

## POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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# NUTRITION & MENU PLANNING FOR EARLY LEARNING SERVICES

## 1. POLICY STATEMENT AND/OR PURPOSE

Catholic Early Learning & Care is committed to ensuring the health, nutrition and wellbeing of all children in their care. Healthy eating and nutritious food play a significant role in determining the health, growth and development of children. Nutrition education is an important part of the program promoting healthy eating habits. Services ensure that positive eating experiences are encouraged, through the provision of:

- Menus that are healthy, diverse and balanced.
- Menus which will expose the children to cuisine from different cultures.
- Nutritional food and snacks, in a happy and social environment.
- Activities that promote an understanding of healthy eating practices.

Children are supported and supervised in eating and drinking safely, with all staff cognisant of potential choking hazards.

## 2. APPLICATION

This procedure applies to all Catholic Early Learning and Care Services in the Diocese of Cairns.

## 3. PROCEDURE

### Choking Hazards

- Choking hazards for babies and young children include anything smaller than a 20cent coin. This should be taken into consideration in the chopping, slicing and preparation of all foods. For further details of foods that pose a choking risk, see [Choking Prevention and Choking Risks](#).
- To reduce food choking risks, Educators will supervise children and ensure that they sit down while they're eating.
- Educators should be aware of children with medical or chronic conditions that make them more susceptible to choking risks.

### Healthy & Safe Food Principles:

- Food and beverages are nutritious and adequate, prepared and stored in a safe and hygienic manner, complying with all laws and regulations, including the Food Act 2006
- Dietary requirements of all children are catered for:
  - Consideration for each child's growth and development.
  - Any cultural, religious or health requirements are provided for.

- Parents/Guardians are required to provide information compiled by health professionals if their child requires a special diet. This is required in the enrolment form and should be discussed with Nominated Supervisor, who will inform Educators.
- Nutrition procedures will be reviewed in consultation with families, children and educators.
- Nutrition and menu planning is based on information from recognised health authorities including Nutrition Australia, Heart Foundation and Queensland Health. In addition, information will be accessed from Australian Government Guidelines Get Up & Grow: Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for Early Childhood, and/or [Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia](#).

Menus will be displayed that are accessible to parents/guardians and children. The menu will accurately describe food and beverage supplied.

- Educators will implement effective food safety practices to limit cross contamination.
- Health information from the Health Translation Database [www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au](http://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au) is available if required.

### **Promoting Healthy Eating Habits:**

- Records of children's food intake will be recorded on request from families. At Early Learning Centres, the nursery will provide food and bottle records for all children.
- Educators and parents/guardians will consult on a regular basis about their child's food interests, dietary requirements and eating habits.
- The nursery will display information on each child's eating patterns for all educators to follow. This information will be updated regularly after consultation with parents/guardians.
- A dietary chart shall be placed in the kitchen area with a list of children who have special dietary requirements. This list will be updated as required.
- Hand hygiene will be reinforced prior to eating.
- Social interactions will be encouraged during meal and snack times. Educators will sit with children at mealtimes, discuss food being served, promote hygienic self-help practices, and use positive strategies to promote children's interest in foods and to encourage lifelong healthy eating habits.
- Educators will model and promote healthy and hygienic eating habits talking to children about safe food practices e.g. sitting while eating.
- Menu feedback will be sought from children. Ideas for new food experiences will be included in menu plans.
- Menus will reflect the multicultural nature of the community and provide children with a broader range of food experiences.
- Special occasions will be celebrated with culturally appropriate food.
- All educators involved in food preparation and serving food need to complete the **I'm Alert Food Safety Training** <http://www.imalert.com.au/foodsafety/training/welcome.php?sub=cairns>
- All educators involved in food preparation and serving food must complete and have on file a "Food Handler's Checklist" form annually.
- Food and nutrition activities are incorporated into children's planned learning experiences, through stories, visual displays, dramatic play and interactions with children.

### **Food Provided from Home:**

- Families will be encouraged to provide healthy food/snacks that meet dietary requirements.
- Food should be age appropriate, varied and satisfies a child's appetite and interest.
- Parents/guardians will be alerted to food excluded from the Service.
- Information regarding food allergy and anaphylaxis will be displayed prominently at service.

