

Healthy eating games & activities

Early childhood services

Games and activities are a great way to teach children about food and healthy eating while having fun at the same time. Play-based learning helps support children's development across many areas such as physical, social, emotional and intellectual.

Embedding games and activities at your centre will help you address National Quality Standard, Quality Area 2.

Through play-based food activities, children have the opportunity to explore and learn about foods in an engaging way, separate from mealtimes.

Food related games and activities are also a great way to expose children to new and non-preferred foods in a fun and encouraging way, especially for fussy eaters or children who are anxious about trying new foods.

The ideas below can be used to engage children in healthy eating experiences, teach them to recognise different foods and encourage them to experiment with new foods, tastes, flavours and textures.

Games and activities

Activity

01



Veggie Guessing Bag

Learning objective

Increase children's recognition and awareness of different vegetables. Children are given the opportunity to learn about new vegetables.

What you'll need

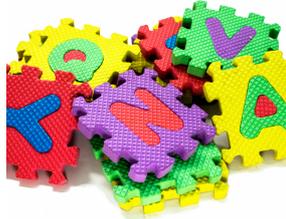
- Selection of vegetables (real or toy)
- A bag or pillow slip

What to do

Place vegetables inside bag or pillow slip. Ask children to feel inside the bag and guess the vegetables inside. You can also blindfold children and place a vegetable from the bag in their hands, ask them to guess what the vegetable is by feeling, smelling or even tasting it.

Games and activities

Activity
02



Letter of the week

Learning objective

This activity provides an opportunity for children to learn about different foods and letters. Increase children's knowledge of different foods, increase their vocabulary and literacy skills.

What you'll need

- A poster, whiteboard or pinboard

What to do

Pick a letter of the week. Discuss with the children all the foods they can think of that start with that letter - draw or write a list. Focus the activity on foods from the 5 food groups (vegetables, fruits, grains, dairy, meats & alternatives). Example: M is for... mushroom, mango, milk, meat.

Activity
03



Pick the odd one out

Learning objective

This activity can help children increase their problem-solving skills and food literacy. Children can learn to identify food compared to non-food items. You can make the game more challenging for older children by teaching them about different food groups.

What you'll need

- A whiteboard, paper to draw or write on, or you can discuss as a class.

What to do

Say or write a series of four words including three fruits or vegetables and one odd word. For example, carrot, potato, cat, onion. Ask the children to identify the odd word. Increase the challenge by choosing three foods from the same food group and one odd one out. For example, celery, capsicum, carrot, yoghurt.

Activity
04



Creating fruit and vegetable people

Learning objective

This activity allows children to learn about different fruits and vegetables, what they look like, what they feel like etc. and express their creativity. Expose children to new fruits and vegetables in a fun and playful way, with no pressure to eat.

What you'll need

- You can use real fruits or vegetables or pictures.
- Use toothpicks to piece real fruits or veggies together to make a standing, three-dimensional figurine

What to do

Chop fruits and/or vegetables into pieces that can be used as facial or body parts. Demonstrate how to use a toothpick to stick pieces together (if creating a 3D person). Allow children to choose which fruits and/or vegetables they would like to use and allow them to use their creativity to create a person or face.

Games and activities

Activity
05



Create a fruit and veggie poster or placemat

Learning objective

This activity encourages children to explore different fruits and vegetables through art and promotes creativity.

What you'll need

- A3 paper
- Pencils or crayons
- Pictures of fruits and vegetables,
- Glue and a laminator.

What to do

Each child gets their own piece of A3 paper to create their own poster or placemat. They can use their creativity to draw their favourites, create a rainbow of different coloured fruits and vegetables or draw a story about fruits and vegetables. Once the poster is completed, they can be laminated to use as placemats at mealtimes or as displays in the classroom.

Activity
06



Foody excursions

Learning objective

Increase children's knowledge and understanding of different parts of the food system and supply chain. Children can learn more about where food comes from.

What you'll need

Foody excursion destinations could include a farm, food market, supermarket, bakery, butcher, food factory, food rescue or food relief organisation.

What to do

Have a clear objective for the excursion something you would like the children to gain from the experience. Follow up the excursion with related activities to build on the children's learning such as class discussions, drawing pictures or tasting foods relating to the excursion. For example, visiting a dairy farm and watching a cow being milked. You can discuss with the class how milk comes from the cow, can be made into yoghurt or cheese and how it makes it to our tables.

Activity
07



20 questions about food

Learning objective

In this activity, children learn how to describe foods and how to ask relevant questions to problem solve and guess the food.

