

Reducing food waste at your service

Early childhood services

Food waste is a global issue that is a major contributor to climate change. Each year around the world 1.3 billion tonnes of food go to waste. [1]

When it comes to workplaces, food waste in a typical early childhood centre in Victoria accounts for nearly 30% of the waste. [2]

Food wastage can occur for a number of reasons such as:

- not enough time for menu planning
- making too much food
- incorrect storage practices
- fussy eating and children's preferences

Making simple changes to reduce waste can not only help you save time and money, but can also have a positive impact on the environment. According to OzHarvest, the top five most wasted foods in Australia are vegetables, bread, fruit, bagged salads and leftovers of meals. [3]

Our top tips:

Plan your menu!

Menu planning is the most important step in reducing waste.

- Plan your weekly menu for the exact number of children attending your centre using the Menu planning guidelines for long day care. Our free online tool, FoodChecker allows you to assess your menu against these guidelines to make sure you're meeting the amount of food required per child.



01

- FoodChecker will also provide you with information on children's portion sizes and ingredient quantity planning.
- Need some inspiration? FoodChecker also has lots of pre-loaded recipes saved under the "common recipes" tab. These can be selected with a click and included in your menu!
- Lastly, writing a shopping list and purchasing only the types and quantities of food you need will save you time, money and reduce waste. After planning your menu with FoodChecker you can download a shopping list. Simply click 'print shopping list' at the top of the results page.



02

Creating a healthy eating environment

- 'Family style serving' (placing food in the middle of the table for older children to serve themselves) is a great way to promote independence and improve motor skills. It also encourages children to listen to their appetite and learn about food in a positive environment.
- Let children decide how much to serve themselves. You can remind them that it is okay to come back for seconds, so they don't need to overfill their plates at first. This may help to reduce plate waste from children not finishing their meal.
- When serving meals with new or unfamiliar ingredients incorporate familiar or favourite foods to encourage acceptance and minimise waste.
- Educators can model healthy eating behaviours by taking part in mealtimes, talking about and trying new foods with the children, and encouraging positive talk about what they are eating.
- Like to know more? For more information on how to promote a positive, healthy eating environment, have a look at our free online training module 'Promoting healthy eating in long day care'

03

Freezing and using leftovers

- Freezing leftovers is a great way to save food for another time and prevent it ending up as waste. Have a look at the [Food Safety Information Council's guide to Fridge and Freezer Food Safety](#) for how long frozen foods should be kept.
- Soups and casseroles are a great option for using up left over vegetables
- Extra vegetables can be grated or cut into small pieces and frozen to use later in savoury muffins, casseroles or soups
- Making smoothies is a great way to use up leftover fruit...and veggies! Vegetables to use in your smoothies include spinach, cauliflower and zucchini. Frozen fruits and veggies also give smoothies a thicker, creamier consistency.
- Smoothies are also a good way to use up milk or yoghurt before they pass their use by date.
- Bread can be kept in the freezer and used again for toast.



04

Effective storage

- Storing food correctly can help reduce the amount of food that ends up in the bin. It's important to follow food safety guidelines and safe handling of foods to prevent food spoiling and potential food poisoning.
- Protect low-risk foods (pantry items) by placing them in clean, dry and sealed containers once their packaging has been opened. [4]
- Keep high risk foods (foods that require refrigeration) in the fridge before cooking or until they are ready to be eaten. [4]
- Place any cooked high-risk foods back in the fridge or freezer in a sealed container if they are not eaten right away. [4]
- Label containers of cooked food with the date they were made and use within food safety guidelines. [4]



Food held between 5°C and 60°C is known as the temperature danger zone. [4]

05

Compost bins and worm farms

Setting up a compost bin and/or worm farm is a great way to use food scraps and become a more sustainable centre. It is also a great opportunity to involve the children and embed curriculum activities about sustainability. Have a look at these worm farm fact sheets for more information

- [Frankston City worm farm fact sheet - what you don't eat your garden will](#)
- [City of Whitehorse worm farm fact sheet](#)
- [City of Whitehorse worm farm information](#)



References

1. <https://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-mission/our-strategies/victorias-plan-to-halve-food-waste>
2. EPA (unpub.), 'Final Report and Attachments: Industry Specific Data Analysis of Bin Trim Round 1, 2016', Environment Protection Authority, Sydney.
3. <https://www.ozharvest.org/food-waste-facts/#:~:text=The%20top%20five%20most%20wasted,%2C%20bagged%20salad%2C%20and%20leftovers.&text=Over%20five%20million%20people%20experience,year%2C%20one%20quarter%20are%20children>
4. <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/gug-children-toc-gug-children-safety>