4.3 Health Promotion in Schools

4.3.4 Promoting Healthy Eating in Schools

Background

Schools are ideally placed to promote healthy eating through the formal school curriculum, the school environment and via a variety of policies and practices. A health promoting school can positively influence knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviour of students, enhancing short term and long term health outcomes.

Poor nutrition can lead to: overweight and obesity; coronary heart disease; stroke; Type 2 diabetes; bowel conditions; dental caries; hypertension; high blood cholesterol; and nutrient deficiencies, including osteoporosis and anaemia.

Children need good nutrition to develop and grow to their potential, to be protected against chronic disease in later life, and to participate in cultural life around food. Educating them about healthy eating, preparing food and the social role of food will help promote good eating habits into adulthood.

General principles

Comprehensive strategies (including education, environmental changes and policy development) should be employed for maximum healthy eating results. The community health nurse may be able to assist the school in initiating and/or developing these strategies to improve healthy eating knowledge, skills and behaviour of school students and their families.

NHMRC Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents and the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating can be supported by schools through development of school policies covering; the school canteen; vending machines; fundraising activities; sponsorships and special events and by strengthening nutrition education within the school curriculum.

When developing policies, a comprehensive approach would include: forming a policy committee, providing information for the whole school community, identifying measures for healthy eating improvement within the school, and launching, publicising, monitoring and evaluating the policy.

School based healthy eating promotion should focus on: the positive outcomes of good nutrition rather than emphasise obesity or poor diet; support student and family initiatives to encourage healthy eating; and build partnerships between school, community organisations and/or business.

The NHMRC (2003) Dietary Guidelines recommend children and adolescents should be encouraged to:

- Eat plenty of vegetables, legumes and fruits.
• Eat plenty of cereals (including breads, rice, pasta and noodles), preferably wholegrain.
• Include lean meat, fish, poultry and/or alternatives.
• Include milks, yoghurts, cheeses and/or alternatives, reduced-fat varieties should be encouraged for children over 2 years of age and adolescents.
• Choose water as a drink.

Care should be taken to:
• Limit saturated fat and moderate total fat intake. Choose foods low in salt.
• Consume only moderate amounts of sugars and foods containing added sugars.

The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating recommends enjoying a variety of foods every day.

**Role of community health staff**

In practice, school nurses should work collaboratively with other Community Health, Public and/or Population Health staff (e.g. health promotion officers) as part of a School Health Service team. Whilst community health nurses are not solely responsible for health promotion within schools, it is acknowledged that school staff frequently turn to the community health nurse for guidance and advice on effective school health promotion approaches.

This guideline has suggested promotion of healthy eating strategies suitable for the school setting. Depending on capacity and existing expertise within the school community, the school nurse’s role in developing or delivering these strategies can vary greatly between being a leader, a catalyst for action or a point of reference for advice to others within the school community.

The strategies in this guideline have been structured around the three major components of the Health Promoting Schools Framework. Below are some suggestions which may assist nurses to identify what their role within each of these components may be.

| **School curriculum, teaching and learning** | o Actively seek to be informed about and support curriculum in learning outcome areas.  
o Advocate where there are gaps in curriculum areas.  
o Provide resources and information to assist teachers in delivery of teaching and learning. |
| **School environment, policies and practices** | o Advocate developing healthy eating policies.  
o Assist in the development of school policies which have an impact on health. |
Partnerships with the community

- Be aware of existing services and support personnel within the school and wider community.
- Promote a coordinated and holistic approach to health related issues.
- Advocate for the involvement of parents, health professionals and other members of the wider community in promotion of healthy eating.

Curriculum, teaching and learning

- Health, Physical Education, Science plus other learning areas – incorporate healthy eating into the curriculum of all year levels in fun and creative ways.
- Professional development for teachers, School Health Service staff and other support staff (e.g. canteen managers) to teach and promote healthy eating (see ‘Useful Resources’ below for examples).
- Curriculum resources (see ‘Useful Resources’ below for examples).
- Free ‘Train the Trainer’ training for School and Health Service staff by the Cancer Council WA in nutrition program ‘Parental Guidance Recommended’ (PGR).
- Provide healthy cooking classes.

School environment, policies and practices

- Develop a whole school nutrition policy.
- Curriculum and School Programs – reinforce and be consistent with learning outcomes.
- Develop a Healthy School Food Service policy and menu (e.g. canteens, breakfast programs, external local school food service providers etc).
- Policies related to healthy eating should include commitment to healthy fundraising options.
- Provision of healthy snacks in after school care services.
- Become a registered Crunch and Sip school.
- Promote consumption of fruit and vegetables – e.g. school vegetable garden program, subsidised fruit at canteen, healthy lunchboxes etc.
- Promote healthy drinks – ensure water fountains are clean, easily accessed, cool and well maintained. Limit access to and discourage consumption of high energy drinks.

Partnerships with the community

- Seek school and local business support for school breakfast programs. Information sessions for the whole school community.
• Seek representation and/or input from the whole school community for development and implementation of healthy eating policies (e.g. teachers, Community Health staff, parents, students, canteen managers etc).

• Involve parents with student/family take-home activities or cooking assignments.

• Raise awareness of healthy eating behaviours and school policies via school newsletters. Include healthy eating articles on a regular basis.

• Disseminate information, and support or endorse community based opportunities to develop budget-wise healthy eating and active living skills for parents, e.g. run workshops for parents.

• Increase awareness of and promote healthy lunchboxes to parents/carers. Create linkages with parents and the broader community.

• Participate in annual Health Promotion events (e.g. Healthy Schools week, World Diabetes Day, Fruit ‘n Veg Month etc.).

Related professional development

• The MindMatters Professional Development Calendar provides details of free MindMatters professional development activities. http://www.mindmatters.edu.au/professional_development/professional_development_landing

Related policies, procedures and guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.2.3 Health promotion sub-policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2 Health promoting school model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.5 Promoting physical activity in schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.6 Promoting mental health and resilience in schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.10 Promoting healthy body image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.3.4 Early identification and management of eating disorders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Useful resources


Fact sheets from the National ‘Go for 2 & 5’ campaign including Fruit and Vegetable serves; processed Fruit and Vegetables; and Tips to include more fruit and veg in your
WA School Canteens Association - Star Canteen Accreditation Program (StarCAP) and a list of Star Choice Registered Products to assist canteens meet accreditation requirements. [http://www.waschoolcanteens.org.au/](http://www.waschoolcanteens.org.au/)


National Heart Foundation – phone 1300 36 27 87 or got to [http://www.heartfoundation.com.au](http://www.heartfoundation.com.au) and click on ‘For Kids’ for information, resources and fun ideas for promoting healthy eating and physical activity in schools and for out of school hours care.


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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Owner</th>
<th>Portfolio</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director Statewide Policy Unit.</td>
<td>School aged children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**References**


