

Port Melbourne's
Ada Mary A'Beckett
Children's Centre
was the first centre in
Victoria to meet the
Healthy Eating
Advisory Service's
*Menu planning
guidelines for long
day care.*

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Ada Mary A'Beckett provides morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea and drinks to 100 children each day, and is committed to providing healthy food and drinks that help the children learn, play and grow.

The Menu planning guidelines are based on the Australian Dietary Guidelines and include information about serving sizes and the number of servings from each core food group which need to be offered in child care each day.

In meeting the Menu planning guidelines, Ada Mary A'Beckett strengthens their practice against the National Quality Standards regarding the provision of healthy food and drinks.

“Meeting these guidelines is a great achievement for the centre” said Maree Leslie, program manager. “It wasn't a hard process, but it involved us re-thinking how we've done things in the past.”

Maree submitted the centre's menu to the Healthy Eating Advisory Service for assessment to see how close it was to meeting the guidelines. The advisory service provided a report on the menu, detailing areas of the menu that met or were close to meeting the criteria, and some recommended changes for areas that required review.

The main recommendations for Ada Mary A'Beckett Children's Centre were to:

- increase the amount of meat alternatives (legumes, eggs, etc) in vegetarian meals
- increase the amount of vegetables served on some days
- replace cream with evaporated milk in cooking
- swap some white bread/rice/pasta for wholemeal or wholegrain alternatives
- change nachos as a snack to a platter of crackers, cheese and tomato or snack-sized wholemeal sandwiches
- replace commercially-made banana cake with raisin bread.

Following the assessment, the centre showed great dedication to providing nutritious food to the children and implemented the recommendations very quickly. Within a month of receiving the feedback, the necessary changes were made and Maree re-submitted the menu for final assessment. Subsequently, the new menu was approved.

In addition to updating the menu, Ada Mary A'Beckett changed suppliers, which has saved a lot of time as they can now pre-order groceries and have them delivered. It's also much more convenient as the wholesaler is able to source any items they request, even if it's not in their catalogue.

Meeting the Menu planning guidelines will also assist the centre to meet the Healthy Eating and Oral Health Benchmarks of the Healthy Together Achievement Program.

Congratulations to Ada Mary A'Beckett Children's Centre on their superb effort! The Healthy Eating Advisory Service looks forward to seeing many other centres follow in their footsteps.



Q&A with Maree Leslie, Program Manager

How long did the menu review process take?

It took about two months, from when we submitted our initial menu, to the time the new menu was approved.

Did you find it easy to include more vegetables in the weekly menu?

We had to think about how we presented the veggies to the children. At first we tried grating extra vegetables into spaghetti bolognese, but interestingly, we found that keeping the recipe as it was before, and serving it with salad instead, was a more popular way to increase their vegetable intake.

What are the children's favourite foods?

The children's favourite is the vegetarian lasagne. They also like the healthy pasta carbonara, creamy tuna pasta, 'jungle curry' (chicken curry with rice and vegetables) and the chicken and leek shepherd's pie.

What are the children less keen on?

Lettuce isn't our toddlers' favourite, but they'll happily eat beetroot, tomato and other salad vegetables.

How do you get children involved with healthy food?

The older children love being presented with sandwich, wrap or roll ingredients and choosing their own fillings. They love the touch and feel of the ingredients, and this is an important part of familiarising children with new foods and giving them some control and independence.

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