

Cooking Together:

A Facilitator's Guide to Community Cooking Programs



The Healthy Loddon Campaspe initiative is supported by the Victorian Government

Authorship and Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Welcome to *Cooking Together - A Facilitator's Guide To Community Cooking Programs*. This manual is designed to provide workers, volunteers, and community members with the skills and confidence to lead cooking programs and classes that build nutrition knowledge, strengthen community connections, and promote better health.

The information and tools provided can be used to build the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to develop inclusive community cooking programs for all members of the community. As a Facilitator, you will play an important role in empowering individuals and groups with the knowledge and skills to make healthier food choices, cook delicious meals, and strengthen community connections through shared food experiences.

The manual provides the following information:

Section 1: Cooking Together program Trainer and Facilitator roles and responsibilities

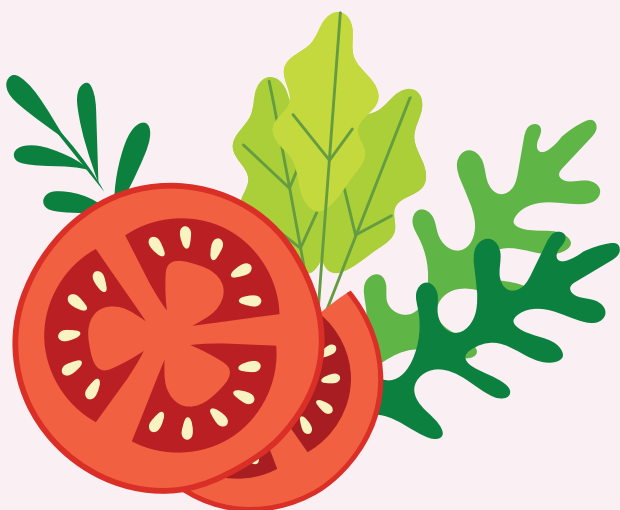
Outlines the roles of Trainers and cooking group Facilitators, clarifying their responsibilities in supporting and delivering community cooking programs.

Section 2: Understanding the nutritional needs of your cooking program community

Provides guidance on how to find reliable information about nutrition, healthy eating, and culturally appropriate cooking practices.

Section 3: Planning a community cooking program

Includes a step-by-step guide to setting up a community cooking group, strategies for inclusive and engaging facilitation, risk management tools, and practical resources to support each session.



Community cooking programs

Community cooking programs aim to increase people's confidence and skills in cooking nutritious, tasty meals for themselves and their families. They support healthier eating, help stretch food budgets, and make people feel more at ease in the kitchen. They also offer a chance to connect with others, reduce social isolation, and build stronger, more supportive communities.

While all community cooking programs bring people together to cook, learn about food, and share meals, they can be run in different ways. How a program is planned, developed and run will depend on a range of different things including the participants, partnering agencies, program budget, access to ingredients, venue, kitchen and equipment.

Cooking programs can be adapted to meet any requirement, as long as food can be cooked and shared in an enjoyable, safe and inclusive way.

Why are community cooking programs important?

Eating well requires a broad range of skills and resources. People are more likely to eat a healthy diet when they have the knowledge and confidence to plan meals, shop for ingredients, and prepare nutritious dishes that meet individual and family needs.

Learning to cook and adapt recipes based on available ingredients also helps reduce food waste and save money. Community cooking programs promote health and wellbeing, reduce social isolation, and support healthier food choices in everyday life. Community cooking programs help people to:

- Learn basic cooking skills
- Improve their knowledge about healthy eating
- Build confidence in the kitchen
- Meet others and feel more connected
- Save money by learning how to cook affordable meals

Where can a community cooking program be run?

Community cooking programs are often held in neighbourhood houses, community centres, churches, organisations, schools or anywhere that has a kitchen. Although having a large fully equipped kitchen is ideal for running a cooking program, it is not always necessary. Cooking sessions can be adapted to suit the kitchen size and equipment available. This manual will help Facilitators plan and run cooking programs that are flexible, inclusive, and responsive to different settings.

Who can run a community cooking program?

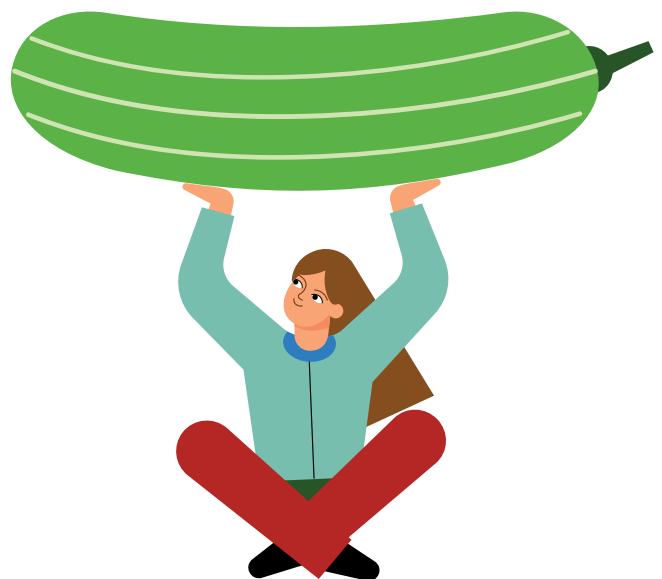
Anyone with an interest in food, nutrition, and cooking can lead a community cooking program. Facilitators do not need to be trained chefs, but they should have the confidence and practical skills to help participants plan, prepare, and cook healthy, tasty meals in a safe and inclusive environment. These programs are often led by passionate community members or community groups who enjoy sharing their food knowledge with others.

Running a successful program is a shared effort. Involving participants in planning and decision-making can build confidence and a sense of ownership. Support from local organisations, councils, and community groups can provide valuable resources. Training others to facilitate is also encouraged, helping to expand the reach and sustainability of community cooking programs. This manual is designed to support that goal.

Cooking program Trainer or Facilitator?

This manual uses the terms *Trainers* and *Facilitators* to describe those involved in leading community cooking programs. Often, one person may take on both roles, so the focus is primarily on supporting Facilitators.

The next section explores how to take on these roles to build capacity and strengthen cooking skills in your community.



Section 1:

Cooking Together Program

**Trainer and Facilitator
roles and responsibilities**



Building confident Facilitators: The role of Trainers and Facilitators.

Eating a healthy diet is essential to our health and wellbeing. Supporting more people to get into the kitchen to cook and share meals, helps promote health, wellbeing, and connection across all ages. Both Trainers and Facilitators play important, complementary roles in making this happen.

The role of a Trainer

Trainers play an important role in building the confidence, knowledge, and skills of others to become effective cooking group Facilitators. Their focus is on developing a confident team within their organisation or community to run inclusive and sustainable cooking programs.

Trainers:

- Support others to grow skills in cooking, planning, and group facilitation
- Help build confidence in leadership and communication
- Model safe, welcoming, and engaging group environments
- Promote inclusive practices that respect diverse cultures and food experiences

Training can happen in a variety of settings, including workplaces, community centres, or kitchens, and may be informal or structured. This manual is a key resource, offering tools, strategies, and principles that new Trainers can apply.

Effective training often includes:

- **Modelling:** Inviting trainees to observe or join existing sessions
- **Guided practice:** Gradually involving new Facilitators in tasks like helping with session preparation or leading activities
- **Reflection and feedback:** Discussing what worked well and what could improve
- **Ongoing learning:** Through workshops, mentoring, or shadowing

Trainers are essential in helping new Facilitators feel confident and prepared to manage the key tasks and risks. They help build a strong local network, ensuring cooking programs are community-led, safe, and long-lasting.



The role of a Facilitator

Facilitators lead community cooking sessions, working alongside participants to share skills, support learning, and build motivation to cook at home. Their role is not about being a chef or nutrition expert, but about creating a space where people feel welcome, respected, and inspired to cook and connect.

