



NUTRITION FACT SHEET #3

PLANNING MEAL TIME ROUTINES

Between meal snacks are an essential part of a school age child's diet. Some children will arrive in the afternoon ravenously hungry while for other children it is a time to wind down, relax and make the transition from school to after school care. Snack times need to recognise that children have varied eating schedules and may need different amounts of food and at different times of the day.

A snack is smaller than a meal and can be something to eat, something to drink, or both, depending on the needs of the child. Snacks are important because they give the children energy to run and play and because children don't eat a lot at one time, they may need one or more snacks throughout the day. Snack times are great times to take advantage of a break in children's play for educators to laugh, talk and be together with the children.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Snack/meal routines

The snacks/meals offered at OSHC may depend on the operating hours and needs of the families attending with the type of snacks/meals and the timing of those routines varying greatly from service to service. Services may choose not to provide breakfast due to their operating hours while others may offer it for a set period of time each morning.

The majority of services provide an afternoon snack for the children. Some services have afternoon tea ready as soon as the children arrive while others offer play time first with afternoon tea a bit later. Larger services may split their afternoon tea into age groups and offer them at a different time of the afternoon. Services that are open late may choose to offer a 'late afternoon tea'. This could consist of leftover afternoon tea, crackers with spreads or fruit.

During vacation care and pupil free days opportunities for morning tea and lunch are also provided however children are generally required to bring these meals and snacks from home. Some services may offer special food days as part of their vacation care program.



Eating environment

The eating environments at OSHC services are as individual as the services themselves. Services need to consider the suitability of the area designated for snack/meal time routines as well as the equipment and facilities provided for the children to use. The eating environment should be located in an area that ensures adequate supervision of all children and ideally, in close proximity to food preparation areas. Furniture and utensils should be age appropriate and developmentally suitable to encourage children to be positively involved and enjoy mealtimes.

Changing the eating environment can make meal times an enjoyable and social experience for children and educators. Find a nice shady spot outside, go on a picnic to the oval during vacation care or get the children to create their own cafe using tablecloths and a bit of imagination!



Food provided

Food provided on the service menu should be appropriate for the eating environment therefore when planning the service menu consideration must be given to which snack/meal time it is as well as the style of food being provided. For example, most services offer a self-serve breakfast station for cereals and toasts etc however a cooked option (such as breakfast wraps) may need to be offered in a different area due to closer supervision requirements.

Afternoon teas choices may also depend on the timing of routines and the environment. Offering a make-your-own sandwich bar may not be suitable for afternoon tea during school terms however could be a great learning activity for children during vacation care.

Children's involvement

Children should be included in food preparation and serving processes as a regular part of the OSHC service program. Through providing opportunities for children to be involved in food planning, preparation and serving, services are encouraging the development of life skills therefore increasing children's responsibility for their own health and wellbeing.

When developing the service menu, 'self-serve' style foods are popular, particularly during breakfast routines where children may be able to help themselves to cereal and milk or to butter their own toast. Many afternoon tea menus involve 'buffet-style' foods with children encouraged to serve themselves, under supervision and guidance from educators.



However your service chooses to structure snack/meal time routines, it is important to remember that through providing these opportunities educators can promote healthy eating and encourage the development of children's life skills.

