Establishing a nutrition policy

These days, an increasing number of children are cared for outside of the home. In this respect, early childhood facilities have a large responsibility for ensuring children get the best possible start to life. This is reinforced under the National Childcare Accreditation Council’s Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) and the Childcare (Childcare Facilities) Regulation 1991.

For oral health promotion to be effective in your facility, you need a nutrition policy and an oral health policy. These two items will help with accreditation, licensing requirements and best practice.

Your facility will also need to support parents/carers in their efforts to teach children new oral health skills and habits. This section provides everything you will need to do this.

Aims

• To create an early childhood environment that supports oral health curriculum
• To create a nutrition policy appropriate for the early childhood setting
• To establish a daily toothbrushing program
• To support parents in their role as oral health educators.

The early childhood years are a time when food habits are developed, many of which will be retained throughout life. Good nutrition is especially important for children because they need extra nutrients for growth and development. A well nourished body is essential for physical and emotional health and contributes to readiness for learning.

Happy Teeth includes two sample nutrition policies. The first is for facilities where children bring food from home and the second is for facilities that prepare food for children in long day care. These policies are adapted from Caring for Children: Food Nutrition and Fun Activities, an excellent practical guide to meeting food and nutrition needs of children in care (see Books in the Additional resources section for details).

Remember to give parents an opportunity to be involved in the process. Use the letters on pages 13 and 14 to let them know about the healthy changes that you have planned.
Nutrition policy for facilities where food is brought from home

Children are growing rapidly, developing new skills and learning every day. At this stage of life, their need for good nutrition is at a peak. It is vital that the food children eat is full of enough vitamins, minerals and other important nutrients. Feeding children poor quality food deprives them of vital nutrients at a time when their growing bodies and growing intellect require them most. The children who get the food they need will be the ones that grow and develop best.

Goal

• To supervise and assist children to receive safe and nutritious food (the term ‘food’ includes all food and drinks).

Strategies

• Parents/carers will receive advice on both suitable and unsuitable food to pack for their children.
• Water will be available at all times and children will be encouraged to drink it regularly.
• Any dairy products provided by the facility will be reduced fat.
• Emergency food, such as breads/cereals or fruit and vegetables, will always be available for children who have brought insufficient food or are hungry between meals.
• Parents/carers will be advised daily when their child is not eating well.
• Children will wash their hands with soap or liquid cleanser before handling food or eating.
• Food will be refrigerated and served at safe temperatures.
• Safe food handling will be reinforced throughout the facility.
• Special occasions will be celebrated with a variety of healthy and treat foods.

Goal

• To provide an eating environment that supports family and multicultural values.

Strategies

• Staff members will sit with children at meal time.
• Food will not be used as a form of punishment either by its provision or denial.
• Multicultural differences will be recognised and accepted.
• Food awareness activities will be chosen from a variety of cultures.
• Special occasions may be celebrated with culturally-appropriate foods.
• Parents/carers will be invited to at least one food occasion each year.

Goal

• To teach children about food and nutrition.

Strategies

• Food awareness activities will be included in the facility program.
• Children will be encouraged to get practical experience in food preparation.
• The foods being eaten by the children will be discussed with them.
• Heights and weights of children will be measured as an activity to demonstrate physical growth.

Adapted from: Caring for Children: Food Nutrition and Fun Activities, NSW Health Department, 1993
Nutrition policy for facilities preparing food for children

Children are growing rapidly, developing new skills and learning every day. At this stage of life, their need for good nutrition is at a peak. It is vital that the food children eat is full of enough vitamins, minerals and other important nutrients. Feeding children poor quality food deprives them of vital nutrients at a time when their growing bodies and growing intellect require them most. The children who get the food they need will be the ones that grow and develop best.

Goal

- To provide children with meals and mini-meals (snacks) that are safe, appetising, consistent with the *Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents* and provide 50 per cent of the recommended daily intake for all nutrients.

Strategies

- Only milk and water will be provided for children to drink.
- Milk will be served with both morning and afternoon tea.
- All dairy products will be reduced fat.
- Only soy milks that are fortified with calcium will be used as a substitute for cow’s milk.
- Children will have access to breads/cereals or fruit/vegetables if they are hungry between meals.
- Vegetables will be included as often as possible.
- Water will be available at all times and children will be encouraged to drink it regularly.
- If fruit juice is provided by the facility for special occasions, it will be diluted with water 50:50.
- Children will be allowed to have second helpings of fruit or milk based desserts.
- If children have not eaten their main meal, they may still receive dessert.
- Parents/carers will be advised daily when their child is not eating well.
- Parents/carers of children on special diets will be asked to provide details of food needs.
- Gloves will be worn or food tongs used by any staff directly handling food.
- Children will wash their hands with soap or liquid cleanser before handling food or eating.
- Food will be refrigerated and served at safe temperatures.
Goal
• To provide an eating environment that supports family and multicultural values.

