, remove the label, enlarge and laminate so people can read the label quite easily at a glance.





Food tastings

Like food displays, food tastings have quite an impact on people. Once a food is tasted, for example in a supermarket, shoppers are much more likely to buy the product. Tastings provide an opportunity to try the food without the risk of wasting money if they do not like it, or feel their family will not.

You could involve local business people such as:

- Local baker
- Local growers and growers in the region
- Green grocer
- Food companies
- Local supermarket



In your centre or setting

There's no need to be too ambitious to get a healthy eating message across. You could simply concentrate on fresh fruit and vegetables that are a little unfamiliar to the children and parents you come into contact with. Simply slice up and serve from a platter or bowl - no cooking. If you have time, you could decorate with other fruits or vegetables, or fruits and vegetables from the same 'family' as the one being highlighted. Food tastings could also be a result of the culinary efforts of one of the staff or parents the night before.

You will need:

- Tables for arranging the displays
- Preparation bench or table for preparing food for tasting
- Kitchen facilities for preparing and cleaning up after the tasting

You will need to provide the following items for tasting food:

Unless you have a very small audience, and it is practical to use crockery and cutlery, you may find it necessary to use disposable items to keep the session simple and practical:

- Disposable napkins
- Disposable plates
- Disposable forks and/or spoons
- Disposable cups



The food

Ensure food is prepared and served according to food safety standards. Food demonstrators from reputable companies are experienced in serving food for tastings and presenting the key messages. Food demonstrators could be appointed to conduct food tastings as required. They are also valuable when presenting a cooking demonstration.



Cooking demonstrations

Cooking demonstrations, particularly when they involve food tastings, questions and answers between presenter and audience, provide the opportunity to see, hear, taste and smell the food being prepared. Cooking presenters should abide by the National Food Hygiene Standards as outlined in the food safety information.

In your centre or setting

You can do a small version of a cooking demonstration - it might be that you can 'demonstrate' part of the process but not the rest. For example, depending on the age of the children in a centre or setting, they could help with preparing a dish (stirring, sifting, washing, but not cutting or peeling). With adults, cooking demonstrations are probably best done with expert help locally - in facilitates big enough to showcase the whole process.

The facilities

The facilities should be suitable for both the presenter and the audience. The kitchen equipment available will determine the food/recipes to be prepared. A list of equipment should be provided for guest presenters so they can plan their menu around this. Ideally an overhead mirror should be used unless the audience is quite small and can sit with a clear view of the presenter as she/he cooks.

Preparation and cooking equipment

- Oven
- Stove top - note the number of gas burners or hotplates
- Griller
- Dishwasher
- Refrigerator
- Bench space

Electrical equipment

- Microwave oven
- Electric frying pan
- Food processor
- Blender

Ensure electric power points are close so plugging in appliances can be done easily. Provide a power board just in case they are not. And remember, power cords are dangerous when obstructing thoroughfares - keep them well out of the way of people traffic!



Utensils

These will depend upon what is being prepared. Set out ahead of time, all utensils to be used. This will help keep the demonstration moving along smoothly.

Basic utensils are:

- Set of knives - large cook's knife, serrated knife, vegetable paring knife, bread knife
- Set of mixing bowls
- Set of metric measuring cups and spoons
- Large chopping board
- Set of wooden spoons
- Serving plates and platters
- Vegetable peelers
- Can openers
- Oven trays
- Colander
- Small, medium and large saucepans
- Frying pan

You will also need to have refuse bins nearby.

The demonstrator

To conduct cooking demonstrations, you may choose to:

1. Work with a member of staff, a child's parent or relative.
2. Enlist the support of another service provider such as a chef /lecturer from a local TAFE college, or a home economics teacher from a local school.
3. Appoint a trained cooking demonstrator from a commercial food demonstration company.
4. Appoint a guest chef /home economist in business or a food presenter.
(Contact the Home Economics Institute of Australia PO Box 143, Carlton South, VIC 3053 Phone (03) 9888 2757)

Interaction

The attention span of the audience is limited, but this is enhanced if the demonstration is entertaining, informative and interactive. Ideally, the participants should be encouraged to ask questions and have them answered as the demonstration progresses. Food tastings given out during the demonstration also make the audience feel part of the activity and provide a first hand experience of the food being prepared.



The demonstration assistant

To keep the demonstration rolling along, it is best to have a designated demonstration assistant to help by:

1. Preparing ingredients before and during the demonstration
2. Clearing the bench of food and items no longer required
3. Handing out recipes
4. Handing out tastings
5. Packing up equipment and cleaning after the demonstration.

