

Background

Mealtimes are valuable opportunities for children to learn and connect with others. These experiences support children's social and emotional development, language and communication skills, self-help abilities, and independence. When mealtimes are positive, calm, and engaging, they contribute to children's wellbeing and help foster positive attitudes with food. Good nutrition is essential for children's growth, development, learning, and overall health.

The safety and wellbeing of children must remain a priority during mealtimes. This includes maintaining active supervision, implementing effective hygiene practices, and ensuring all centres staff are aware of and respond appropriately to individual child health and dietary needs.

Not in scope: Responsibilities and risk minimisation strategies relating to the management of anaphylaxis, allergies and undiagnosed dietary requirements. Instead refer to *Anaphylaxis and Allergies Procedure – Childcare / Kindergarten / OSHC* and *Undiagnosed Dietary Requirement Procedure*.

Branch childcare centres implement this procedure alongside with the *C&K Childcare Centre Food Safety Program*.

For the purposes of this procedure, **Kitchen Personnel** are Chefs, Cooks, Kitchen Assistants and teachers and educators who may temporarily work in a childcare kitchen.

Nutrition

Teachers and educators will:

- Model and encourage nutritional eating habits and a positive attitude towards food.
- Promote nutritional food choices with children and families as outlined in the [Australian Dietary Guidelines](#) and [Get Up and Grow: Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for Early Childhood](#).
- Ensure drinking water accessible at all times. Encourage/prompt children to drink water throughout the day.
- Appropriately discuss oral health concepts with children. Encourage/prompt children to drink water after meals.
- Provide a daily record of food consumption for children under 2 years of age.

(Childcare Only) Kitchen personnel will:

- In consultation with children, families, teachers and educators, develop, document and implement delicious menus that meet the dietary and nutritional needs of children (including children with food allergies and undiagnosed dietary requirements) and in accordance with [Australian Dietary Guidelines](#) and [Get Up and Grow: Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for Early Childhood](#) recommendations. Refer to [Nutrition Australia QLD](#), an online menu planning tool.
- Document and display current menu that accurately describes all meals and beverages served to children, including meals provided to infants and children with food allergies and undiagnosed dietary requirements. Alterations to menus must be recorded and displayed.

Training

Teachers, educators and kitchen personnel will:

- (Optional for Kindergartens) Complete online [Do Food Safely](#) module (external food handler course). Provide evidence of completion to centre Director/Nominated Supervisor for centre personnel file.

Safe food preparation

Teachers, educators and kitchen personnel will:

- Wash and thoroughly dry hands before preparing, handling and serving food. Gloves are not required when hands are clean and dry. Disposable gloves must be worn when preparing or serving food if:
 - Hands have cuts, sores, or abrasions;
 - Acrylic nails, artificial nails, or chipped nail polish are present; or
 - Jewellery may compromise food safety.
- Clean and sanitise food preparation, serving, and eating areas before and after use.
- Never prepare and serve food when unwell.
- Wash fruit and vegetables before preparation and serving.
- Cook or reheated food to a minimum internal temperature of 75°C. Measure temperature using a food thermometer. Clean and sanitise thermometer before and after each use with an alcohol wipe containing at least 70% isopropyl alcohol.
- Allow cooked and heated food to cool before serving. Remove a small piece of food with a spoon to another plate and test temperature with a food thermometer or on the inside of wrist. Throw this piece of food away, wash spoon, and wash and dry hands.

- Avoid the 'food danger zone' by cooking and heating food to 75°C.



Positive meal routines:

Teachers and educators will:

- Discuss nutritional eating habits with children rather than instructing them what to eat, what not to eat, what to eat first or how much to eat.
- Support children to recognise and respond to their own hunger and fullness cues.
- Slow down to the pace of the children. Be patient and supportive of children who are developing eating skills or who may be hesitant or selective eaters.
- Be responsive and flexible to individual hunger needs, recognising that children may require food at different times or outside scheduled mealtimes.
- Be present and responsive during mealtimes. Where practical, sit with children and engage in meaningful conversations that support social connection and learning.
- Consider strategies that influence the 'mood', such as setting up tables in an attractive manner (e.g. flowers, placemats) and arranging tables to enable small group interaction.
- Support children's developing independence by encouraging age and developmentally appropriate participation in mealtime routines, including opening containers, serving themselves where appropriate, feeding themselves, and assisting with mealtime responsibilities.
- Provide utensils, cups, and eating equipment that are appropriate to each child's age and developmental stage.
- Never use food and drink to reward or punish a child.
- Respect family, religious, and cultural food preferences. This may require meals to be heated.
- Never withdraw food from children or make judgments about food provided by parents/guardians.