What you'll need

- A list of foods
- You can turn this game into "celebrity heads" by sticking laminated images of fruits and vegetables or other foods from the five food groups onto a headband or paper crown.

What to do

Think of a food and allow children to take it in turns to ask "yes" or "no" questions to help figure out the food. Alternatively, if playing celebrity foodie heads, place the headband on the child's head and attach one of the laminated cards. Allow the child to ask questions of the group to identify their food. You can give extra clues such as the colour, shape, texture etc. until they correctly guess the food.

Games and activities

Activity
08



Australian Guide to Healthy Eating

Learning objective

This activity allows children to learn about the different food groups and which foods go in which group.

What you'll need

- A blank chart of the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating, which you can access [here](#)
- Pencils, pens, textas or crayons

What to do

- Discuss the different food groups, as shown on the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating. Ask the children to draw examples of foods from within each group (they could draw their favourite foods or foods they would like to try).
- You could provide pictures of foods and ask the children to place them in the correct food groups.
- With older children, use this activity to discuss “everyday foods” (those in the 5 food groups) and “sometimes foods” on the bottom right of the page.

Activity
09



Theme tasting day

Learning objective

This activity allows children to increase their knowledge of the variety of foods and allows them to explore new foods with different colours, textures, tastes etc.

What you'll need

Pick a healthy food theme. For example, it could be ‘apple day’. Bring in a variety of different apples for the children to learn about and try if they want to, such as green apples, red apples, dried apples, pureed apple.

What to do

Place the foods along a table and allow children to explore the different foods, by looking, touching and smelling them. You can offer some cut up pieces of the foods to allow children the opportunity to taste a piece if they wish. Discuss with the children the differences or similarities between the different varieties of foods.

Activity
10



Create a food alphabet

Learning objective

This activity provides an opportunity to increase children’s literacy and food literacy skills by foods that start with each letter of the alphabet. This can help increase a child’s vocabulary and their knowledge of different foods.

What you'll need

Print outs of the alphabet and pictures and/or words of different foods.

What to do

Stick the letters up around the room. Ask the children to identify foods to place under each letter. Children could cut out or draw pieces of food and put under the corresponding letter. For example: Aa – apple, asparagus, avocado, apricot, artichoke.

Games and activities

Activity 11



Yummy snack makers

Learning objective

Allow children to create (with pictures) a healthy snack. This allows them to use their creativity and knowledge about foods that go together. It is also an opportunity for children to learn about nutritious snack options.

What you'll need

Print out pictures of individual nutritious snack foods or collect cut outs from a food brochure.

What to do

Allow children to choose foods from the cut outs to put together a tasty, nutritious snack. Some ideas include wholemeal toast with cheese and tomato, fruit with yoghurt, capsicum or carrot sticks with hummus or mashed avocado, scrambled eggs on an English muffin etc.

Activity 12



Planting a herb or veggie garden

Learning objective

Having a veggie or herb garden at your centre is a great way to teach children about where food comes from and how it grows. Children can learn new skills, have fun, play and develop self-confidence by spending time in the garden tending to plants and growing their own food3.

What you'll need

- A place to plant veggies and/or herbs such as pots, planter boxes or a patch in the yard.
- Seeds or plants ready to plant. TIP: include some easy to grow edible plants (tomatoes, peas, beans, snow peas and herbs).

What to do

- Pick where and how you'll establish a vegetable or herb garden, will you have a planter box, or a pot?
- Plant seeds or plants into the designated area and follow care instructions in regard to soil or fertilisers, watering and sunlight requirements.
- For more support and inspiration have a look at [gardening for children](#) or [Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation](#)

Activity 13



Food memory game

Learning objective

This game allows children to develop and improve their attention, concentration, focus and memory skills. Children are given the opportunity to identify, explore and discuss different healthy foods.

What you'll need

Laminated pictures of foods from the five food groups (you'll need two copies of each image). TIP: Try to include some unusual or uncommon fruits and vegetables to increase children's exposure to different foods.

What to do

Spread out all cards face-down. Children then take it in turns to flip two cards over at a time. If they do not match, the cards are turned back over in the same place and it is then the next child's turn. If the cards match, the child gets to keep those two cards. The child with the most matches at the end of the game is the winner. During the game, encourage children to identify and talk about the foods on the cards.

Games and activities

Activity
14



Snap

Learning objective

This activity encourages children to become familiar with foods from the 5 food groups on the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating. This activity also teaches children to take turns and develop attention, concentration and quick reflexes by being the first to call out matching pairs.

What you'll need

Laminated pictures of foods from the five food groups (you'll need two copies of each image). TIP: You could use the same cards from the memory game.