Strategies
• Staff members sit with the children at meal times and share the same food.
• Food will not be used as a form of punishment either by its provision or denial.
• Recipes and food awareness activities will be chosen from a variety of cultures.
• Special occasions may be celebrated with culturally appropriate foods.
• Parents/carers will be invited to at least one food occasion each year.
• Recipes for food served in the facility will be available to parents.
• The weekly menu will be on display to parents/carers and staff.

Goal
• To teach children about food and nutrition.

Strategies
• Food awareness activities will be included in the facility program.
• Children will be encouraged to get hands-on experience in food preparation.
• The foods being served to children will be discussed with them.
• Heights and weights of children will be measured as an activity to demonstrate physical growth.
• Children will be shown how to swish with water to remove food from their teeth following a meal.

Adapted from: Caring for Children: Food Nutrition and Fun Activities, NSW Health Department, 1993
Healthy teeth for life

Throughout this manual, we’ve discussed how important the development of good habits are in the early years. In fact, many of the habits developed during this time will be retained throughout life. Happy Teeth includes an oral health policy sample and toothbrushing policy. Be sure to involve parents/carers in your oral health and toothbrushing program development.

Healthy teeth and gums are important for general good health. They play an important part in the digestion of food, correct speech and in developing self-confidence by enhancing our appearance. Keeping baby teeth until they fall out naturally is also important for the maintenance of space for the adult teeth.

Dental disease

Dental caries (tooth decay) and gum disease (gingivitis) are the two most common dental diseases. They are both caused by plaque.

Plaque is a sticky colourless layer of harmful bacteria and food particles, which constantly forms and adheres to teeth. The bacteria in plaque react with the sugar in food to produce an acid, which attacks both the tooth surface and gums causing disease.

It is important to note these bacteria can be passed from one person to another, especially in early childhood. A likely transfer occurs when a parent/carer tastes food from a spoon, or sucks a dummy or bottle teat prior to giving it to an infant. Since a baby is born without the bacteria that cause tooth decay, these practices can increase a baby’s risk of future tooth decay.

The mechanical removal of plaque helps to maintain strong healthy teeth and gums by reducing the number of bacteria and food particles available to produce acid.

The use of fluoride toothpaste when brushing strengthens the tooth surface against acid attack and replaces minerals lost from the tooth surface from recent acid attacks. Fluoride toothpaste is available in both low (childrens) and regular strength. The lower fluoride strength is most appropriate for children. The table below shows when to introduce fluoride toothpaste.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IS YOUR LOCAL WATER SUPPLY FLUORIDATED?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth to six months - brush your child’s teeth without toothpaste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six months to five years - brush your child’s teeth with a small pea-sized amount of low fluoride toothpaste</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Developing a toothbrushing routine from when the baby teeth first appear in the mouth ensures brushing becomes a life time habit. It is essential this habit is developed and reinforced by parents/carers in the home. Keep toothpaste out of reach of small children.

Fluoridated water helps to protect teeth against decay in people of all ages, from very young children to the elderly. Water fluoridation is the adjustment of fluoride in drinking water to a level that provides the ideal, constant “repair kit” for teeth.
Oral health

Aim
To provide children with an environment that supports and encourages good oral health attitudes and behaviours from an early age as identified in QIAS, Quality Area 8: Health Principles.

Whole facility
Strategies
All staff will ensure parents/carers and children are provided with appropriate, consistent and up-to-date information on the development and maintenance of good oral health by:
- regularly providing parents/carers with appropriate Happy Teeth pamphlets
- providing water with meals and encouraging swishing of mouth with water after eating
- encouraging fruit and vegetable consumption
- accessing the Happy Teeth resource kit in conjunction with programming
- director and staff regularly informing parents/carers about the facility procedure/policy in relation to dental care, nutrition and general hygiene (Germ Busters Early Childhood) through newsletters, verbal communication and parent/carer meetings
- the active involvement of staff in oral health professional development opportunities and educator updates as provided in Happy Teeth
- display dental health information and resources for parents/carers during Dental Awareness Month (August).

Babies and toddlers
Strategies
All staff will ensure parents/carers are provided with appropriate, consistent and up-to-date information related to assisting children to develop and maintain healthy teeth and gums by:
- encouraging and supporting mothers to breastfeed
- ensuring no bottles in bed
- ensuring no flavoured milk, fruit juice, cordial or softdrink in baby bottles
- ensuring no honey, sweetener or any other substance on dummies
- introducing a cup from about six months of age
- discouraging use of bottles from one year of age.

Kindy and preschool
Strategies
A toothbrushing program/oral health program is implemented and staff actively involve children and families in promoting good oral health by:
- encouraging children to discuss nutritional values and links to oral health through regular meal-time discussions
- teaching children to care for teeth and gums through regular nutrition conversations and correct brushing technique
- providing children with individual toothbrush, low fluoride toothpaste and bag or case (toothbrush to be replaced every three months)
- supervising children while they brush teeth each day, following steps outlined in Happy Teeth (page 40).