PROMOTING HEALTHY EATING IN OOSH

Healthy eating is essential to maintaining good health. Healthy eating and physical activity help children grow, learn and build strong bones and muscles. As a caregiver, OOSH workers have a great opportunity to be a role model of positive behaviour and a healthy lifestyle.

Healthy food choices and regular physical activity may help children to maintain a healthy weight and prevent health problems.

The Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia recommend children “enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods”. Eating a variety of nutritious foods means consuming different food types in appropriate amounts to obtain all the required nutrients without excess energy intake.

Children need a wide variety of foods for a well-balanced diet. The amount of physical activity they have in a day will be an important part of how much they need to eat. Some children of this age are fussy about what they eat, but when busy and active, snacking is important to keep energy levels high.

Providing food from diverse cultural backgrounds is a good way to introduce children to new foods and to foods with different flavours, colours, textures and aromas. This not only gives you an opportunity to show recognition and respect toward people from various cultures, but also gives children an opportunity to learn about other cultures and discuss similarities and differences.

It is important to be aware that some children from diverse cultural backgrounds may not be able to eat certain foods for religious or other beliefs. As well as being aware of cultural requirements, OOSH staff also need to take into consideration that some children may have food allergies or have special food requirements. Always check with the family about food preferences and/or requirements.

ENCOURAGING CHILDREN TO ENJOY A VARIETY OF HEALTHY FOOD

is the role of the OOSH service to decide what food to provide (in consultation with the families) and the children’s role to decide whether to eat and how much to choose. The eating environment and staff attitudes can influence children’s enjoyment of healthy food. Consider the following points when preparing and serving food:

★ Explore different ways of presenting, serving and eating, such as sitting in a circle, using chopsticks or eating from bowls instead of plates. Turn afternoon tea into a picnic – either indoors or outdoors

★ Talk to children about different foods and where they come from

★ Involve the children in the planning, preparing and serving the food

★ Create a relaxed social time where staff sit and eat with children – this is an opportunity to discuss foods in a positive light

★ Display menus for children and parents

★ Be a good role model – let children see you enjoy eating healthy food

★ Have a fruit or vegetable of the week – allow children to taste it, discuss how and where it grows and the recipes it could be used in

★ Get the children involved in growing vegetables – many vegetables grow well in pots

★ Offer children a choice of new foods. The more children are offered a new food, the more likely
they are to accept it, especially if they see peers or role models enjoying the food

★ Provide appropriate alternatives for children who don’t want to eat what you have prepared

Providing healthy foods that meet children’s nutritional needs requires planning. Planning will save you time and money and can ensure the breakfast and afternoon tea your service is providing is nutritionally adequate.

WHAT IS A HEALTHY AFTERNOON TEA OR BREAKFAST FOR CHILDREN IN OOSH?

Using nutritional recommendations from the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating and the Australian Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents, nutritionists have developed a checklist for planning breakfast and afternoon tea at OOSH. This checklist contains suggestions for a healthy afternoon tea and breakfast for primary school aged children and has been reproduced as OOSH Development Factsheet #24b ‘Menu checklist for breakfast and afternoon tea’. In brief, the checklist provides information on:

Foods to include:
★ A dairy or a high calcium food to provide calcium for growing bones and teeth.
★ A cereal-based food that contains carbohydrate and fibre.
★ A fruit or vegetable, which are good sources of vitamins, minerals and fibre.
★ A good OR moderate source of iron. Iron is needed to carry oxygen around the blood.
★ A drink – the best drinks for children are milk or water. Fruit juice is not essential if fruit is served. If you choose to serve it, dilute it by half with water.

Foods to avoid:
Foods that contain too much fat, sugar or salt are not recommended for afternoon tea as they do not provide essential nutrients for growing bodies. These foods include:
★ Sticky snacks like health food bars, lollies and fruit straps as they may cause tooth decay
★ Cordial, soft drinks or drinks containing caffeine
★ Foods high in fat and sugar like cream filled and chocolate coated biscuits, chocolate and chocolate and yoghurt coated health food bars.
★ Foods high in fat and salt like chips and savoury snacks.

Some healthy afternoon tea combinations for OOSH include:
★ Plain crackers with toppings (e.g. vegeemite, cheese) plus fruit salad with custard. Water to drink.
★ Mini pizza (toast, tomato paste, ham, pineapple and cheese) plus fruit pieces. Water to drink.
★ Pikelets with jam plus fruit pieces. Milk with Milo™ to drink.
★ Breakfast biscuits (e.g. Weetbix™) with honey or jam plus fruit pieces. Milk to drink.
★ Cheese and tomato sandwiches (made with one slice of wholemeal and one slice of white bread) plus frozen orange quarters. Water to drink.

Some healthy breakfast combinations for OOSH include:
★ Weetbix™ and milk plus fruit pieces. Water or milk to drink.
★ Raisin toast plus fruit pieces. Milk with Milo™
★ Wholemeal toast or muffin topped with baked beans or spaghetti. Milk to drink
★ Porridge and milk. Dried fruit. Water to drink.

OTHER RELEVANT OOSH DEVELOPMENT FACTSHEETS:
★ Menu checklist for breakfast & afternoon tea

The following documents were referred to when developing this Factsheet:
★ ‘Nutrition Ready to go at Out of School Hours Services’. Central Coast Health, South East Health and Network of Community Activities, 2003. This publication is available from Network of Community Activities.
★ The Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia (available from: www.nhmrc.gov.au)

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