Facilitators help plan and run practical cooking sessions, guide safe food preparation, and encourage social connection. They also support others to build confidence in cooking, budgeting, and trying new foods, at their own pace.

Some Facilitators come with strong cooking skills and confidence working with groups, while others grow into the role with support and experience. What matters most is the ability to connect with people, foster a positive group dynamic, and promote learning in a non-judgmental, inclusive way.



Facilitator skills

Cooking groups are often fun, energetic environments that require a person who can adapt and respond to the group's needs. Community cooking group Facilitators often come with their own range of skills and abilities to create a positive and inclusive experience. Below are some fundamental skills that a person needs to ensure the sessions are well-organised, flexible, safe, and fun.

- **Cooking skills:** Strong practical cooking skills and the ability to adapt recipes to suit different ingredients, dietary needs, and group preferences.
- **Facilitation skills:** Confidence in leading group sessions, setting clear expectations, and balancing structure with flexibility to meet the group's needs.
- **Communication and listening:** Ability to listen actively, show empathy, and build trust through respectful and clear communication.
- **Social skills:** Ability to create an inclusive space where everyone feels welcome, and participation is actively encouraged from people of all backgrounds and abilities.
- **Safety and group management:** Ability to maintain a safe cooking environment, manage time, and support positive group dynamics.

What is involved in being a cooking group Facilitator?

Facilitating a cooking group requires planning, clear communication and a commitment to creating a safe and inclusive space for the people attending the group.

How to create a positive cooking group experience

Key principles

| | | | | | | | |
|----------------|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|----------|-----------|
| Fun and social | Promote healthy eating | Share accurate information | Shared decisions | Design sessions based on needs | Positive messaging | Hands-on | Inclusive |
|----------------|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|----------|-----------|

Facilitator activities



1. Planning and organisation

This is the foundation of a successful cooking program and sets the tone for how the group will run. Good planning involves defining the group's purpose, choosing an accessible kitchen space, and designing sessions that suit the participants' needs. It also includes managing budgets, ingredients, equipment, and volunteer support.

2. Communication

Effective communication ensures everyone is informed and engaged. This includes sharing clear session information, using inclusive language, and reaching participants through a variety of communication channels to keep them connected and involved.

3. Guidance and support

Facilitators play an active role in guiding the group. This involves helping participants understand recipes and safety measures, offering support during sessions, and sharing accurate and appropriate nutrition information.

4. Safety and hygiene

Maintaining a safe and hygienic environment is essential. This includes food safety practices, allergy awareness, and being prepared to handle emergencies or risks that may arise during the sessions.

5. Participation and relationships

Strong group dynamics are built through participation and connection. This is about creating a respectful, inclusive space where everyone feels valued, can contribute, and enjoys a sense of community and shared learning.

What is the Facilitator's role in providing nutrition information?

Facilitators play an important role in creating a safe, inclusive and positive space to explore food and cooking. While cooking sessions are not nutrition education classes, the way food and health are discussed during activities can influence how participants feel about eating and about themselves. Sharing messages that are non-judgmental and grounded in evidence helps to build trust and support confidence in food choices.

Language used for food and nutrition

Facilitators are not expected to take on the role of a Nutritionist or Dietitian, but having a basic understanding of nutrition and the ability to share health-promoting messages is valuable. These messages might include:

- Increasing fruit and vegetable intake
- Choosing wholegrains instead of refined white grains
- Including healthy fats such as olive oil, fish, nuts, and avocado
- Eating processed or discretionary foods in moderation

In addition to promoting healthy eating habits, Facilitators should also use inclusive and respectful language when discussing food. Avoiding labels like "good" or "bad" for foods helps reduce shame and supports a more balanced relationship with eating. Terms like "*nutritious food*," "*sometimes foods*," or "*discretionary foods*" are more helpful and less likely to make people feel judged.

Food should not only be valued for its nutritional content, but also for how it makes us feel, the role it plays in our culture, and the enjoyment it brings. Facilitators can encourage participants to reflect on these aspects by asking thoughtful questions during sessions—for example, "*What do you enjoy about this meal?*" or "*Does this remind you of a food you grew up with?*"

There are some common food comments that come out in cooking programs, both from participants and occasionally the Facilitators. Changing the language is a small but powerful step to being open and curious to different foods, and foods that people may not like. For example:

| Common phrases | Change phrases to |
|--|--|
| It's yuck! I don't/ won't eat that! | I don't usually enjoy... but I'll try it, or other people really like the taste. |
| I shouldn't eat carbs | Carbs fuel my body and help me feel full |
| I can't believe you're eating that | That looks interesting—how is it? |
| You're such a picky eater | You have your own food likes and dislikes, and that's okay |
| That food is gross | That food is new to me—I wonder what it tastes like! |
| That's not a real meal | Everyone enjoys different kinds of meals—what do you like about yours? |



Guiding principles to positive food messaging

1. Provide accurate, evidence-based information

Facilitators are not expected to be nutrition experts, but it's important to share information that is accurate, current, and grounded in evidence. Use trusted resources, like the Australian Dietary Guidelines or Nutrition Australia, to guide your messaging.

Section 2 of this manual includes practical information on nutrition across life stages and where to find reliable resources of nutrition information.

Facilitators should not provide personal dietary advice or promote specific diets. Instead, focus on sharing general messages that encourage variety, balance, and enjoyment of food. When unsure or when specific health advice is needed, refer participants to a qualified health professional, such as a Dietitian.

2. Promote inclusion, not restriction

Everyone brings different experiences and beliefs around food, body image, and health. It's important to respect this diversity and avoid messages that may cause shame, guilt, or confusion. In *Cooking Together*, we focus on adding knowledge, skills, and enjoyment, rather than excluding foods or promoting strict eating rules.

We promote healthy choices while also acknowledging that all foods can have a place in a balanced diet. Occasional use of convenience or treat foods is okay and can reflect real-life cooking habits.

3. Upholding positive and inclusive food messages

Food-related conversations are natural in group cooking programs, but they need to be handled with care. Certain topics or personal views, especially around weight, diets, or avoiding certain foods can unintentionally cause harm or reinforce stigma. This is especially important when working with people who may already feel pressure to change their eating or body shape.

The table below highlights the nutrition concepts and health ideas that need special consideration when working with a group, providing what nutrition messaging to avoid and what to use as an alternative.

| Avoid Promoting | Instead, Aim To |
|---|---|
| Fad diets or unproven nutrition trends | Use simple, inclusive messages that encourage curiosity and confidence |
| Weight loss as a goal or measure of success | Emphasise variety, balance, and the enjoyment of food |
| "Good" or "bad" food labels | Highlight food's role in culture, connection, and care—not just nutrition |
| Restrictive eating patterns without medical reason | Acknowledge that all foods can fit into a healthy, balanced way of eating. Refer to trusted sources such as the Australian Dietary Guidelines |
| Superfoods as a requirement for good health | Focus on realistic, accessible food choices |
| Rigid or moralising views about "clean" or "healthy" eating | Avoid personal opinions or unsolicited advice about diets, health, or weight |

Where you are concerned about someone's eating or need advice, contact your local community health service or suggest your participant see a Dietitian.

Section 2:

Understanding the nutritional needs of your cooking program community



Nutrition and health in your community

Access to healthy, affordable food and the skills to prepare it are essential to individual and community wellbeing. Yet in many communities, people face barriers such as low income, time pressures, limited food education, and lack of access to appropriate ingredients. Facilitating food literacy and cooking skills can empower people to make informed food choices, support their health, and reduce food insecurity.

What are the main food and nutrition priorities for the Loddon Campaspe region?

The 2019 Active Living Census explored the general health of the Loddon Campaspe region, along with other areas that are impacted by food and cooking skill levels.

