

Healthy Eating Advisory Service

Food, mood and learning outcomes

Schools

Food plays an important role in ensuring students are happy, healthy and resilient.

Food, mood and learning outcomes

The link between food, mood and learning

We know that eating in line with the Australian Dietary Guidelines helps support children's growth and development.

Children do best when they eat a variety of foods from the five food groups, including:

- fruit
- vegetables and legumes/beans
- grains (cereal foods)
- lean meat and poultry, fish, and/or alternatives
- milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or their alternatives

Foods high in added sugar, salt or saturated fat are known as discretionary foods. Examples include lollies, chips and fried foods. Eating too many foods from this group has been linked to emotional and behavioural issues in children and adolescents. [1]

Research shows that eating a balanced and nutritious diet can improve mood, concentration, and memory [2,3,4] and enhance learning. [5]

Why are schools important places to make changes?

Schools can play a key role in influencing healthy eating habits. We know that:

- students can eat over a third of their daily energy intake during school hours! [6]
- most primary school students buy food and drinks from the canteen at least once a week. [3]

It is important to improve the nutrition intake of school age children as in Victoria:

- most children do not meet the recommended daily serves of vegetables
- half of their diet is made up of discretionary foods [8].

By encouraging vegetable intake at school and including more nutritious options at the canteen, we can help children eat a nutritious diet, and improve their overall wellbeing.

It's never too late to encourage healthier eating habits in a positive way. Childhood and adolescence is a key time to build lifelong habits and learn how to enjoy food.

Get started today!

You can start to improve students' learning outcomes and mental wellbeing by promoting healthy eating throughout your school environment.

Ideas to get you started:

- Provide a healthy canteen menu in line with the Canteens, Healthy Eating and Other Food Services Policy.
- Plant a vegetable garden and use the produce in cooking activities and the canteen menu. View the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation program for more ideas.
- Use non-food rewards in the classroom to help students develop healthy relationships between food and behaviour.
- Encourage parents to provide nutritious lunches (access our Healthy lunchbox fact sheet here).
- Explore Vic Kids Eat Well, an exciting statewide initiative focused on transforming food and drink environments where kids spend their day.
- Discover Healthy Places Healthy Futures, a supportive initiative helping services to become healthier places.
- Make sure water is freely available and allow students to have a water bottle in class.
- Engage all school staff to become positive role models by eating healthy foods and drinking water at school.
- Schedule 'brain food' breaks during the day to encourage students to eat fruit and vegetables in class.
- Source fresh produce from your local community, such as local markets and food growers.



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