Safe and hygienic meal routines

Teachers and educators will:

- Support children to wash and thoroughly dry their hands before and after eating.
- Support children to remain seated when eating.
- Actively supervise children during mealtimes.
- Support children to use serving utensils, such as tongs, when sharing food from shared platters.
- Ensure children do not share food, drink containers, eating utensils, or drink bottles with peers.
- Encourage children to turn away from food and cover their mouth and nose with their elbow when coughing or sneezing.
- Thoroughly clean tables, chairs, and high-touch surfaces immediately after mealtimes using detergent and water and disposable paper towel (preferred). If using a cloth towel, launder and sanitize after each use.
- When food has spilt on ground, mop floors under and around tables with detergent and water.
- Never consume hot drinks in the vicinity of children. Consume hot drinks in areas that are not used by children.
- (Childcare only) Send plates and cutlery to the kitchen to be sanitized in commercial dishwasher.
- (Childcare only) Use a separate bowl and spoon when feeding individual infants. When interrupted to care for another child while preparing food or feeding an infant, wash and dry hands again before continuing.

Food storage

When applicable, parents and guardians will:

- Upon arrival, remove food from insulated containers and place in designated area e.g. basket and/or refrigerator. Do not store food in insulated containers within the refrigerator. In accordance with Food Safety Council advice, when stored in the fridge, temperature within insulated containers may fluctuate and be inconsistent with the fridge temperature. When multiple insulated containers are stored in a fridge, air flow within the fridge is impeded, which in turn may impact the fridge temperature.
- Upon arrival, place containers with perishable foods (such as meats, cooked foods and dairy) in the refrigerator. Place dairy products in the body of the refrigerator; not in the refrigerator door.
- Seek direction from teachers and educators when unsure of centre food storage routine.

Teachers, educators and kitchen personnel will:

- Display and follow [Food Safety Poster](#).
- As part of the [Daily Safety Checklist](#), complete a twice daily check and maintain refrigerator temperature below 5°C.
- Respect family, religious and cultural food storage practices, except when inconsistent with food safety guidelines e.g. perishable foods such as cooked foods, meats and dairy must be stored in refrigerator; cannot be stored at room temperature.
- To prevent cross-contamination between raw and cooked foods:
 - Keep raw and cooked foods separate in the fridge.
 - Keep cooked food and ready-to-eat foods above raw food in the fridge.
 - Use separate utensils and equipment (such as cutting boards and knives) for raw and cooked food.
- Store dairy products inside the body of the refrigerator. Do not store in refrigerator door.
- Store cooked food and uncooked meat separately in the refrigerator. Store raw meat on bottom shelf only.
- Defrosted food should not be returned to the freezer. Heat and eat or discard.
- Never keep left over meals. Dispose of left over meals on same day as served.

Cooking experiences and the use of food in play

Teachers and educators will:

- Consider food allergies and undiagnosed dietary restrictions when planning a cooking experiences.
- Consider play alternatives instead of using food products in play. Discuss play with food as a team and make decisions to meet the current needs of children and families. Consider possible cultural, participation rights and ethical issues of using food in play. Consult with families to determine whether using food products in play is appropriate and respectful.
- Where possible, choose experiences where food is cooked, as germs are destroyed in the cooking process. Alternatively, ensure children eat the food they have prepared themselves e.g. fruit salad cups or sandwiches.
- Maintain hygiene:
 - Wash and dry hands before cooking.
 - Support children to wash and dry their hands before cooking.
 - Tie back long hair before cooking. Support children to tie back their long hair before cooking.
- Never implement cooking experiences during (and 48hrs after) an outbreak of an infectious illness.
- Never use eggs collected from centre or family-owned chickens. Use shop bought eggs, within expiry date.

Birthday cakes

It is unlikely that blowing out birthday candles will spread disease, unless the child has recently been sick. However, risk minimisation options for this activity could be to use separate cupcakes or birthday 'claps' rather than blowing out the candles.

Key references

- Australian Government - [Australian Dietary Guidelines](#).
- Australian Government - [Get Up and Grow; Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for Early Childhood](#)
- [Food Safety Information Council Website](#)
- NHMRC - [Staying healthy guidelines | NHMRC](#) (6th Edition)
- Nutrition Australia Qld - [Food Foundations](#)