

Developing healthy eating habits and attitudes during middle childhood is important for children's long-term nutritional wellbeing. Healthy eating habits, together with regular physical activity, contribute to a child's physical growth, capacity to learn and the development of a positive body image and self-esteem. Good nutrition also prevents illness and health problems such as obesity.

The importance of nutrition

Outside school hours care (OSHC) services play an important role in addressing the nutritional needs of children in their middle childhood years and in reducing the current high rates of obesity in this age group. Offering healthy menus, cooking activities and providing meal and snack times that are relaxed, positive social occasions can contribute to good nutritional outcomes for children. Providing regular and varied opportunities for physical activity will also address growing children's health needs.



Staff need to know about the daily nutritional requirements for children to provide them with a balanced diet. Professional development of staff in nutrition will support them in creating healthy food practices in the service. Staff can also be important role models by participating in and showing enjoyment of healthy eating and physical activity.

There are many readily available resources that services can draw on for clear advice on nutrition for children during middle childhood (see resources at the end of this *Factsheet*).

Representatives from recognised nutrition organisations and local dietitians are also useful sources for advice and guidance.

Nutrition policies

The development of nutrition policies can contribute to consistency of staff practice and good nutrition standards in OSHC services. These should be developed and regularly reviewed by staff and management. The involvement of these parties will assist in developing a common understanding and agreement about children's nutrition at the service. Families should also be invited to have input in the policies and express their views about their child's nutrition.

These policies need to be consistent with current information from recognised nutrition authorities. A key resource for the development of nutrition policies in OSHC is the *Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia* (National Health and Medical Research Council). This resource provides clear, simple advice about food and nutrition for children's health.

It includes recommendations for:

- Providing a wide variety of nutritious food
- Providing sufficient nutritious foods
- Drinking plenty of water
- The size of food serves
- Limiting fat intake
- Being active every day
- Preparing food safely

Other issues to consider in a nutrition policy are:

- Involving children
- Cultural issues
- Special diets
- Foods for celebrations and special occasions
- The eating environment
- Communicating with families
- Professional development of staff
- Physical activity (this could be developed as a separate but related policy)

Physical activity

Physical activity goes hand in hand with nutrition in providing good health outcomes for children. Regulating food intake and being physically active contributes to children's wellbeing and self-esteem and reduces health problems such as obesity. OSHC services can play an important role in promoting children's fitness by providing a variety of physical activities in every session.

Access to open space and simple activities will encourage children to be active. Equipment such as balls, frisbees, skipping ropes, elastics and pavement chalk can be readily included in most OSHC programs. A range of group and individual activities will encourage maximum participation by children, as will sporting, music and dance activities. Staff who participate and show enjoyment of physical activities will help encourage children's participation in physical activities.



Provide enjoyable mealtimes

To provide mealtimes that are positive social occasions staff can:

- Provide clear consistent rules around food and eating habits. For example, sitting down while eating to promote social interaction and to prevent choking and food spills
- Involve children in the preparation and clean up of meals
- Role model good eating habits
- Provide a clean, attractive place to eat. For example, use table cloths and clean utensils
- Encourage children to wash hands before meals



Involving children

When children are involved in decisions about their own nutrition and eating habits they are more likely to be aware of and understand the reasons for a healthy diet and staying active. This will encourage them to take responsibility for eating well and leading an active lifestyle. Children can be encouraged to participate in:

- Discussions about nutrition
- Menu planning and preparing food
- Preparing and cleaning up meals
- Developing service policies and procedures that affect their nutrition

Communicating with families

Children's home, school and OSHC environments all play a role in influencing their eating habits. It is useful to involve families in discussions and decisions about children's nutrition and healthy eating to achieve consistency at home and in care.



Services can encourage family involvement by:

- Providing access to up to date information
- Providing accurate advice and support
- Inviting them to contribute to policy development and review
- Developing policies with them about food being brought from home
- Communicating with them about any food allergies or sensitivities their child may have
- Seeking input on cultural values about nutrition and eating practices
- Providing opportunities to discuss any concern they may have about their child's eating habits or weight gain

Nutrition tips for school age children

- Eat mostly complex carbohydrates such as breads, rice and pasta
- Eat moderate amounts of foods that are high in protein
- Eat less foods that are high in sugar and fat
- Provide plenty of fresh water. Low fat milk can also be provided as a nutritious drink
- Minimise soft drink and juice intake. If juice is provided, dilute by half with water
- Include dairy or high calcium foods such as milks, soft or hard cheese, and yoghurt
- Include a good or moderate source of iron such as beef, chicken and baked beans
- Use fresh, canned, dried or frozen foods - there is scarcely any nutritional difference between these
- Limit the intake of food with additives

About breakfast

Many families have busy lifestyles and mornings can be particularly rushed. Many children skip breakfast and make up for it later in the morning by eating snacks that are high in fat and sugar. This is one of the ways in which children develop unhealthy eating habits and gain weight. Providing a nutritious breakfast in OSHC services can prevent children from filling up later on snacks that are poor in nutritional value.

Breakfast can be simple to prepare by including cereal, milk, breads and fruit. Fruit smoothies can be satisfying for children who may not have a big appetite in the morning. Rice, noodles and lean meats can also be offered. Families and children should be invited to participate in planning breakfast menus.

About afternoon tea

Children's nutritional needs will differ in the afternoon. Some children will arrive at the service hungry after a busy day at school and be ready to eat. Others will want some time to settle in before they sit down to eat afternoon tea. Staff need to be aware and accommodating



of children's different needs at this time. The amounts that children need to eat will vary so offer children plenty of good food choices to meet their needs. Staff also need to make sure that food is provided for children who arrive late.

Afternoon tea can also be simple to prepare and can include fruit, raw vegetables, various breads with toppings, sandwiches and muffins that are low in fat and sugar. Again, staff should invite families and children to participate in planning afternoon tea menus.

Try these nutrition activities

- Provide nutritious cooking activities - try fruit muffins, vegetable bakes and quiches. Avoid cakes and biscuits that are high in sugar and fat
- Create a garden patch or fill pots with herbs, fruit or vegetable plants
- Explore the range of children's backgrounds and customs through cultural food activities. Try cooking using different ingredients, recipes and utensils



Further Information

- Cooke, L., Marshall, L. and Sangster, J. (2003). *Nutrition Ready to Go at Out of School Hours Services*. New South Wales: Central Coast Health, South East Health and Network of Community Activities.
- Department for Community Development, Government of Western Australia. (2004). *OSHC News*. Western Australia: Department for Community Development.
- Gain, M., Dowshen, S. and Izenberg, N. (2004). *Fit Kids. A practical guide to raising healthy and active children – from birth to teens*. Victoria: Dorling Kindersley.
- Mathews, C. (2004). *Healthy Children. A Guide for Child Care*. Australia: Elsevier.
- National Childcare Accreditation Council (2003) *Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance Quality Practices Guide*. New South Wales: National Childcare Accreditation Council.
- National Health and Medical Research Council. (2003). *Food for Health. Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- National Heart Foundation of Australia (2004) *Eat Smart, Play Smart*. Victoria: National Heart Foundation.

Useful Websites

- Food Standards Australia New Zealand - www.foodstandards.gov.au
- Healthy School Communities Program, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing - www.healthyactive.gov.au/healthy_school
- National Health and Medical Research Council - www.health.gov.au/nhmrc
- Nutrition Australia - www.nutritionaustralia.org
- Queensland Health - www.health.qld.gov.au



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