



# INTRODUCTION

This section provides background information for early childhood services professionals.

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# About the DHS Strategy to Promote Healthy Eating

- This resource, *What's there to eat?* is the beginning of the implementation of a broad Strategy commissioned by the Department of Human Services (DHS), Public Health Division in 1999. The Strategy targets families with young children with healthy eating messages.
- The Strategy to Promote Healthy Eating comprises of three phases of action, with each phase lasting about 3 years.
- The first phase - the one being implemented through this resource - is concerned primarily with young families, with key messages that promote the consumption of more fruit and vegetables.
- Childhood is the key time when eating habits and understandings are formed. Each new addition to a family creates an opportunity for family eating to be modified - it's when parents are most likely to examine the family diet and make changes.
- The Strategy to Promote Healthy Eating, and this resource, are based on research with consumers, nutrition and health promotion specialists and the private sector.
- Research showed that it is important not to communicate about food simply in nutritional or dietary guidelines terms, but to include the social, emotional and practical considerations of food and eating.
- The research also highlighted that it's important not to concentrate only on the health benefits of a healthy diet - this is not enough to get people to change unless they've had a diet related 'health scare' in the family.
- People often don't change the way they and their family eat because they think it will take more time to eat more healthily, or it will be more difficult to prepare. Very importantly, they also worry about how well their partner and children will take to the change. Sometimes they don't try new things because they're not confident it will work.
- When young families need and look for advice and reassurances, they generally turn to friends and family for guidance first.
- Other credible sources for parents include; maternal child health nurses, community health workers, child care centre personnel, kindergarten / playgroup / early childhood centre staff, local government human services and Specialist Children's Services.
- The Strategy document recommends the development of an ongoing supportive relationship between DHS and service providers in the early childhood sector at a local level as well as a range of other communications activities (such as media relations, professional development, conferences and seminar promotion and working with industry).

Food is not just a source of nutrients. It is important for good social and emotional health as well as physical health. Food and eating are part of the way people live their lives.

The eating patterns of individuals and families are constantly being shaped and changed by a variety of factors. Some of these include:

- the kinds of food that are available at the local supermarket or shop
- cultural and family background
- the amount of time available to shop for, prepare and cook food
- the personal likes and dislikes of household members
- values, attitudes and beliefs about food and eating
- knowledge about food and nutrition
- advertising campaigns and food promotions
- the amount of money that can be spent on the food budget
- access to transport.

From the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating (1998)

The Strategy development recognises and reinforces what is also outlined in the current *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating* - that there are many factors that affect Australian eating habits today.





**This diagram is a summary of the DHS Strategy to Promote Healthy Eating.**

|                         | <b>Phase 1</b><br>(1-3 years)   | <b>Phase 2</b><br>(3-6 years)   | <b>Phase 3</b><br>(6-10 years)  |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Target audience:</b> | Victorian parents   | Victorian food preparers /purchasers (includes partners)<br><br>Children  | Teenagers<br><br>Vulnerable groups  |
| <b>Key messages</b>     | Eat fruit and vegetables  | Increase variety in fruit and vegetables<br><br>Eat more legumes /cereals   | Eat more of more. That is, increase your variety in and across food groups<br><br>Possibly - Multicultural inclusiveness and use of 'Australian Cuisine' concept vehicle  |
| <b>Intention</b>        | Work with parents through appropriate service providers and media to increase daily consumption of fruit and vegetables in young families | To increase the number and range of food purchases and preparers who are knowledgeable about the need to eat a variety of fruit and vegetables, know how to go about doing so, and who actually do it | To build on the work achievements of Phases 1 and 2 in order to extend consumer understanding from increasing variety of fruit and vegetables in their diet to increasing variety within and across food groups |
| <b>Settings</b>         | Early childhood sector service providers  | Schools<br><br>Supermarkets   | Other community settings<br><br>Workplace   |
| <b>Industry</b>         | Fruit and vegetable   | Fruit and vegetable<br><br>Cereals and legumes  | Broader food industry (Phase 1 and 2)   |
| <b>Non-government</b>   | With interest / focus on fruits and vegetable consumption   | Include child friendly settings in health sector<br><br>Health sector work with partners  | Include 'at risk' settings through health sector<br><br>Include workplace projects through health sector  |





## The aims of *What's there to eat?*

This resource, *What's there to eat?*, has been developed and designed specifically for professionals who work in early childhood services. That is:

- Child care centres (long day care)
- Kindergartens / early childhood centres
- Maternal and child health centres.

Each professional group will find this resource useful in different ways. It is not expected that all professionals will find all sections useful. You should pick and choose what you need, and what suits your setting and role.

It aims to assist you, as an early childhood services professional, to:

1. update your own working knowledge of food and nutrition
2. access accurate information about food and nutrition that will be useful to the parents and families you work with, so you can share this information with them
3. provide you with practical, hands on activities that promote healthy eating and are appropriate to your service or centre
4. put you in touch with other service providers, and other sources of information about food and healthy eating that is appropriate for parents and children.