This person could be a member of staff, a parent or relative of one of the children or the chef /presenters personal assistant.

The recipes

Choose recipes that are quick and easy to prepare in front of an audience, or part-prepare the dishes before the demonstration to save time. The presenter will need to supply the recipes he/she is going to prepare ahead of time, to allow for printing /copying to give to the participants.

The list of ingredients should be short and the methods replicable by the audience in their own homes wherever possible. These should be handed out for the audience to refer to as the demonstration takes place. There should be enough space for the participants to write notes. Pens could be provided for those who do not have one.

For recipe format, see Recipes and Shopping section.

The food – shopping

When shopping for the ingredients, record the ingredients under the following headings:

- Fresh vegetables, fruit and fresh herbs
- Meat, poultry and fish
- Dairy items
- Bakery items
- Dry stores such as flour, rice and grains

Prepare some foods ahead of time, in cocktail-size serves on serving plates/platters.

For ingredients that take a long time to cook, such as dried beans, peas and lentils, pasta and rice, partially prepare, or cook ahead of time.



Setting up the demonstration area

1. Set up the demonstration area well ahead of time, with seats arranged around the demonstration bench.
2. A welcoming cup of tea or coffee should be offered for participants.
3. Playing a music CD or audio tape also provides a welcoming atmosphere and puts the participants at ease when they first arrive.

The demonstrator - on show

1. Welcome the participants to the area.
2. Provide name badges if the demonstration has been pre-booked. Alternatively, provide name badges that participants can fill in themselves.
3. Commence with introductions – if it is a small audience, ask people to introduce themselves to the group.
4. Encourage questions and discussion between presenter and participants.
5. Record any topics for lengthy discussions in the 'parking lot' and follow up at the end of the session.
6. Choose the style of presentation that you feel most comfortable with, such as humour and anecdotes, rather than long pauses during concentrated food preparation. (If this type of preparation is necessary, a commentator could facilitate questions and discussion at this time.)

The tastings

Unless you have a very small audience, and it is practical to use crockery and cutlery, you may find it necessary to use disposable items to keep the session simple and practical.

When presenting food for tasting, you will need to provide the following items:

- Disposable napkins
- Disposable plates
- Disposable forks and/or spoons
- Disposable cups

Food can also be arranged on large plates and platters to be passed around by the demonstration assistant, with napkins.



Increasing variety

This is a fun activity that can allow children to experience and experiment with different foods. The aim of the activity is to encourage children to become familiar with and try different foods.

The activity works best with small groups of children (approx 6-8)

You will need:

1 blind fold

Plates and spoons

6 different foods

eg. chopped fruits such as banana or melon, grated or finely sliced vegetables such as carrot or celery. You may like to try some dairy foods like different cheeses and yoghurt.

Before the activity commences ensure that the children's hands are clean. Blind fold one child and put a small piece of food in their hands or on a spoon. Encourage the child to feel the food, smell the food and finally taste the food! See if the child knows the names of all of the foods tried.

Make your way through the different foods before taking the blindfold off.

Repeat the activity with the other children in the group.



Acknowledgments: Adapted from the Queensland Health

Better Senses

Making children familiar with different foods can be a real challenge. Children often need up to 20 exposures to a new food before they are ready to try it. Learning about foods through senses can be a fun way to encourage children try new food.

You will need:

Chopped fruits such as oranges or grapes, grated or finely sliced vegetables such as zucchini or mushrooms. You may like to try some dairy foods like different cheeses and yoghurt.

Sense	Activity	Food Activity
Smell	Name 3 foods with a sweet smell and two with a sour smell	Ask the children to try one of the prepared foods with whilst blocking their noses. See the difference unblocking makes to taste
Hearing	Make up a song about food, or sing a well known one	Ask the children to eat some of the prepared foods and describe the sounds eg crunchy, slurpy, silent
Touch	Think of some other words for touch eg feel, stroke, pat	Ask the children to feel some of the prepared foods and describe what they felt eg smooth, fuzzy, hard, soft
Sight	Discuss the many different colours of fruit and vegetables eg red apples, yellow bananas	Name all of the fruit and vegetables that are round, shiny, long or pointy
Taste	Words for the different tastes are sweet, bitter, salty, sour and acid. Ask the children to name a food that matches each taste	Encourage the children to taste all of the foods provided



Acknowledgments: Adapted from the Queensland Health