Limit ‘Sometimes’ Foods Background Paper

In consultation with their expert advisory panel, this background paper has been developed by researchers at The Royal Children’s Hospital and Murdoch Childrens Research Institute.

Kids – ‘Go for your life’ recommend parents and carers limit child (6 months to 12 years) access to and consumption of ‘sometimes’ food and drink. The Victorian education department also encourages schools to limit the provision of ‘occasionally’ foods in accordance with the ‘Go for your life’ Healthy Canteen and Food Services Policy.

The Australian Guide to health eating describes foods that do not fit into the five food groups. These ‘extra’ foods are not essential for providing nutrients the body needs and may contain excessive fat, salt and sugar. Therefore ‘extra’ foods can contribute large amounts of energy and potentially harm a growing body. This group of extra foods may be referred to as ‘sometimes’ or ‘occasionally’ foods, or ‘treat’ foods. ‘Occasionally’ foods in the school setting need to be limited to twice a school term. ‘Sometimes’ foods in the family setting will vary with a family, but guidance may suggest a limit around once a week or less. ‘Sometimes’ food and drinks can add variety to the diet, however, many Victorian children are consuming too much fat, sugar and salt and need to limit ‘sometimes’ foods.

‘Everyday’ food choices for children are those which provide nutrients needed for growth and development; they come from a variety of the basic food groups including vegetables and legumes, fruits, cereals, milk and milk products, lean meat and water.

‘Sometimes’ food and drinks to limit
‘Sometimes’ foods include confectionary and chocolate, biscuits, chips, bars and other packaged snacks high in fat or sugar, fast food and takeaway meals. All drinks aside from water and unflavoured reduced fat milk (for children aged 2 years and over) are considered to be ‘sometimes’ drinks due to the high sugar and fat content of these beverages. Sometimes foods need to be limited in both consumption frequency and serving size.

A balanced dietary intake- ‘everyday’ food and drinks for children
The Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia support enjoying a wide variety of nutritious foods with care taken to limit fats, sugars and salt (‘sometimes’ foods) in the diet.
Limit saturated fat and moderate total fat intake
The 1995 National Nutrition Survey\(^5\) highlighted children aged 8 to 11 years eat too much total fat (33.4 per cent of total energy) and saturated fat (14.3 per cent). For children aged 5-15 years, dietary fat should provide around 30 per cent of energy, with not more than 10 per cent of total fat from saturated fat. In early infancy 50 per cent of energy uptake is provided from fat, rich in essential fatty acids required by the body for cell structure and development of the central nervous system. While families are encouraged to limit fats in their diets, extremely low fat diets are not encouraged for children.

Consume only moderate amounts of sugars and foods containing added sugars
Soft drink and cordial are prominent sources of refined sugar in the diets of Australian children\(^6\). Health problems occurring with excessive sugar intake including excess weight gain\(^7\), small appetite, tooth decay, fussy eating, diarrhoea, malabsorption and failure to thrive\(^8,9\).

Tooth decay can be an issue from infancy and may be caused by baby sucking on a bottle for long periods\(^10\). The feeding bottle should only be used for milk and water, and a feeding cup can be introduced to baby by six to eight months. Sugar-containing food and drinks should be moderated throughout childhood\(^11\).

Choose foods low in salt
Little is known about the current intake of salt in Australian children. However, we do know that processed foods are the largest source of salt in the diet of Australian adults. In early life, ingestion of foods high in salt can stress kidneys which are not fully developed and cause illness and even death. Freshly-prepared baby foods, without added salt and canned baby foods which have strict limits on the amount of sodium they may contain are suitable for young infants. Good eating practices are established early in life. Therefore, continuing to limit the consumption of high salt food and processed foods as children grow older, can avoid the development of high blood pressure in later life.