### **Lunch Box Safety**

- As services generally do not provide children with access to heating devices, any potentially hazardous food in a lunch box needs to be kept at a safe temperature of below 5°C.

- Below are some simple tips to help ensure food is kept at a safe temperature until the time it will be consumed:
  - use insulated lunch boxes or cooler bags
  - keep a frozen drink or freezer brick inside the lunch box
  - if preparing lunches the night before, keep it in the fridge until leaving home
  - Any perishable food such as meat, poultry or egg sandwiches, should be thrown out if not eaten that day.
  - Alternatively, pack lunch options that do not need to be kept cool to stay safe, such as:
    - > sandwiches with fillings such as hard cheeses, pickles and some spreads (e.g. Vegemite or honey)
    - > canned meat or fish
    - > whole (uncut) fruit and vegetables.

### **Food Safety Tips for Parents**

- Parents and guardians are reminded of a few simple food safety rules to prepare safe and healthy lunches and avoid the growth and contamination of food poisoning bacteria:
  - Wash and thoroughly dry hands before handling food. Children should be encouraged to always wash their hands before eating.
  - Wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly.
  - Keep food preparation areas clean and dry.
  - Keep lunch boxes, utensils and reusable water bottles clean and dry.
- Further information on food safety is available on [Queensland Health](#) website.
- Centres are not permitted to reheat, cook or otherwise prepare food for children.

### **Guidelines for Food Preparation - Centres**

To prevent cross-contamination between raw and cooked foods:

- Keep raw and cooked foods separate (even in the fridge).
- Do not keep uncooked food above cooked food in the fridge.
- Use separate utensils (including cutting boards, knives, etc.) for raw and cooked food.
- Keep food hot (over 60°C) or cold (5°C or less); otherwise discard.
- While the legal requirement for reheating food is 60°C, it is recommended that food should be reheated to 70°C for 2 minutes.
- Heating to this temperature will destroy germs that may have grown in the food. Reheating to 70°C, is recommended as you do not know if the food has been cooked, stored and transported to the centre correctly.
- The temperature of food must be checked with a probe thermometer.
- Ensure the food is allowed to cool before it is given to the child to eat. Remove a small piece of food with a spoon to another plate and test the temperature of the food with your hand. Keep a non-mercury thermometer in your fridge so that you can check that the temperature is 50C or less.
- Throw out left-overs. Heat food once only.

### **Provision of Drinking Water:**

- Children will have access to clean drinking water at all times.
- Educators will encourage children to drink extra water during the summer months.
- Educators and children are made aware of the signs of dehydration.
- Families are required to provide a water bottle daily.

### **Food Provided by the Service:**

**Services must follow the [Menu Planning Guidelines for Long Day Care \(Vic Health Guidelines\)](#) when planning the menus for the service and ensure that they are providing a variety of nutritious foods from the below 5 food groups**

# Australian Guide to Healthy Eating

Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from these five food groups every day.

Drink plenty of water.



- Food provided for children will meet the recommended minimum food requirements for children in long day care (i.e. at least 50% of the recommended dietary intakes for nutrients during eight hours of care.)
- Where applicable, a lunch time meal, morning and afternoon tea will be provided by the service daily.
- Individual needs will be considered in meal schedules and planned in the best interests of the children.
- Food provided will be varied, seasonally appropriate and the menu cycle will be rotated to ensure that children attending part time will have opportunities for experiencing a range of foods. Foods will offer different colours and texture.
- If the service offers a rotating menu, the menu rotation is a minimum of 4 weeks.

The menu is reviewed every 3 – 4 months.

## Meat:

**Offer 1** children's serve of lean meat, poultry, fish or alternatives per child per day.

## Vegetarian meals

**Include vegetarian meals on the menu at least once per fortnight for variety.**

Vegetarian meals should include:

- A food containing protein: eggs, legumes (e.g. chickpeas), milk, yoghurt, cheese, soy products (e.g. tofu)
- A food containing iron (if not already included): spinach, legumes (e.g. chickpeas), baked beans, peas, tofu, eggs and broccoli
- A fruit or vegetable high in vitamin C (to enhance iron absorption by the body) such as capsicum, broccoli, kiwifruit, Brussels sprouts, pawpaw, cauliflower, orange, mandarin, berries, cabbage, cantaloupe, frozen mixed vegetables, broad beans, spinach, sweet potato, potato, pineapple, cherries, raw tomato, zucchini, peas and green beans.