Food insecurity

Findings from the census show that in the Loddon Campaspe region, there is a food insecurity rate of 9.2%, which is higher than the rate for Victoria at 6.2%. This translates to 1 in 10 households being food insecure and not having enough to eat. Food insecurity is shown to be higher in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, unemployed people, and those with very low household income.

Food insecurity is the lack of consistent access to enough safe, nutritious, and affordable food for an active, healthy life. It can be temporary or long-term, and it ranges in severity.

Main causes of food insecurity in the Loddon Campaspe region

Food insecurity in the Loddon Campaspe region is influenced by a combination of economic, geographic, and social factors. Key contributors include low income, rising living costs, limited access to food in rural areas, housing insecurity, and social isolation. These challenges are often compounded during times of crisis, with limited emergency support available to those in need.

| Causes | Impact |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Economic inequality | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low income and unemployment• Rising cost of living |
| Limited food access in rural areas | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Geographic isolation• Limited transport options |
| High cost of food | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overall food costs have increased• Misconception of the price gap between healthy and unhealthy foods |
| Housing insecurity | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Housing stress reduces disposable income available for food• Temporary housing lacks proper cooking and storage facilities |
| Social and cultural barriers | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of food literacy• Social Isolation |
| Emergency and crisis situations | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family breakdown, health crises, or natural disasters can suddenly disrupt food security• Limited emergency food relief services |

Outcomes of food insecurity

People experiencing food insecurity often face stress and anxiety about running out of food, leading them to skip meals, eat smaller portions, or rely on cheap, unhealthy options. Over time, this can result in periods of hunger and poor nutrition. Food insecurity is strongly linked to poorer physical and mental health, higher rates of overweight and obesity, and increased intake of sugary drinks, with consistently low intake of fruit and vegetables. These patterns can begin in childhood, leading to long-term poor eating habits and health outcomes.

In the Loddon Campaspe region, as in many parts of Australia, fruit and vegetable consumption falls below recommended levels for the general population. When surveyed in the Loddon Campaspe region, the following statistics were found:

| Food Category | Statistic (Loddon Campaspe region) |
|------------------|---|
| Vegetable intake | Only 13.3% of adults met the AGTHE* recommendation of 5+ serves of vegetables per day |
| Fruit intake | 48% of adults met the AGTHE* recommendation of 2 serves of fruit per day |
| Water intake | Only 20% of adults consumed the AGTHE* recommended 8 glasses of water per day |
| Sugary drinks | 14% of adults reported consuming sugary drinks daily |

*AGTHE = Australian Guide to Healthy Eating

For updated statistics go to the Healthy Loddon Campaspe website www.healthyloddoncampaspe.au/alc

Food literacy

Food literacy is the set of skills, knowledge, and behaviours that allow individuals to make informed choices about food to support their health. By improving food literacy, we can help individuals to make informed food choices, reduce reliance on processed foods, and build healthy habits.

Food literacy is the ability to understand where food comes from, how to access and prepare it, and how it impacts health and wellbeing. It combines practical skills with knowledge that supports confident, informed food choices. It includes:

- **Nutrition awareness** – Knowing how food choices affect overall health and prevent chronic diseases and understanding how to eat well for personal and family needs.
- **Food skills** – The ability to plan, prepare, and cook healthy meals using available ingredients.
- **Budgeting & access** – Understanding how to make nutritious meals affordable and accessible.
- **Cultural & social aspects** – Recognising the role of food in traditions, celebrations, and community connections.

Food literacy can be improved by building skills and nutrition knowledge that align to the specific needs of a group or person. These needs can include health, age, culture, socioeconomic status and finances.



Key elements impacting food literacy

Facilitators should assess the food literacy needs of their group when planning a cooking program. The table below lists questions to help identify areas to address, such as nutrition knowledge, cooking and shopping skills, food access, and sustainable food practices.

| Key Elements | Questions to consider |
|---------------------------|--|
| Knowledge | <p>Do your participants understand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does healthy eating look like in daily life?• How do different foods affect energy, mood, and overall health?• How to identify what makes up a balanced meal?• Do dietary needs vary with age, health, and lifestyle? |
| Skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the food preparation skills needed to prepare a meal?• Are they confident in following simple recipes and using kitchen tools safely?• Can they make recipes to suit their taste, budget, or dietary needs?• Do they feel confident shopping for food?• Can they plan meals and budget for food each week? |
| Capacity to source | <p>Can your participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access fresh and affordable food close to home?• Are they aware of foods that are locally grown or produced?• Do they have space, knowledge, or support to grow their own food?• How does the availability of food influence what people eat? |
| Sustainable manner | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are they storing food correctly and reducing household food waste?• Are they using leftovers and planning meals to avoid waste?• Is composting or recycling food scraps being promoted or practiced?• Are local or community gardens accessible and used to grow fresh produce?• Are people encouraged to choose seasonal and locally grown foods when possible? |

*This table has been derived from Nutrition Australia, NourishNurture Food Literacy Program Manual.

Understanding the nutritional needs of your community

In the Loddon Campaspe region, everyone should have the opportunity to learn how to cook and prepare food, whether through formal education in schools or informal learning at home. Cooking skills and nutritional knowledge are vital for maintaining a healthy diet, and this program is designed to help these skills be shared and passed on from person to person.

By improving cooking skills and understanding nutrition, individuals are better equipped to prepare balanced, healthy meals, leading to a deeper understanding of food literacy and promoting food security. Adopting a healthy lifestyle has been shown to reduce the risk of lifestyle-related diseases such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease and also contribute to improved mental health.

Understanding your target audience

Cooking programs should be aimed at specific target groups in the community and should be easily accessible to those people.

You should think about who your cooking program is aimed at and have a clear target audience. You will find some ideas about nutrition messages, health and nutrition considerations and other tips for specific age groups in the section below.

Example Target Audiences

| | | |
|---------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| New parents | Teenagers | Elderly people |
| Parents of young children | People with disabilities | Pregnant women |
| People with low income* | People from different cultural backgrounds | People who are socially isolated |

*While some programs might be aimed primarily at people with low incomes, Facilitators should always consider ways to make their program financially accessible for all community members.

Working with diverse groups

To create an inclusive and respectful cooking group, it is essential to recognise and accommodate the diverse backgrounds of participants. When running a cooking program, we should consider the following.

- Respecting dietary restrictions and preferences related to religion, tradition, or health (e.g., Halal, Kosher, vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free).
- Incorporating culturally diverse recipes and cooking techniques. Encouraging participants to share their own food traditions.
- Using inclusive language including LGBTQIA+ terms and pronouns.
- Acknowledging and celebrating cultural food practices.
- Consider noise, lighting, smells, and textures to be inclusive of neurodivergent people.
- Be open to different ways of learning, expressing, or engaging.

Using the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating (AGTHE) to support nutritional needs of your group

Our nutritional needs change as we grow, from childhood through to older adulthood. When planning cooking sessions, it's important to consider the age and life stage of the group, as different age groups require different types and amounts of nutrients to stay healthy.

To help guide your planning, we use the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating (AGTHE). This guide outlines the five core food groups and the recommended daily servings for each group, based on a person's age, gender, and life stage. It's a simple and trusted resource for promoting balanced eating in a way that suits diverse needs.

Before each session, consider asking participants what nutrients they think are most important for their age or life stage. This encourages group discussion and builds awareness of individual nutritional needs.

As a Facilitator, familiarising yourself with the AGTHE will help you select or adapt recipes that are both healthy and appropriate for the group. It also ensures that your sessions support participants to make informed, lasting changes to their eating habits.

Refer to [Eatforhealth.com.au](https://www.eatforhealth.com.au) for more information

Australian Guide to Healthy Eating

Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from these five food groups every day.

Drink plenty of water.

