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.

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.

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

The veggie guessing bag

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

What you’ll need
- A selection of different vegetables (they can be real or toy)
- A bag or a pillow slip

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

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, pinboard, or somewhere to write or add pictures to

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, you can discuss, draw or write a list. Focus the activity on foods from the 5 food groups (vegetables, fruits, grains, dairy,
Healthy eating games and activities

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 the food compared to non-food items. You can also make the game more challenging for older children and teach them about different food groups.

What you’ll need
- 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 examples, carrot, potato, cat, onion. Ask the children to identify the odd word. For the more challenging version, choose three foods of the same food group and one that is the odd one out. For example, celery, capsicum, carrot, yoghurt. Ask the children to identify the odd one out and explain why it does not belong with the rest of the group.

Create a fruit and vegetable person

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. Children can be encouraged to eat their vegetable person for morning or afternoon tea if they wish.

What you’ll need
You can use real fruits or vegetables or pictures. You can also use toothpicks to piece real fruits or veggies together to make a standing, three-dimensional figurine, or children can create the picture flat on a plate or piece of paper.

What to do
Chop fruits and/or vegetables into pieces or shapes 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.

Create a fruit and veggie poster or placemat (VegKIT)²

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

What you’ll need
A3 paper, coloured pencils, crayons, cut outs of pictures of fruits and vegetables, glue and a laminator.

What to do
Each child gets their own piece of A3 paper to either draw or use cut outs of fruits and vegetables 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 displays in the classroom.
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
Try to have a clear objective of the excursion in mind, something you would like the children to gain from the experience. You can also 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 then 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.

Blank 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, some pencils, pens, textas or crayons. You can also refer to the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating poster for ideas.

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

Theme tasting day

Learning objective
This activity allows children to increase their knowledge of the wide 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’, then 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. Or you could have ‘tomato day’ and bring in a cherry tomato, large tomato, yellow tomato, green tomato, crushed tomatoes.

What to do
Place the foods along a table and allow children to explore the different foods, by looking at them, touching and smelling. 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 and what they taste, smell and/or feel like.

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 healthy foods.

**What to do**
Stick the letters up around the room. Ask children to help identify healthy foods to place under each letter. You can also add some that the children have missed to teach them about new foods. Children could also cut out or draw pieces of food and put under the corresponding letter. For example: Aa – apple, asparagus, avocado, apricot, artichoke etc.

We are 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.

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 food.

**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 include 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 https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/gardening-for-children
20 questions or celebrity foodie heads

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
Just some healthy foods in your mind for children to guess! You can also turn this game into “celebrity heads” by sticking laminated images of fruits and vegetables or other foods from the 5 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.

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 5 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 on the floor or at a table. 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.

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 5 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.
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.

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, some salt, a small potato cut in half.

What to do
Fill both bowls with water and place salt in one of the bowls. Label both bowls as either “fresh water” or “salty water” so you know which one has the 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 about 30 minutes and watch what happens – The salt draws the water out of the potato, causing it to shrivel. Explain to 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.

Learning about food in 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 a few ways you can do this activity, you can discuss food from different cultures which would not require any props, food or equipment. You could also get the children to draw or cut out pictures of foods from different cultures, in which case you’d need pencils, crayons, textas 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 can align the chosen culture with a specific celebration day if you wish.

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 cut out from coloured felt or from pictures printed on paper.

What to do
Ask 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 about the fruits and vegetables.

Sing a song about food and nutrition
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.

You can search 'fun food songs for children' on the internet for more ideas.

What to do
Sing a-long and have fun!

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. Have a look at the following 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 and 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 include

- 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

Useful references

5. All about food: A resource for services caring for children, Queensland Health, 2006