Mealtimes and Other Food Opportunities

Breakfast

PLANNING FOR BREAKFAST

Various factors should be considered when planning a breakfast service, including:

Roles and responsibilities

- Consider breakfast preparation in the context of the cook's work hours (e.g. is the cook at work and able to assist with breakfast preparation or service?).
- If cooks aren't available, educators must take responsibility for breakfast service as part of their role. Services will need to accommodate for this by scheduling sufficient staff at these times.

Mealtimes schedules

- Take into account the morning period can involve morning tea and other food opportunities – needs to be looked at holistically for the child and service.
- Timing (e.g. is it a progressive mealtime model?).
- How are breakfasts included in food policy at the service?

Food insecurity

- Providing breakfast can be a safety net for children who may be experiencing food insecurity issues at home.
- Although not all services provide breakfast to all children, having some options available to those who need it is important.

Daily activity levels

Acknowledge the activities the child has on for the day that may impact mealtimes.

Food budget

Ensure that the budget allows for nutritious breakfast options.

Nutrition guidelines

Take into account the contribution that breakfast will bring to daily nutritional requirements and align breakfast provision with nutrition guidelines.

Communication with families

As breakfast is less structured than other mealtimes in ECEC (e.g. not all children receive breakfast, options may be limited), communication with families is critical to:

- Understand whether or not a child has been fed before they arrive at ECEC.
- Determine if breakfast is regularly required.
- Ensure services can accommodate ad hoc family emergencies.
- Assist families to understand if enough food is being packed each day (in lunchbox-based services).
- Determine if breakfast will be brought from home for consumption upon arriving at the service.

BREAKFAST FOODS

Even while kept simple, breakfast is an opportunity to provide a variety of tasty options across the five food groups.

- As a minimal breakfast that provides nutritional quality, offer wholegrain-based cereals (e.g. wheat biscuits, oats) with dairy (e.g. milk, yoghurt, or alternatives).
  - If possible, cereals should be high-fibre, minimally processed, and iron fortified.
  - If choosing packaged cereals, look for options that are low in added sugars (less than 15g of sugar per 100g if it does not contain dried fruit; less than 25g sugar per 100g if dried fruit is an ingredient in the cereal).
  - Providing a side of fruit will create a more balanced meal.
- Pre-planning allows for quick and easy breakfast options, which don't require cooking in the morning, beyond simple cereals (e.g. vegetable frittata, overnight oats, savoury breakfast muffins, etc). This also allows for acknowledgement and support for breakfast options aligned with cultural preferences.

Breakfast ideas

Wholegrain or wholemeal toast with spread or topping: Nutrient dense spreads (e.g. ricotta, avocado, roasted pumpkin) or toppings (e.g. cheese on toast, baked beans on toast)

Cereals with dairy (and fruit):

- Wheat biscuits (e.g. Weet-bix™)
- Oats/porridge (with fresh or frozen fruit)
- Overnight oats (with fruit and yoghurt)
- Muesli

Other:

- Pre-made savoury muffins
- Cold, hard boiled eggs
- Vegetable frittata

BREAKFAST AND RESPONSIVE FEEDING

Although the flow and structure of breakfast may be different to other mealtimes, responsive feeding practices should still remain consistent and deliberate:

- Offer breakfast for all children who arrive during the breakfast service window, allowing children to decide if they are hungry and would like to eat.
- Create a space where children can sit and eat relatively calmly where possible.
- Ensure children are seated and supervised whilst eating and drinking to reduce the risk of choking.

Allow self-serving of breakfast options, to support self-regulation, or provide smaller portions at first and allow 'seconds' for those that wish to have more.

- ⚠ **For children with food allergies, follow individualised allergy care plans, ensure they are given the right food that is safe for them to eat. Two staff members should check and sign off that the right food is given to the right child with food allergy.**
- For high-risk foods (e.g. milk, yoghurt), minimise the amount of time they spend at room temperature.

If a child is hungry before or after the set breakfast time, ensure nourishing options are available to them.

IS BREAKFAST PART OF MENU AND MEAL ASSESSMENT?

As breakfast provision is optional and often less structured, it is generally not assessed in the same way as other mealtimes. However, when it is offered, it is an important contribution to a child's daily intake and energy levels at the start of the day. If providing breakfast, consideration should be given to:

- Clearly define who is responsible for preparation and service.
- Appropriate portion sizes, as breakfast is a full meal.
- Document what is available on the menu if it is a regular offering.



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A project funded by Healthway and delivered by Edith Cowan University.

Morning tea and afternoon tea

MENU PLANNING

Morning tea and afternoon tea are both important opportunities to create a balanced daily menu in conjunction with lunch (main meal) which meets the recommended number of serves from each food group for all children. Considerations when planning include:

- Thinking of this as a mini-mealtime (meaning a variety of options and food groups can be offered).
- Morning tea, lunch, and afternoon tea combine to form a standard menu which is assessed against the Australian Dietary Guidelines, so it is important to consider it:
  - in relation to the main lunch meal.
  - in terms of meeting and balancing 5 foods groups across the day.