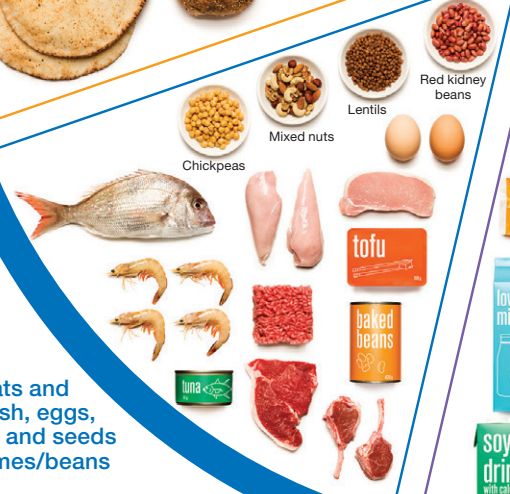
Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain and/or high cereal fibre varieties



Vegetables and legumes/beans



Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds and legumes/beans



Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives, mostly reduced fat



Fruit



Use small amounts



Only sometimes and in small amounts



Young children 2-11 years old

Proper nutrition is crucial for children's growth, development, and overall well-being. A balanced diet supports physical health, cognitive development, and emotional wellbeing. Parents play a vital role in guiding healthy eating habits, providing nutritious meals, and creating a positive food environment that encourages lifelong healthy eating patterns.

From the AGTHE these are the recommended servings for young children.

| Recommended servings for ages 2-11 | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|-------|------------|
| | Meat or alternatives | Dairy or alternatives | Grain foods | Fruit | Vegetables |
| Boys | 1-2.5 | 1.5-2.5 | 4-5 | 1-2 | 2.5-5 |
| Girls | 1-2.5 | 1.5-3 | 4 | 1-2 | 2.5-5 |

Nutrition messaging to promote healthy eating in young children

- Encourage new foods, colours and textures
- Encourage children to eat in a group or at the family dinner table
- Encourage more fruit, vegetables and wholegrains for young children
- Encourage snacks that contain foods from a variety of food groups
- Refer to Nutrition Australia's [Helping Kids to Become Great Eaters](#)

Health and nutrition issues to consider for this group

- Food allergies and unknown food allergies
- Fussy eating or food avoidance refer to [RCHM](#) for more information and when to refer to a dietitian

Refer to *Nutrition Information and Healthy Recipe Resources* in Section 4.

- Choking hazards (grapes, meat, bones)

Older Children 12-18

As children enter their pre-adolescent and adolescent years, their nutritional needs become more specific to support rapid growth, increased physical activity, and cognitive development.

| Recommended servings for ages 12-18 | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|-------|------------|
| | Meat or alternatives | Dairy or alternatives | Grain foods | Fruit | Vegetables |
| Boys | 2.5 | 3.5 | 6-7 | 2 | 5.5 |
| Girls | 2.5 | 3.5 | 5-7 | 2 | 5 |

Nutrition messaging to promote healthy eating in older children

- Encourage older children to prepare their own meals and lunch boxes to enhance cooking skills from a young age
- Encourage a range of fresh fruits and vegetables instead of prepackaged snacks in lunch boxes
- Encourage healthy snacks and drinks after physical activity, sport or high-energy activities
- For healthy **lunchbox ideas** refer to the Healthy Eating Advisory Service

Refer to *Nutrition Information and Healthy Recipe Resources* in Section 4

Health and nutrition issues to consider for this group

- Body image and disordered eating patterns
- Bullying at school from food choices
- Media, social media and marketing influences
- Poor food hygiene

Adults 19-50

Nutrition in younger adults plays a crucial role in supporting physical and mental health. As young adults navigate busy lifestyles, maintaining a balanced diet rich in essential nutrients is key for managing stress and preventing chronic conditions.

| Recommended servings for ages 19-50 | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|-------|------------|
| | Meat or alternatives | Dairy or alternatives | Grain foods | Fruit | Vegetables |
| Men | 3 | 2.5 | 6 | 2 | 6 |
| Women | 2.5 | 2.5 | 6 | 2 | 5 |

Nutrition messaging to promote healthy eating in younger adults

- Eat a variety of foods from all food groups (promote inclusion rather than exclusion of foods)
- Eating regularly and avoid skipping meals
- Use meal preparation to save time and encourage healthier food choices
- Choose water instead of soft drink, coffee or cordial
- Choose whole foods over processed foods

Refer to *Nutrition Information and Healthy Recipe Resources* in Section 4.

Health and nutrition issues to consider for this group

- Moving out of the family home or, in with a partner for the first time
- Hormonal changes and weight management
- Pregnancy and children in the home
- Limited access to kitchen facilities at work
- Family food preferences



Pregnant women

Understanding the nutritional needs during pregnancy is essential for both the health of the mother and the development of the baby. The following table outlines key nutrients required and their recommended daily intake for pregnant women.

| Recommended servings for pregnant women | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-------------|-------|------------|
| Meat or alternatives | Dairy or alternatives | Grain foods | Fruit | Vegetables |
| 3.5 | 2.5 | 8.5 | 2 | 5 |

Nutrition messaging to promote healthy eating pregnant in women

- Eat a variety of foods from all food groups
- Eat adequate amounts of iron, iodine, calcium and folate
- Choose water instead of soft drink, coffee or cordial
- Eat small frequent meals to help with nausea

Refer to *Nutrition Information and Healthy Recipe Resources* in Section 4.

| Important nutrients during pregnancy | |
|---|---|
| Iron Iron is needed to make red blood cells and carry oxygen around the body. | Meat and poultry Wholegrain breads Cereals Leafy greens |
| Iodine Iodine is essential for foetal brain development. | Fish Iodised salt (in moderation) |
| Calcium Calcium helps to form healthy bones | Dairy and alternatives with added calcium Tofu Canned salmon and tuna |

Health and nutrition issues to consider for this group

When preparing for a cooking session for pregnant women ensure you are aware of foods that should be avoided during pregnancy due to their high risk of containing harmful bacteria like Listeria or Salmonella.

| Foods to avoid during pregnancy | | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|---|------------------|
| Processed meats (deli meat) | Sushi | Unpasteurised dairy | Rockmelon |
| Raw meat | Soft cheeses | Raw eggs | Hummus or tahini |
| Raw seafood | Soft serve ice cream | Pre-packaged salads, including leafy greens | Bean sprouts |

An extensive list can be found here [Foods to eat or avoid when pregnant | NSW Food Authority](#)

Older adults 51-70

Nutrition in older adults is essential for maintaining health, mobility, and independence. A well-balanced diet with adequate protein and variety will be best for this age.

| Recommended servings for ages 51-70 | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|-------|------------|
| | Meat or alternatives | Dairy or alternatives | Grain foods | Fruit | Vegetables |
| Men | 2.5 | 2.5 | 6 | 2 | 5.5 |
| Women | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 5 |

Nutrition messaging to promote healthy eating in older adults

- Eat a variety of foods from all food groups
- Use meal preparation to save time and encourage healthier food choices
- Choose water instead of soft drink, coffee or cordial
- Choose whole foods over processed foods (wholegrains, fruit and vegetables)
- Eat an adequate amount of protein through getting enough dairy and meat serves

Health and nutrition issues to consider for this group

- Development and management of chronic disease i.e. diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer.
- Social isolation
- Consider risks listed in both Younger Adults and Seniors

Seniors 70+

A balanced diet, rich in key nutrients like calcium, vitamin D, fibre and protein, is essential to prevent chronic conditions, manage weight, and ensure overall well-being in older adulthood.

| Recommended servings for ages 70+ | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|-------|------------|
| | Meat or alternatives | Dairy or alternatives | Grain foods | Fruit | Vegetables |
| Men | 2.5 | 3.5 | 4.5 | 2 | 5 |
| Women | 2 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 5 |

Health and nutrition issues to consider for this group

Malnutrition is one of the biggest nutritional risks at an elderly age. To avoid malnutrition, make sure they are eating regularly and have adequate protein.

Other considerations when cooking with older participants?