### **Fruit**

**Offer 1 children's serve of fruit\* per child per day.**

\*Some hard fruit may need to be cooked, mashed, grated, pureed or very finely sliced to prevent choking  
**Grapes are not permitted at CELC services**

### **Vegetables**

**A variety of vegetables and/or legumes should be provided, at least 2–3 different types per day and 5 different types per week.**

\*Some hard vegetables may need to be cooked, mashed, grated, pureed or very finely sliced to prevent choking.

### **Milk, yoghurt, cheese and alternatives**

**Offer 2 children's serves of milk, yoghurt, cheese or calcium fortified alternatives per child per day.**

Ensure alternative products such as soy drinks and soy yoghurt are calcium fortified (with at least 100mg of added calcium per 100mL).

Flavoured milk **must not** be included in the daily menu.

### **Grain (cereal) foods**

**Offer 2 children's serves of grain (cereal) foods per child per day.** Include high fibre (wholemeal and wholegrain) varieties at least 3 times per week, preferably every day.

### **Fats and Oils**

**Avoid** palm, cottonseed and coconut oils or oil blends that contain these, as well as cream, sour cream, butter, copha, ghee and lard.

### **Salt**

- Salt should not be added to cooking or be available at the table.
- When selecting packaged foods, choose 'low salt', 'reduced salt' or 'no added salt' products.
- Use herbs and spices to enhance the flavour of meals.

### **Morning and afternoon tea**

**Morning tea and afternoon tea should be planned and documented on the menu.**

Foods and drinks included at morning tea and afternoon tea should be nutritious and based on choices from the five food groups.

### **Late snack**

An extra snack is recommended for children attending eight or more hours in care. If offered, this will also be documented on the menu.

**Water is offered at all meals and is available freely throughout the day.**

### **Feeding infants under 12 months of age**

From around 6 months, a variety of age-appropriate solid foods should be offered. Services will modify infants' menus in consultation with parents.

CELC will provide mash and/or menu item from 6 months of age, following the guide below:

- 6 months – offer coarsely pureed/mashed foods, progressing to lumpy and finely chopped options.
- 8 months – offer chopped and finger foods to encourage children to start feeding themselves.
- 12 months – offer foods from the regular menu with a variety of tastes and textures in children's size portions.
- Fresh mash is prepared weekly to be served and consumed the week following
- Mash is stored in food grade containers in the kitchen freezer
- Containers are clearly labelled with:
  - date prepared
  - ingredients included date to be consumed by
- Frozen mash to be defrosted in the microwave provided
- All staff must read and sign "Food Handlers' Checklist"
- All staff reheating food must complete the "Hot Temperature Record" form
- Refrigerator and Freezer temperatures to be monitored and recorded twice daily
- All staff to be made aware of the requirement for reheated food to be heated at or above 75 degrees.
- The temperature of all reheated food MUST BE CHECKED before serving to ensure it has cooled to 60 degrees or less and it is not going to pose a burns risk to the child
- Breast milk, infant formula and cooled boiled tap water should be the only drinks provided to infants until 12 months of age.
- Include iron-containing nutritious foods each day e.g. iron fortified cereals, pureed meat, poultry and fish, cooked mashed tofu, legumes (e.g. chickpeas or lentils) or eggs.
- Fruit, vegetables, grains and milk, yoghurt, cheese and alternatives should also be available for infants every day.
- For more information about feeding infants refer to [Menu planning for babies.](#)

### **Foods and drinks for children with allergies**

Children with allergies should be provided with suitable alternatives to foods and drinks that are not tolerated. This should be documented on the menu.

### **Food Requirements for Under Twos:**

- Children will be supported in their attempts to feed themselves. The seating arrangements for highchairs and low tables and chairs will be arranged to encourage social interactions at mealtimes.
- Feeding schedules will be flexible and adaptive to individual routines. These routines will be developed in consultation with parents/guardians in centre orientation time. It will be regularly reviewed and updated in accordance with the changing needs of the developing child.
- Solid foods will be introduced at around six months in consultation with the child's parents/guardians.
- Infants under twelve months will be provided with cool boiled water for extra fluid.
- Parents/Guardians and educators will monitor and discuss children's appetite, fluid intake, interest in food and self-help skills.
- All drink bottles stored at the service will be labelled with each child's name.