Limit ‘sometimes’ foods from an early age
Food preferences are learned via experiences with food and eating\(^12\) and emerge early in life. Important factors in the development of children’s food preferences and eating behaviours are food availability and accessibility, parental role modelling, television viewing and child parent interactions around food\(^13\). Healthy eating and limiting ‘sometimes’ foods can be established from the time solids are introduced. At this time parents and carers need to make nutritious food and drink choices available in adequate amounts and by role modelling healthy eating. Rejection of new foods, including healthy foods, is common and normal in children. When healthy foods are introduced and refused, they should be reoffered, as infants will regularly reject new foods (neophobia) with preference increasing after repeated exposure to novel food\(^14\). Feeding practices commonly employed by parents, such as restricting foods considered to be nutritionally undesirable, also using foods as rewards, inadvertently
promotes behaviours counter to their intentions\textsuperscript{15} and are therefore not recommended. Involving children in selecting and preparing nutritious foods to eat together as a family is recommended.

\textbf{‘Sometimes’ food advertising to children}

Children’s food and drink preferences are influenced by television advertising as well as road sign advertisements, supermarket product placements and promotions, and peer pressure\textsuperscript{16}. The proportion of ads promoting non-nutritious foods range from 50 to 80 per cent\textsuperscript{17} of food advertised during children’s programs\textsuperscript{18}. Limiting television viewing time or sitting and discussing what children are watching on the television can help to increase awareness of subliminal targeting of inappropriate food advertisements.

\textbf{Limit ‘sometimes’ food and drink in school and early childhood settings}

On school days, children on average consume 37 per cent of energy intake at school and most children bring their lunch from home\textsuperscript{19}. Victorian students (65 per cent) have been found to have high fat, salt, sugar packaged snacks at least once a week, with close to 20 per cent of children usually having these snacks once a day or more. For the 14 per cent of children who purchase foods from the school canteen, the Victorian public school ‘Go for your life’ Healthy Canteen and Food Services policy guides the types of foods made available to children based on nutrient density. The policy uses the descriptor ‘occasionally’ to describe foods with high energy, low nutritional value, high in either saturated fat, added salt or added sugar. From 2007, high sugar content drinks should not be supplied through school food services. From 2009, no confectionary should also be supplied through school food services.

Healthy eating policies are encouraged throughout all early childhood settings. For children who spend a full day in care, it is expected that at least 50 percent of their recommended dietary intake for nutrients is provided\textsuperscript{20}. Examination of menus from centres participating in Start Right Eat Right, 2005 – 2007\textsuperscript{21}, showed 33 per cent offered main courses and 44 per cent offered snacks and or desserts considered to be high in fat and or sugar, two or more days per fortnight. After completing Start Right Eat Right training and implementing healthy eating policies, high fat and or sugar meals and snacks were reduced to three per cent and ten percent respectively. It is important early childhood settings contribute to the development of healthy eating habits by providing a variety of foods for children to taste and enjoy.

\textbf{Healthy food fast}

‘Sometimes’ foods also describes foods high in fat, sugar and salt and often energy-dense, which are prepared and purchased outside the home and used as part or in place of a home-prepared meal. Food prepared outside the home is somewhat higher in total fat than food prepared at home, whether eaten at home or away from home\textsuperscript{22}. In Victoria, a study found, most children had fast food once a week or less. On days when fast food is eaten, children’s energy levels are increased, with fruit and vegetables intake decreased when compared to days on which fast food is not consumed\textsuperscript{23}. High fat, salt, sugar, take away or fast food options need to be limited.
to only ‘sometimes’, with healthy, convenient options selected by the family most often. Healthier, convenient family food options may include, grilled fish and salad pack, vegetable or lean meat burger with salad, pasta with tomato based sauce and green salad.

This statement is to be reviewed in 12 months from date of release.

1 Department of Education and Training, ‘Go for your life’ Healthy Canteen Kit, Melbourne, 2006.
17 Young Media Australia, Food advertising (fact sheet), developed August 2003, available online www.youngmedia.org.au
18 Children, Youth and Women’s Health Service, TV Food Ads Educate and Advocate, a whole school approach to television food advertising and healthy eating, 2007.
22 Gibbons KL, Role of fats the primary school years, MJA 2002 (176) S115-S116.