- Is this person new to cooking for just 1 or 2 people and is finding it challenging?
- Has their taste changed recently due to medication or chronic disease?
- Has their appetite decreased?
- Do they have the motivation to cook for themselves?
- Do they have the tools to cook?
- Can they open packages or use cooking utensils?

Healthy eating on a budget

When it comes to eating a healthy diet, many believe it is expensive, however with some clever planning eating healthy can be done with a small budget.

Tips for cooking on a budget include

- Check what you already have in the fridge and pantry before you go shopping
- Make a weekly meal plan
- Stick to a shopping list
- Buy fruits and vegetables that are in season
- Buy canned or frozen fruit and vegetables
- Buy homebrand
- Prepare and cook meals at home

You may like to include a handout for those attending a cooking session. Nutrition Australia have prepared a fact sheet [here](#), or refer to *Nutrition Information and Healthy Recipe Resources* in Section 4.



Portion sizes

Portion guides that align with the AGTHE are available to help understand what a portion is for each stage of life. In each age group, meals should consist of lean protein, whole grain, carbohydrates and vegetables.

Tip - For a good visual tool to determine portion sizes, refer to the [Baker Portion Plate Guide](#).

The Baker portion plate is used because it follows the AGTHE guidelines and helps to get the portions right for a balanced meal, identify low-GI carbohydrates, lean protein and demonstrates a range of mixed meals like curries or stirfrys.

To modify recipes to fit within the AGTHE and Baker Portion Plate Guide refer to the *Guide to Choosing and Adapting a Healthy Recipe*.

Choosing and adapting healthy recipes for your group

Choosing the right recipes is important when running a cooking program. Recipes should be nutrient-rich, culturally appropriate, and easy to prepare, with ingredients that are acceptable, affordable and accessible to your group.

A healthy recipe uses mostly whole or minimally processed ingredients, combines foods from some of the five food groups, and is prepared with healthy cooking methods. It is also important to consider the cooking skills, equipment, and dietary needs of participants.

Use the *Guide to Choosing and Adapting a Healthy Recipe* in Section 4 to help with the process.

Below is a summary of how to adapt recipes in ways that support better health without compromising taste or enjoyment.

| Nutrition guide | What to Add |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Nutrient-rich ingredients | Include whole foods (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, lean proteins, low-fat dairy). |
| Balance and variety | Ensure a mix of carbohydrates, proteins, and healthy fats. |
| Healthy fats | Use olive oil, canola oil, fish, avocado, nuts, and seeds instead of butter. |
| Limited added sugars and salt | Reduce where possible while maintaining taste. |
| Vegetables in every meal | Encourage adding a variety of different coloured vegetables in each meal. Swap vegetables if not in season or available, or use frozen or canned veg. |
| Whole grains & legumes | Incorporate brown rice, barley, quinoa, lentils, chickpeas. |
| Healthy cooking methods | Use steaming, grilling, roasting, and stir-frying instead of deep frying. |



Cooking Methods

Cooking techniques can influence both the nutritional quality of a meal and how well it suits the needs of your group. Some methods, like steaming or baking, help retain nutrients and reduce added fats, while others, like deep frying, add extra energy and salt.

It's important to consider the age, health status, and dietary needs of participants. For example:

- Children and older adults may need higher energy or softer foods, which means that the use of healthy fats and oils from food or used for cooking are beneficial.
- People with certain health conditions may benefit from low-fat or low-salt cooking.
- Some techniques may be safer or easier depending on cooking skills and physical ability.

By choosing a variety of healthy, adaptable cooking methods, you can create meals that are both enjoyable and suitable for everyone.

| Cooking method | Explanation |
|--------------------|--|
| Boiling | Cook in boiling water |
| Poaching | To gently simmer food in liquid (e.g. water, stock, milk) |
| Steaming | Cooking by steam from boiling water |
| Stir-frying | Cooking in a wok, over high heat, stirring often |
| Sautéing | Cooking small pieces in a shallow pan over a relatively high heat |
| Grilling | Cooking over a high, dry heat using a grill, grill pan, or griddle |
| Braising | Slow cooking in the oven, partially covered by liquid |
| Baking | Cooking using a stable dry heat, such as oven or air fryer Note: Use small amounts of oil where possible |
| Roasting | Cooking meat or vegetables in a dry heat including oven or over open fire Note: Use Roasting rack so fat falls to bottom of pan |
| Stewing | Simmer in liquid, such as broth, stock or sauce for long periods Note: Remove excess fat from meat before cooking |

Understanding allergies, intolerances and dietary needs

When planning recipes for a cooking group, it's important to consider the diverse dietary needs of participants. These may be due to allergies, intolerances, health conditions, cultural practices, or personal choices.

Food allergies can cause serious or life-threatening reactions. Always check with participants about their dietary needs in advance, read ingredient labels carefully, and avoid cross-contamination in the kitchen. There are a range of websites that can help you learn more about food allergies and the foods that trigger these reactions.

Refer to the Section 4 *Nutrition information and healthy recipe resource*, for more information.

The table below outlines common dietary needs and what they typically involve, to help you plan inclusive and safe recipes for your group.

| Dietary needs | Explanation |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Vegan | No animal products, including meat, fish, dairy, eggs, honey, gelatin, and other animal-derived ingredients. |
| Vegetarian | No meat or fish but may include dairy and eggs depending on the specific type of vegetarian diet (e.g., lacto-vegetarian, ovo-vegetarian, lacto-ovo-vegetarian). |
| Gluten-free | No food that contains gluten, which is found in wheat, barley, rye, and some oats. |
| Lactose-free | Avoid lactose, (a sugar found in milk and dairy products). |
| Low FODMAP | Limits certain fermentable carbohydrates found in various foods, which may cause digestive issues. |
| Nut, soy or egg free | Avoid ingredients or products containing ingredients due to allergies or preferences |
| Low salt/sodium | Limits sodium intake, typically to manage health conditions such as high blood pressure. |
| Allergy friendly | Avoids specific allergens such as gluten, nuts, shellfish, or other known food allergens |
| Halal | Consumes foods that adhere to Islamic dietary laws, including specific meat preparation and alcohol restrictions. |
| Kosher | Consumes foods that adhere to Jewish dietary laws, which include meat and dairy separation, and specific animal product handling and preparation. |

Section 3:

Planning a Community Cooking Program



Planning your community cooking program

Strong community cooking programs are built through collaboration and thoughtful planning. This helps ensure the program reflects people's needs, interests, and the strengths of the local community.

As a Facilitator, your role is to follow key planning steps. These steps can guide you when starting a new cooking group or adapting an existing one.

Instructions:

- Read through step 1-5 outlined below. Work with your team or co-Facilitators to complete the tools provided for each section.
- Use the relevant checklists and tools in **Section 4 Resources, Checklists and Tools** section to guide your planning, track progress, and make sure you are well-prepared before your sessions begin.

Step 1: Get people in your community involved

Community-led programs are more likely to succeed when people are involved from the beginning. This step focuses on building relationships and listening to others to help create your cooking group.

The best way to start is to talk to people you know. Potential participants, colleagues, volunteers, or community contacts will be your most important cooking program supporters. Then reach out to others who know your target group, such as local organisations, services, or community leaders.

Whether you are part of an organisation or starting a group independently, early collaboration builds trust, shared purpose, and long-term success.

| What to Do | How to Do It | Tools to Use |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| Start conversations | Talk to local community members, services, and potential participants about your idea. | |
| Make local connections | Go to networking events or community meetings to meet people and promote your program. | |
| Identify supporters | Look for people interested in joining, helping run the group, or supporting with referrals, funding or space. | <i>Connecting with your community checklist</i> |
| Build trust and engagement | Visit local spaces and be open to listening and sharing. | |
| Keep track | Take notes on who you meet, their ideas, and any offers of support. | |

Step 2: Find what you need for your cooking program

Effective planning helps ensure that your cooking program runs smoothly, is well-resourced, and meets the needs of your community. This step outlines what Facilitators and their team need to do to get ready for a successful program.