This information was developed after consultations with peak early childhood services groups - such as Kindergarten Parents Victoria, the Victorian Private Childcare Association, the DHS Maternal and Child Health co-ordinator, the Health Promoting Schools Program and community dietitians.

This resource will be regularly reviewed by the DHS to ensure that these aims can be met through this resource.

When new information is developed, it will be distributed to you to be included in this resource, in the appropriate tab divided section.

Everyone who has this resource received it through a professional development workshop. Details will be collected on a database to ensure everyone receives all updates and newsletters.



## How to make the most of *What's there to eat?*

*What's there to eat?* has been developed to allow for flexibility in many ways. It allows for work in different settings (from kinders to child care centres and community centres) and different time commitments.

Each section of this resource has been designed to offer you something that is of direct use to work in community early childhood settings. Some of this is background information is for you as a professional, some is information you can pass on to parents with young children. The information included here will equip you with the information you need to conduct hands-on, practical activities which highlight healthy eating in your community.

Your time commitment will vary depending on which activities you run.

Some of the activities provided for in this resource include:

### Phone around

- Find out if there are local dietitians in your area who can help you when you need it. Try the local community health centre, community directory or DHS Regional Health Promotion Officer (see the Contact and Resource listing section for DHS numbers).
- Check through the resource listing and see if any of the items that are available are suitable to your service or centre.
- Get in touch with other early childhood service providers in your area if you have an idea for a healthy eating promotion that's bigger than you are!

### Posters to display

- Put them up in your own centre or office if it is visited by young families / parents, or negotiate to have them displayed at your local shopping centre, kinder, community meeting rooms.
- Ask local fruit and vegetable retailers if they would like to display them in their shop windows.

### Photocopiable tips for parents (see 'Family Tips' section)

- You can copy the pages most relevant to the parents you meet and distribute them through your own day to day activities.
- Distribute copies of the tip sheets appropriate to the age of the children you work with at enrolment times in kinders and childcare centres.
- Alternatively, you could make copies available to others in your local network - teachers of young children, foster care families, family day carers.
- You could ask if local retailers are interested in displaying the posters.
- Copy the recipe ideas and distribute to parents in your network - they've all been tried and tested and are proven successes with children.



### **Resource contacts** (see 'Contacts and Resources' section)

- Use the contacts and phone numbers listed to stock up on reliable brochures, posters and other materials.
- Follow up on books for your own professional development or conferences / seminars produced by the organisations listed.

### **Media activities** (see 'Case studies and local media' section)

- Fill in the pro forma media releases and distribute them over a period of months.
- Think of a range of picture opportunities that show children and / or families enjoying healthy food – eating it or making it. Discuss with your local newspapers.
- Get up to date with your local media contacts using the guide.
- Write your own media release based on the key issues about healthy eating and fruit and vegetable consumption in your community - team up with other local people (other service providers, community dietitian, or retailers) and produce a joint media release.
- Collect the results of your labours (published articles, pictures or radio interviews) and file them in this resource to track your work.
- Submit your projects to DHS – for potential inclusion in subsequent updates of *What's there to eat?*

### **Food on show** (see 'Food Safety and Activities' section)

- Plan a cooking demonstration for families or parents you work with. Feature lots of fruit and vegetables - you can try to do it yourself, or use a professional demonstrator. Talk to your local retailers about sponsorship.
- Organise a food tasting session in your community or with a community group you have contact with. Feature lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, and healthy dips to accompany them.
- Talk to your local community dietitian about organising a demonstration, tasting or display – get them involved and capitalise on their experience and knowledge.
- If you know about an upcoming event that attracts parents / young families, organise a healthy food display in a prominent place. Be happy if people 'steal' bits of the display. Leave some of the tip sheets or recipe ideas near the display.

### **Collection file**

- Use this folder to collect information and material you come across about healthy eating.
- Build the recipe collection, family tips collection and papers and new data on healthy eating, nutrition and diet for future reference and file in the last section of this resource.
- Keep this guide in an easy-to-reach location - so you don't forget to file healthy eating updates, newsletters.

There are many other activities and ways you can get involved in promoting healthy eating in your community. As you read through this resource, you can identify which pieces of information and activities are relevant for you and your community.



# What's there to eat? newsletter

The *What's there to eat?* newsletter will be one of the ways you will be kept up to date with information about the progress and implementation of the Strategy, new data and, most importantly, what other service providers are doing in promoting healthy eating in their area.

The newsletter will highlight how they are adapting the material in this resource to suit different situations. The newsletter will also keep you informed of professional development opportunities and any related conferences, courses and seminars that are coming up.

One of the functions of the newsletter will also be to let you know when reviews of the Guide are taking place, and how you can provide input. The *What's there to eat?* newsletter will also ensure that any updates to information of data contained in the kit can be communicated to you between general periodical reviews of this resource.

The newsletter will be circulated more widely than to those who are registered as having a resource. The aim of this is to showcase the work of early childhood service providers in the area of promoting healthy eating more widely - for example, to service providers who do not have the kit, industry organisations and others interested in promoting healthy eating in different settings.