### **Foods and drinks that should be limited in the daily menu**

Some foods and drinks should not be included in the daily menu on a regular basis. These items are generally higher in saturated fat and added salt and/or sugar or a combination of these, and typically have little nutritional value.

Examples of foods and drinks which should be limited, preferably not be included in the daily menu are:

- sweet drinks such as soft drinks, fruit juice and fruit drinks, cordial, sports drinks, sports waters, flavoured waters, flavoured mineral waters, iced teas and energy drinks
- confectionery, chocolate, jelly
- deep fried foods, such as hot chips
- pastry-based foods, such as pies, sausage rolls and pasties
- processed meats, such as sausages, frankfurts, hot dogs, salami, kabana, twiggy sticks, Strasburg, Devon.
- chicken nuggets and fish fingers
- fast food and takeaway foods
- high fat and salt savoury snack foods, such as crisps, chips, biscuits
- ice creams and ice confections

high sugar and high fat baked and packaged goods, such as cakes, some muffins, sweet pastries, slices, biscuits and bars.

### **Breast Milk:**

The service will encourage and support breastfeeding. Parents/Guardians are encouraged to provide frozen breast milk for each day of care. Frozen breast milk will be thawed in the refrigerator.

### **Expressed breast milk will be warmed in either warm water or a bottle warmer, not a microwave.**

- Ensure breast milk is clearly labelled with the child's name and the time and date the milk was expressed.
- Two educators should check the label of the breast milk before it is given.
- Throw away any milk that is left over.
- Do not re-freeze or reheat leftover milk.

### **Formula:**

- It is recommended that formula is prepared as required.
- When preparing formula, follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully.
- Throw away any formula that is left over.
- Do not freeze or reheat left-over formula.
- Ensure the bottles are clearly labelled with the child's name and date the formula was made.
- Preparation instructions for infant formulas will be displayed in the nursery food preparation area.
- Milk will be warmed in either warm water or a bottle warmer, not a microwave.
- Ensure the temperature is not excessive and there is no danger that the baby could be scalded.

## **4. BREACHES OF THIS POLICY**

Appropriate disciplinary action will be taken against a person who is found to have breached the requirements contained within this document. Action taken will depend on the nature and circumstance of each breach and could include: an official warning and note on the individual's personnel file; a formal written and/or verbal apology; counselling; demotion; transfer; or suspension or dismissal for very serious matters.

## **5. ENQUIRIES**

Catholic Early Learning and Care Director- [admin@ccelc.catholic.org.au](mailto:admin@ccelc.catholic.org.au)

## 6. SEE ALSO

- Food Act 2006 [Food Act 2006](#)
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 [Education and Care Services National Regulations](#)
- Regulation 78,79,80
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 [Education and Care Services National Law \(Queensland\)](#)
- The National Quality Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care 2018 [National Quality Standard | ACECQA](#)
- PANOSH
- Kidzbodz <http://www.kidzbodz.com.au/default.htm>
- <http://heas.health.vic.gov.au/early-childhood-services/policies-and-guidelines/sample-menu-OSHC>
- Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia [Australian dietary guidelines 1 - 5 | Eat For Health](#) [http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/\\_files\\_nhmrc/publications/attachments/n34.pdf](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/n34.pdf)
- [www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bf](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bf) - breastfeeding and work
- [www.nutritionaustralia.org](http://www.nutritionaustralia.org)
- Healthy Eating Book –Get Up and Grow [Get Up & Grow – Healthy eating and physical activity for early childhood – Resource collection | Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing](#)
- Healthy Eating Pyramid [Australian guide to healthy eating | Eat For Health](#)
- Menu Planning Guidelines for Long Day Care [Menu planning guidelines for long day care | Healthy Eating Advisory Service](#)
- Menu Planning Checklist
- Food Handling and Preparation
- Infection Control
- Enrolment and Orientation
- National Quality Standards. 2.1, 2.2, 3.1.2,4.1.1, 6.1.6.2.7.1.2,7.3

## 7. APPROVAL

*Al Forster.*

Alison Forster  
Director  
Catholic Early Learning and Care

**Date: 26/11/2025**