2.1 Find a suitable community kitchen space

Before starting your cooking group, you'll need a safe, accessible, and well-equipped space.

| What to Do | How to Do It | Tools to Use |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Find a venue | Look at neighbourhood houses, community centres, schools or church halls. | <i>Plan your cooking group checklist</i> |
| Check access | Make sure it is close to public transport or has parking. | |
| Visit the kitchen | Check what equipment is available – stove, sink, fridge, enough benches and storage. | <i>Kitchen setup checklist</i> |
| Ask about costs | Find out if it is free or if there is a fee. | <i>Plan your cooking group checklist</i> |
| Plan for portable appliances | If there are not enough facilities in the kitchen, you can use things like electric frypans or induction cooktops. | <i>Kitchen setup checklist</i> |
| Think about needs of your group | Check if there is disability access, baby change tables or space for kids, an area for people to eat or sit down. | <i>Plan your cooking group checklist</i> |

2.2 Work out your budget

Decide how your cooking program will be funded, how much money is needed and what the money will be used for.

| What to Do | How to Do It | Tools to Use |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Work out your funding | Look into grants, donations, internal budgets, or ask for small contributions from participants. | |
| Find low-cost ingredients | Use food rescue services, community gardens, or local donors to reduce costs. | <i>Budgeting for your cooking program</i> |
| List all your expenses | Think about food, venue hire, equipment, printing, and volunteer costs. | |

2.3 Update nutrition and food safety knowledge

Make sure you and your team have up-to-date nutrition and food safety knowledge. Use the resources and checklists to support safe, healthy, and inclusive cooking sessions.

| What to Do | How to Do It | Tools to Use |
|---|---|---|
| Complete food safety training | Do the free online from the Department of Health, Victoria, DoFoodSafely course and encourage your team to do the same. | DoFoodSafely https://dofoodsafely.health.vic.gov.au/ |
| Check your team's nutrition knowledge and confidence | Talk with Facilitators and volunteers about their comfort and knowledge in food safety, allergies and nutrition. | <i>Nutrition information and healthy recipes resources</i> |
| Use trusted nutrition resources | Refer to this manual and recommended websites to find reliable information for your group. | <i>Nutrition information and healthy recipes resources</i> |
| Choose appropriate recipes | Make sure recipes are healthy, affordable, and suit the culture and nutrition needs of your group. | <i>Guide to choosing and adapting a healthy recipe</i> |
| Plan together as a team | Use the tools and checklists to prepare, plan sessions, and track your progress. | <i>Refer to Step 3 and tools in Section 4</i> |

Step 3: Develop your cooking program outline

Now that you have gathered the essentials for your cooking group, it is time to map out your session plans. A clear outline helps everyone understand their roles and work together smoothly. Involving participants in the planning process, whether at the start or along the way, can make the program more relevant, inclusive and effective. This step is key to creating a shared sense of purpose and ownership.

3.1 What is the purpose of your group?

Start by identifying the aim of your cooking group. Is it to build basic cooking confidence, explore cultural recipes, promote healthy eating, or reduce social isolation? Clarifying this purpose helps shape your activities, recipe choices, and group discussions. You may need to consult your group to determine this.

3.2 Involve participants

Involving participants in planning the cooking sessions helps to build ownership, confidence, and real-life skills. It's also essential that they have a say in what is made each week. You can talk to participants individually before the cooking session or as a group to plan what you are going to do. This may not happen all at once but try to factor involving participants in the decision-making process.

What to do and talk about:

Session structure: Ask participants how they would like the sessions to run. Would they prefer to cook individually, in pairs, or in small groups? Do they want to eat together or take meals home? Involving them in these decisions can help shape a format that makes it comfortable and engaging for everyone.

Recipes: Meet with the group to select recipes together and talk about how they can be adapted to suit everyone's needs. You may consider budget-friendly swaps, simpler techniques, or dietary preferences.

Refer to Guide to choosing and adapting a healthy recipe

Seasonal foods: Encourage seasonal thinking. Can you include herbs or vegetables from a community garden or fruit from a local grower? This helps connect food to the place and reduce costs.

Pantry basics: Plan what you may need in your pantry and stores for the cooking program. These may be sourced from food rescue organisations to help reduce costs. *Refer to Shopping list for pantry staples*

Budgeting and shopping: Use this time to also discuss shopping and budgeting tips. These practical conversations help participants build skills they can use outside the group. Some participants may volunteer to help with shopping each week or assist with other necessary activities.

Group agreement: Setting clear expectations and guidelines for a safe, inclusive and fun session is an important step.

Before your first cooking session, create a Cooking Group Safety and Inclusion Agreement (see Section 4: Resources, checklists and tools).

How to develop a Cooking Group Safety and Inclusion Agreement:

- Go through a list of suggested guidelines in the *Cooking group agreement and guidelines* in Section 4 and invite participants to add or remove items.
- At the first session, review the agreement together to highlight the importance of safety, hygiene, and respect.
- Display the final agreement in the kitchen so it's visible to everyone each session.

3.3 Understand and prepare for risks

Knowing what risks exist when working in a kitchen with community members is extremely important. Mapping these out before the group starts and putting measures in place to prevent risks is essential for the safety and wellbeing of all people involved in the group. There are some key steps that can be taken to reduce risks and prepare for a safe and stress-free cooking session.

A range of tools and checklists, including the *Community cooking risk assessment tool*, has been included in **Section 4: Resources, checklists and tools**, so you can review any possible risks and develop a plan if anything happens.

Important actions include:

1. Complete the *Community cooking risk assessment tool* before you start your program.
2. Participants must fill in a registration form before they start. The registration form must include a section for contact details and allergies/intolerances. *Refer to Cooking group registration form*
3. Be aware of food allergens and reinforce that all food must be labelled. Where necessary avoid the use of high allergen foods for high-risk groups
4. Develop a group agreement that explains expected behaviours, clothing and actions to prevent and manage risks (see below).
5. Be sure to complete food safety and handling training and follow the processes outlined in this.
6. Make sure you are covered by public liability insurance through your organisation or host agency.

3.4 Determine your group structure

The table below provides a list of planning questions that can help you determine the structure of your cooking group and design it so it aligns with the group’s purpose.

| Planning question | What to consider |
|---|--|
| How long will the session run for? (include time to set up and pack up) | Allow enough time to set up, cook, eat (or pack), and clean up without rushing. Most sessions run for 1.5 to 2.5 hours, depending on your recipe and format. |
| How many people can you safely have in the kitchen? | Keep the group size manageable. 4–8 participants is ideal for hands-on cooking, depending on space, equipment, and Facilitator support. |
| Will people cook in groups, pairs, or individually? | Choose a format that suits your group size, kitchen layout, and goals for participation and learning. Cooking in groups reduces costs and provides enough food if eaten together. |
| Will people cook the same recipes or different recipes? | If people are taking meals home, cooking the same meals is a good idea, whereas a shared meal works best when different recipes are cooked together. |
| Will people eat their food together after cooking or take it home? | Decide whether the session includes a shared meal or if food will be packed to take away. Shared meals can help build connections. Taking meals home can help to support food security, especially for people living in low income households. If people are taking meals home, provide them with information on how to store it safely for later consumption. |
| Will there be time to talk, reflect, or share food stories? | Consider building in time for discussion or storytelling — this adds meaning and strengthens group connection. |
| What day, time, and location will you choose? | Choose a regular time that suits most people. Consider if the facilities are in a shared space, at a time that is safe and welcoming. |



3.5 Write up a cooking session schedule

A clear plan helps the session run smoothly, keeps everyone on track, and ensures there is enough time for cooking, learning and sharing food together. Most sessions will run between 1.5 -2.5 hours, so time can be adjusted depending on the length of your session and structure of your program.