MORNING AND AFTERNOON TEA TIMING

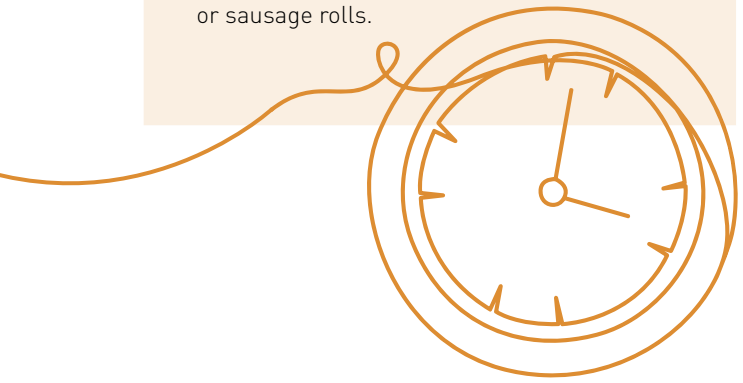
- Services can decide what mealtime approach works best for their context.
  - For many services, Morning Tea starts at around 9am, with Afternoon Tea provided at 2pm-3pm.
  - If following a progressive approach, these options may be available for up to an hour, with children free to choose if, and how much, they would like to eat.

MORNING AND AFTERNOON TEA FOODS

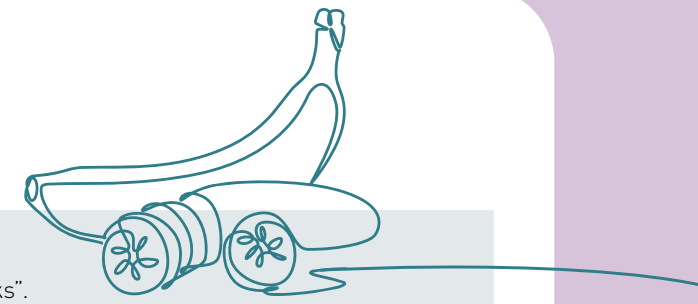
Morning and afternoon tea are a great opportunity to provide children with foods and food groups which may not appear elsewhere on the menu that day.

Some key considerations:

- Include a vegetable option in at least morning or afternoon tea, such as:
  - Fruit and vegetable platter (only offer a platter if all foods on the platter are suitable for any children with food allergies).
  - Legume based dips (e.g. hummus, white bean dip).
  - Vegetable based fritters.
- Offer ½ cup milk at morning or afternoon tea, not at both.
- When providing sweet options, select low sugar foods, such as fruit-based muffins, unflavoured yoghurt with fresh fruit pieces.
- When providing savoury options, select lower fat and lower salt foods, such as vegetable and herb muffins instead of pastry based pinwheels or sausage rolls.



Other food opportunities



WHEN OTHER FOOD IS NEEDED

This guide uses the term "other food opportunities" instead of "snacks". The usual scheduled mealtimes are morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea, and these are the meals assessed as part of the menu.

The word "snacks" can suggest a focus on packaged foods. The term "other food opportunities" is used to emphasise that these are food opportunities outside the usual routine mealtimes.

There are a variety of reasons other food may be needed, including:

- Children who may still be hungry before or after the scheduled mealtimes (e.g. breakfast, morning tea, lunch, or afternoon tea).
- Toddlers undertaking the transition from infants rooms to toddler rooms (e.g. away from being fed on demand towards structured mealtimes), who will often be hungry at a time that does not match the room's timetable.
- Children who are being picked up late and require additional food before leaving.
  - This can support families' evening routines by preventing the child from being hungry immediately upon leaving the ECEC service..
  - ⚠ **For children with food allergies, follow the set policies and procedures for providing foods for food allergy. All food and drinks for children with food allergy must be labelled with the child's name and their allergy. Two staff members should check and sign off that the right food is given to the right child with food allergy.**

Although generally quick and simple in nature, when planned effectively, other food opportunities can be an important contributor to a child's energy levels and overall dietary intake.

PART OF A CHILD'S OVERALL DAILY INTAKE

- Other food can support children in meeting their recommended number of serves from the five food groups.
  - However, other food opportunities are generally not assessed as part of the broader menu as not all children will be offered them in a structured way.
- Cooks should be allocated time to plan and prepare other food opportunities, similar to the rest of the menu.

MEETING NUTRITIONAL GAPS

- Include calcium-rich foods such as dairy (e.g. unflavoured plain yoghurt, cheese).
- Include vegetables and meat and meat alternatives to complement the daily menu.

REDUCING WORKLOAD IN THE KITCHEN AND ON THE FLOOR

- Make use of leftovers from morning and afternoon tea (e.g. fruit, vegetable platters, baked goods, etc) or lunch options which could be served cold (e.g. meatballs, frittata).
- Leftovers can be saved in the fridge for each room, to be offered again later in the same day. However, to minimise food safety risks, they should not be kept for the next day.
- Other food opportunities generally need to be low effort and ready-to-go for the educators serving them.
- If planned ahead, a 'cook once, eat twice' principal can be used, for example:
  - If making vegetable slice for lunch, cook an additional tray and freeze until needed at a future time.

FOOD SUGGESTIONS

Crackers, preferably wholegrain varieties

- Plain, unflavoured rice crackers can be used for a gluten free option
- Pita crisps can be made in place of crackers
- Cheese and cracker platter

Rice cakes or corn thins

- Rice cake with cream cheese or hummus

Dairy and fruit

- Homemade frozen yoghurt (blend fruits into yoghurt, then freeze)
- Fruit and yoghurt cup
- Fresh, cut fruit pieces

Reflective Questions for Educators

- *How well do we support cooks and food coordinators to undertake the complex responsibilities associated with menu planning, budgeting, food allergen management and food safety?*
- *How do we use mealtimes to support children who may experience food insecurity, varying attendance patterns, developmental transitions, or additional nutritional needs?*
- *When adapting recipes due to budget, seasonal availability, supply chain interruptions, cultural requirements or dietary needs, how do we ensure nutritional quality and food group balance are maintained?*

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