What to do

Children take half the cards each, but don't look at their cards. They take turns placing the cards down in a pile, face up. When the cards match, the children need to call out the name of the matching food. The player who calls out the correct food match first takes the pair and the game continues. The winner of the game is the one with the most pairs.

Activity
15



Food cupboard

Learning objective

This activity allows children time for creative play with pretend foods. They can use their creativity to cook pretend meals or learn about new foods through pictures and toys.

What you'll need

There are a few ways you can do this. You can make a "food cupboard" out of a large piece of cardboard by folding in both side edges to form doors. On the inside you can draw shelves and stick cut outs of food pictures. You could also have a real shelf in your room with toy foods.

What to do

Allow children to organise the foods and stack the shelves. Children can also take the foods out of the shelf to prepare imaginary meals.

Activity
16



Salty potato experiment

Learning objective

Too much salt can make our hearts and kidneys have to work harder. Too much salt can also make us feel thirsty. In this science experiment, children can learn about how salt draws out water from a potato, or our bodies, which makes us thirsty. They can also learn why it is important to not eat too much salt.

What you'll need

- Two small bowls of water
- Salt
- A small potato cut in half

What to do

Fill both bowls with water and place salt in one of the bowls. Label bowls as either "fresh water" or "salty water". Place one half of the potato in the salty water and the other half in the fresh water with the cut side facing down. Leave for 30 minutes and watch what happens! The salt draws the water out of the potato, causing it to shrivel. Explain to the children that just like the potato loses water when put in a salty solution, salty foods and drinks make people thirsty as it draws out water from our bodies, therefore salty foods should only be eaten sometimes and not in large amounts.

Games and activities

Activity 17



Food and different cultures

Learning objective

To increase children's knowledge about foods from different cultures. It may be an opportunity for them to learn about new foods that they haven't seen or heard of before. You can also make food with the children for a fun and engaging way to teach children about cooking as well as different cultures cuisines.

What you'll need

There are a few ways to do this activity! You can discuss food from different cultures. You could also get the children to draw or cut out pictures of foods from different cultures, requiring pencils, crayons, and/or picture cut outs. If you want to cook a cultural dish with the class, you will need to pick a recipe and the foods and equipment required to make it

What to do

Choose a culture and relevant dish or recipe to discuss, research, draw or cook. For example, Japanese and sushi, Ethiopian and injera or Italian and pizza (healthier varieties). You could also align the chosen culture with a specific celebration day!

Activity 18



Food labelling activity

Learning objective

Increase children's food recognition skills. Children can become more familiar with different varieties of fruits and vegetables.

What you'll need

- Fruit and vegetable shapes (use coloured felt, paper or cardboard, or pictures printed on paper).

What to do

Ask the children to label each fruit and/or vegetable as they are placed on a table or board. You can also discuss the foods, asking them about the different colours, telling stories or singing songs.

Activity 19



Sing along

Learning objective

Singing songs can be a fun way to talk about different foods with children. You can find some songs with nutrition messages too.

What you'll need

A food or nutrition related song. Try these fun food songs from Australian performers:

- Watermelon by Justine Clarke
- Fruit salad or Hot potato by The Wiggles
- Wash your face in orange juice by Peter Combe

What to do

Sing along and have fun!

Games and activities

Activity
20



Books and posters

Learning objective

Create ongoing discussions about food using books and stories. You can also display posters about healthy foods and drinks around the room. Check out these suggestions:

Books:

- I'm Having a Rainbow for Dinner, Author: NAQ Nutrition
- We're Growing a Rainbow, Author: NAQ Nutrition Australia
- Jasper McFlea would not eat his tea, Author: Lee Fox, Mitch Vane
- Cool as a Cucumber, Author: Sally Smallwood
- I Can Eat a Rainbow, Author: Annabel Karmel
- Eating the Alphabet, Author: Lois Ehlert
- Oliver's Vegetables, Author: Vivian French
- Are You Eating Something Green? Author: Ryan Sias
- I Will Never Not Ever Eat a Tomato, Author: Lauren Child
- Monsters don't eat broccoli, Author: Jean Barbara Hicks
- Beautiful Bananas, Author: Elizabeth Laird
- Rainbow plate, Author: Dr Preeya Alexander

Posters:

You can display posters of all kinds of foods from the five food groups, such as fruits and vegetables. Some suggestions:

- The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating
- Melbourne Market Fresh Fruit Guide
- Melbourne Market Fresh Vegetable Guide
- Melbourne Market Fresh Asian Herb Guide
- Melbourne Market Fresh Tropical and Exotic Fruit Guide

