

Eating at SA Montessori

Our Goals:

- To hold and respect a holistic view of health and well-being,
- To support children to develop a positive relationship with food,
- To balance respect for the agency of the family with our responsibility to promote a healthy lifestyle,

Food provided by the centre

“Early childhood settings provide many opportunities for children to experience a range of healthy foods and to learn about food choices from educators and other children.” (EYLF, pg 45)

We provide opportunities for children to engage in food preparation, cooking and tasting experiences as part of our Practical Life curriculum. We also provide positive and uplifting opportunities to learn about food, nutrition and cooking within our learning programs and we promote a range of fun physical activities.

Children are encouraged to access snacks during the morning and afternoon to help them maintain a stable energy level throughout the day.

When choosing food that we offer to children, we aim to:



- Focus on freshness and incorporate seasonal change,
- Embrace ‘eating a rainbow’ of colours to reflect different fruits and vegetables,
- Balance security with novelty by offering familiar favourite foods alongside opportunities to try new things and explore a range of textures and tastes,
- Be mindful of minimising additives, including added sugar or salt,
- Include foods that we know children are likely to eat enthusiastically to refuel energy,
- Focus on food as fuel, and avoid stigmatising or shaming any food types or eating habits.
- Look for opportunities for children to actively participate in food preparation,
- Celebrate diversity by exploring foods from various countries and cultures.

Food provided by families

“Educators acknowledge the histories, cultures, languages, traditions, religions, spiritual beliefs, child rearing practices and lifestyle choices of families.” EYLF, pg 16

We are a ‘lunchbox centre’, which means we ask families to provide lunch. It is our experience that children prefer food prepared from home which caters to their individual and cultural preferences. There are many reasons why we ask families to pack lunch. It is one of the ways that we embrace diversity within our setting, as children learn about different foods and cultures from one another during mealtimes. Eating lunch from home also improves safety for children with allergies and intolerances. Having a lunchbox also helps prepare children for their transition to primary school. Perhaps most importantly, reconnecting with home and family by eating their lunch also provides children with an emotional boost. This ensures that lunchtime fuels their bodies and their social and emotional well-being.

We greatly appreciate it if parents are able to minimise the amount of disposable packaging present in their lunchboxes. As part of our deep commitment to sustainable practices, we encourage the use of reusable packaging and the presence of ‘nude foods’ (eg. unwrapped whole fruits). We recognise this is not always possible, but we thank families for considering this.

Lunchboxes are stored according to Food Safety requirements. We are able to reheat food if children or families would prefer that it is consumed warm.

We encourage families to be mindful about the foods that they choose for their child’s lunchbox as “*good nutrition is essential to healthy living and enables children to be active participants in learning*” (EYLF). We understand that parents and families have diverse perspectives and influences in relation to their child’s food and eating habits. We trust parents and families to determine their child’s dietary needs.

We endeavour to avoid nuts in our environment and we ask that you **do not pack nuts or nut products**. Educators may set aside food from a child’s lunchbox only in the event that it is believed to;

- Contain a high-risk allergen that poses an immediate threat to the safety or survival of a child,
- Present a significant choking hazard that cannot be minimised by preparation,
- Consist solely of chips, chocolate or lollies. *This is based on a survey of more than 100 SA Montessori parents, with a majority preferring that these items are not consumed in our centres.*

If an item is set aside, it will be done very subtly and it will be framed positively and sensitively. Due to the emotional significance of homemade foods, we will not remove homemade items appearing to contain small traces of chocolate, though we strongly discourage the use of chocolate as this causes confusion for children. Homemade items appearing to contain nuts or choking hazards will be removed.

Lunchbox tips

We know many parents are seeking inspiration and ideas around food and nutrition. The following sources have been recommended by our families, for our families. These have helped other parents and families like you to build a balanced, positive and empowered approach to their child’s food.

Natural Super Kids	Healthy food tips and snack ideas	https://www.naturalsuperkids.com/
Eat for Health	Dietary guidelines	https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/
Solid starts	Advice for introducing food for babies and toddlers	https://solidstarts.com/
Kids Eat in Color	Dietician created tips for feeding your family	https://kidseatincolor.com/
Growing Intuitive Eaters	Helping to make food fun for children	https://growingintuitiveeaters.com/
Lively Eaters	Supporting children with feeding therapy	https://livelyeaters.com.au/
Dr Kyla	Paediatric dietician – specialising in “fussy eating”	https://mealtimes.com.au/

Mealtime atmosphere

Children are encouraged to eat together at tables, or an outdoor picnic when the weather is appropriate. Children are asked to remain seated whenever they are eating. This protects their safety by reducing the risk of choking and also promotes courtesy within this communal mealtime. Educators are present throughout mealtimes to supervise closely for safety and model positive attitudes towards food and eating. Creating comfortable and sociable mealtimes helps to ensure that children have an uninterrupted period with no distractions from eating. This increases the likelihood that children will consume the right amount of food to fuel their own body. We are not willing, or able, to coerce or force a child to eat. Children will be encouraged by our educators to explore and enjoy their food in a comfortable and empowering setting.

Drinks

Parents of *babies and toddlers* are encouraged to refer to our Infant Nutrition Policy for information about expressed breastmilk, formula and cow’s milk for young children.

Fresh drinking water is accessible to children at all times and we proactively provide water at various points. The timing and frequency vary according to the routines of the room, the age of the children and environmental factors such as temperature. We encourage children to drink from a glass to foster independence, motor skills and social courtesy. We discourage the use of water bottles because these can cause confusion and cross-contamination when multiple children have the same type of bottle.

In some cases, drink bottles may be appropriate and necessary. This includes;

- When a child is new, and a bottle provides comfort while they learn how to access drinking water,
- When a child’s hydration is a particular focus or goal and a drink bottle allows for a better measure,
- When educators request that parents send drink bottles to support the flow of the daily routine.

If you do bring a drink bottle, please ensure it is prominently labelled with your child’s **full** name, choose a bottle that is transparent or translucent, and ensure that only *water* is in the bottle.