Below is an example of a session schedule for a 2-hour cooking group which shows how to plan what will happen and when during your cooking group.

| Time | Activity | Details |
|---|-----------------------------|--|
| 30-60 min (not included in 90 min session) | Preparation before session | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the session aim (what cooking skills, budgeting tip or nutrition message are you covering in the session?). Have recipes printed or online. Review recipes and confirm all steps. All ingredients are available. Substitute ingredients are available if needed (for allergies, vegetarians/vegan etc.) |
| 10 min | Session introduction (Talk) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introductions and welcome. Review recipe, ingredients and dietary modifications, if required. Discuss nutrition, budget shopping and waste reduction tips, tricks or message. |
| 45 min | Cooking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aprons on and tie hair back. Wash hands. Prepare recipe as per method. Demonstrate steps throughout the session (i.e. cutting techniques, safe food handling etc.) |
| 30 min | Eating | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serve and eat together. Discuss flavours, texture in foods and how might adapt the recipe for individual tastes. Encourage feedback about sessions. |
| 25 min | Clean up and pack up | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wash, clean and put away items to return kitchen as it was found. |

Step 4: Cook together

4.1 Check pantry stocks and available produce

Keeping recipes affordable is essential for community cooking programs. Low-cost meals support food access and help participants develop budgeting and meal planning skills they can apply at home.

Before planning your session, check what pantry staples and produce you already have. This helps reduce waste, makes the most of available ingredients, and guides recipe selection.

Ways to use your stocks, reduce costs and waste

| Strategy | Description |
|--|---|
| Check pantry inventory | Review dry goods, tinned foods, oils, herbs, spices, and condiments on hand. These can help stretch meals and reduce purchases. |
| Review fresh, frozen, and canned produce | Use what is already available, especially items nearing expiry. Frozen and canned produce are nutritious, affordable alternatives when fresh items are limited. |
| Plan around what is in season | Seasonal fruits and vegetables are often fresher, tastier, and more affordable. Use seasonal guides or ask local suppliers what's in peak supply. |
| Choose flexible ingredients | Select ingredients like rice, lentils, canned beans, onions, and carrots that can be used in multiple meals to reduce waste and manage costs. |
| Buy in bulk when possible | Purchase staples like oats, flour, rice, and pasta in larger quantities if you have storage space, to save money and maintain consistency. |
| Use store-brand products | Opt for generic or store-brand items, which are usually more budget-friendly and similar in quality to branded products. |
| Accept donations or local produce | Connect with food rescue organisations, community gardens, or local growers for potential donations or surplus produce. |
| Label and store correctly | Clearly label and safely store food items to extend shelf life and make ingredients easier to access when planning sessions. |

A well-stocked pantry and smart use of available produce not only saves money but also provides opportunities to teach participants practical skills in budgeting, food storage, and menu planning.



4.2 Shop for ingredients

Weekly shopping for a community cooking group can be flexible and creative, depending on your budget, local options, and who is responsible for buying ingredients. Planning what you need and where you can get it ahead of time helps stretch your budget, reduce food waste, and meet the group's needs.

Shopping can provide a good opportunity to teach budgeting, food literacy, and planning skills that participants can apply at home. So where possible, try to get group members involved and volunteer to help with shopping for food. For some groups, shopping online can help with planning and time management, others find it useful to shop together as a group or get a group member to volunteer their help each week.

Below are some helpful tips for shopping for your cooking group

| Tip | How this helps |
|---|--|
| Create a detailed shopping list | Buying from the shopping list stops unnecessary purchases and helps buy the right quantities. |
| Assigning shopping roles | Sharing responsibility builds skills, confidence, and group ownership. |
| Explore diverse shopping options | Local markets, discount grocers, and culturally appropriate stores may offer better prices and ingredient variety. |
| Use food rescue or surplus services | Supplements your supplies and reduces costs if working with food relief organisations. |
| Time your shopping wisely | Early shopping offers more choice; late shopping can offer discounts on perishable items. |
| Buy bulk items to use throughout program | Reduces cost and waste by purchasing larger quantities and using throughout the program |
| Buy according to shelf life | Prevents spoilage by selecting items that suit your storage and cooking timeline over the course of your cooking group |
| Keep receipts and track spending | Helps manage your budget and plan for future sessions. |
| Consider accessibility | Choose shopping options that are easy to reach for whoever is doing the shopping. |

4.3 Communicate with participants

Clear and consistent communication is an important part of running a cooking group. As a Facilitator, it is important to keep participants informed about what to expect in each session, what to bring, and any changes to the schedule or venue. Regular communication also helps remind the group of shared expectations, such as group values, behaviour guidelines, and participation agreements.

Keeping participants in the loop builds trust, promotes engagement, and helps create a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment. It also allows participants to feel more prepared, confident, and connected. Choose communication methods that suit your group's preferences and abilities and be consistent in how and when you share information.

Some effective ways to communicate with participants include:

- Group emails with session details or reminders
- A private Facebook group to share updates, photos, and recipes
- WhatsApp or text message groups for quick updates and last-minute changes
- Printed flyers or handouts for participants who prefer offline communication

4.4 Create a welcoming environment

A welcoming environment starts before participants even arrive. The way you set up the kitchen space, greet people, and run the session all contributes to how comfortable and included participants feel. As a Facilitator, your role is to create a safe, respectful, and engaging space where everyone can participate fully, regardless of their background, abilities, or experience with cooking.

Set up kitchen space

Begin by ensuring the kitchen is clean, well-organised, and easy to move around. Make sure there is enough room for everyone to work safely and comfortably. Provide drinking water and glasses so people can stay hydrated during the session. Keep benches clear of clutter and wipe down surfaces before the group begins.

Consider food safety and cross contamination needs

Be mindful of participants with allergies or intolerances, such as gluten-free or nut-free requirements and keep these ingredients separate, using clearly labelled utensils and surfaces to avoid cross-contamination. This attention to detail shows care and helps build trust with your group.

Make everyone feel welcome

Greeting each participant warmly and taking time to make them feel involved as soon as they arrive. Pay attention to individual needs, such as those related to disability, age, or social or communication difficulties, and adjust your approach when needed.

Encourage participation and build relationships

Create a positive, friendly atmosphere that helps people feel comfortable joining in. Involve participants in planning, decision-making, and shared tasks during sessions. Be mindful of potential barriers, such as language or literacy, and adjust your approach to ensure everyone can participate meaningfully.

Working with diverse groups

Get to know your group and be aware of different needs and backgrounds. Some participants may face food insecurity, speak different languages, or have cultural or dietary preferences. Others may need extra support due to disability, learning differences, or age. Adapt your sessions where needed to ensure everyone feels included and respected.

Build connection through shared experiences

Group conversations to help people feel comfortable and involved. Encourage participants to share their food traditions, stories, or preferences. Recognise everyone's contribution and create a sense of belonging through shared cooking and conversation.

4.5 Facilitating cooking sessions

When facilitating a cooking session, it is normal to expect some noise, movement, and a bit of organised chaos as participants prepare to cook. Take a moment early in the session to bring everyone together, talk through the recipe, highlight any adaptations, share key cooking tips, and provide a short demonstration if needed. This is where your planning pays off as following your session plan helps keep things on track and allows enough time for all activities. (Refer back to 3.5 Write up cooking session schedule) The points below provide some tips and tricks to help with group facilitation.



1. Introduction - recipe discussion, cooking demonstrations and nutrition information

At the start of the session, gather the group for a quick welcome and outline what you will be cooking. Talk through the recipe, highlight any changes or ingredient swaps, and check for questions. Provide a short cooking demonstration to show key steps or techniques, including knife skills. Share simple, relevant nutrition messages that support the recipe, keeping the information clear, inclusive, and positive. Then move into the hands-on cooking activity with everyone involved.

Helpful safety and demonstration tips

| Topic | What to demonstrate | Facilitator tips |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Reading recipe | Read through the ingredients list and the steps in the methods | "This is an important step in the recipe. Watch how I do/roll out/cut this" |
| Recipe adaptations | Highlight any changes to recipes or for people with dietary needs. | "We are using green beans today instead of broccoli, as there is a lot in the garden" |
| Knife handling | Hold the knife safely, claw grip, stable board | "Use a damp cloth under the board to stop it slipping." |
| Walking with a knife | Walk slowly, knife pointed down, close to body | "Say 'knife behind' or 'coming through' to alert others." |
| Pan and handle safety | Turn handles inwards, not overhanging | "Handles out of the way prevent accidents with hot pans." |
| Safe setup | Keep a tidy bench, cloths off the stove | "Clean as you go – it saves time and reduces risk." |
| Clear instructions | Explain a basic chopping task clearly | Use plain language and check for understanding. |
| Positive communication | Encourage and model patience | Mistakes are learning moments – stay calm and supportive. |

2. Guidance and troubleshooting

As a Facilitator, observe how the group is progressing and offer help when it's needed, always ask before stepping in. Move around the space, check in with participants, and provide simple guidance or demonstrations where useful. If something goes wrong, support troubleshooting with calm encouragement and promote a flexible, problem-solving mindset. Mistakes are a natural part of learning.

3. Skill sharing

Encourage participants to support each other and share what they know. Pairing different skill levels allows more experienced cooks to guide beginners, which builds confidence, connection, and a stronger group dynamic.

4. Managing behaviours by reinforcing group agreements and guidelines

If a group member behaves in an unsafe, disruptive, disrespectful, or unhygienic way, refer back to the group agreement and shared guidelines on behaviour, safety, and hygiene. Calmly remind the individual, or the group, of what was agreed. A respectful and safe environment is essential for everyone's wellbeing.

5. Celebrate small wins and delicious achievements

Recognise progress, no matter how small, whether someone tried a new skill, helped someone, or shared a great idea. Invite participants to taste each other's food, offer compliments, and reflect on what they enjoyed. Celebrating success builds confidence and makes the experience more meaningful for all.

Step 5: Cooking program evaluation

Evaluating your cooking program helps you understand what is working well, what could be improved, and what participants are getting from the session. It makes sure the program stays relevant, engaging, and responsive to the needs of the group.

Evaluating the program requires Facilitators to review and monitor what is happening throughout the program, not just at the end. Below are some different ways that Facilitators can review the program and make sure it is achieving what it set out to.

To achieve this:

- **Gather feedback** from participants at the end of each session or at the end of the program. This can be done through quick verbal check-ins, simple surveys, or feedback forms.
- **Reflect on achievements and changes in the group** such as skill development, confidence in cooking, social connection, or changes in food habits.

- **Observe participation and engagement** during sessions, what activities worked best? What challenges came up? What needs to be changed next week to make the session run more smoothly?
- **Talk to co-Facilitators or volunteers** about their observations and ideas for improvement.
- **Document key learnings** to help improve future sessions or inform others running similar programs.
- **Share outcomes** (with permission) with your organisation or partners to support future funding, collaboration, or program growth.

Evaluation doesn't have to be complicated, it is about listening, learning, and improving over time. Refer to **Section 4 Sample evaluation form**, for a way to ask questions and get feedback from your cooking group participants.

The table below outlines a range of feedback or observations from the cooking program and what actions that could be taken to improve the sessions or overcome the identified issues.

| Feedback/observation | Action to improve |
|--|---|
| Low participant engagement | Introduce more hands-on activities, vary recipes, or ask participants for input. |
| Sessions regularly run out of time | Adjust session plan to focus on fewer tasks or simplify recipes. |
| Confusion during cooking steps | Provide clearer instructions or visual aids; offer a quick demo before starting. |
| Participants not following the food safety practices | Reinforce key safety messages at the start of each session; display visual reminders. |
| Some participants seem left out or unsure what to do | Assign small roles, pair people up, or check in with quieter participants. |
| Recipes are too complex for skill levels | Simplify recipes or provide step-by-step guides with images. |
| Not enough equipment or space | Stagger tasks, rotate stations, or plan recipes that use shared tools efficiently. |
| Dietary needs not consistently met | Collect dietary info early, plan inclusive recipes and label ingredients clearly. |
| Group dynamics are tense or unbalanced | Revisit group agreement, encourage team building, and address any issues that may be affecting the group. |
| Limited feedback from participants | Use informal check-ins, feedback forms, or group reflections to gather input. |
| Healthy recipes are not liked or wanted by group | Involve participants in choosing recipes they enjoy and adapt them to be healthier in subtle ways without compromising taste. |

Section 4:

Resources,
checklists
and tools



Community cooking program planning tools

Connect with your community

Use the following checklist to make sure you have taken time to talk to other people and get them involved in the planning process. These discussions help you understand what you need to include in the cooking group, to gain support and help you understand what your cooking group participants need. **Tip:** Start by connecting with existing services and groups as they often know what is needed and who is interested.

| What to do | Questions to ask others | Check box |
|--|--|-----------|
| Reach out to local services and organisations linked to your target group. | What food or social programs are already happening? What gaps do you see? Do you know of any places that have a kitchen appropriate for a cooking group? | |
| Talk to people who might benefit from or support the group. | Would you or someone you know be interested in a cooking group? What would make it useful or enjoyable? | |
| Attend local events or meetings to build connections. | Is there much interest in food or cooking activities in the community or with this particular group? | |
| Gather input through chats, surveys, or informal interviews. | What would you like to learn, cook, or share in a group setting? | |
| Map your networks – who can help with skills, time, or resources? | Do you know anyone with cooking, organising, or community experience who might want to help? | |

Understand community strengths

| What to do | Questions to ask others | Check box |
|---|--|-----------|
| Explore what people already know, enjoy, or feel confident doing in the kitchen. | What do you enjoy cooking or eating? What have you learned from family or culture? | |
| Identify learning needs and areas to build on. | Is there anything you'd like to learn more about when it comes to cooking or healthy eating? | |
| Recognise unique strengths and experiences (e.g. cultural cooking, language skills, gardening). | Do you have skills or experiences you'd like to share? | |

Be inclusive and welcoming

| What to do | Questions to ask others | Check box |
|--|--|-----------|
| Plan for a mix of ages, backgrounds, and abilities to be involved. | What would help you or others feel welcome and able to join in? | |
| Create opportunities for participants to shape the group. | Would you like to lead an activity, bring a recipe, or share a food story? | |
| Foster a respectful and inclusive environment. | What makes a group feel safe and welcoming to you? | |

Plan your cooking group checklist

This step helps you plan the key resources needed for your cooking program, including the venue, budget, and nutrition support. Use the checklists to ensure everything has been considered in relation to health and safety, as well as the required equipment. Refer to the Community Cooking Kitchen Setup Checklist to make sure your kitchen is ready.

Tick off each item as you go and add notes where needed.

Venue

| General requirements | Check box | Comments |
|--|-----------|----------|
| I have found a location that is safe, accessible, and easy to reach. (Available parking, public transport, disability access i.e. ramps, toilets). | | |
| The venue is free or affordable. | | |
| The venue has running hot and cold water, hand washing facilities and a sink. | | |
| The venue is big enough to have a cooking group for 8-10 people i.e. bench or work space for groups to prepare food, equipment etc. | | |
| Refrigeration and storage facilities are available to store food safety (dry food, cold and frozen foods) . | | |
| There is space for people to eat together once they have cooked their food. | | |
| I have completed the <i>Community Cooking Kitchen Set-Up Checklist</i> . | | |
| The kitchen has basic facilities that work and enough equipment for all participants to cook . | | |
| A first aid kit, fire extinguisher and clear exit path is available from the kitchen. | | |

Budget

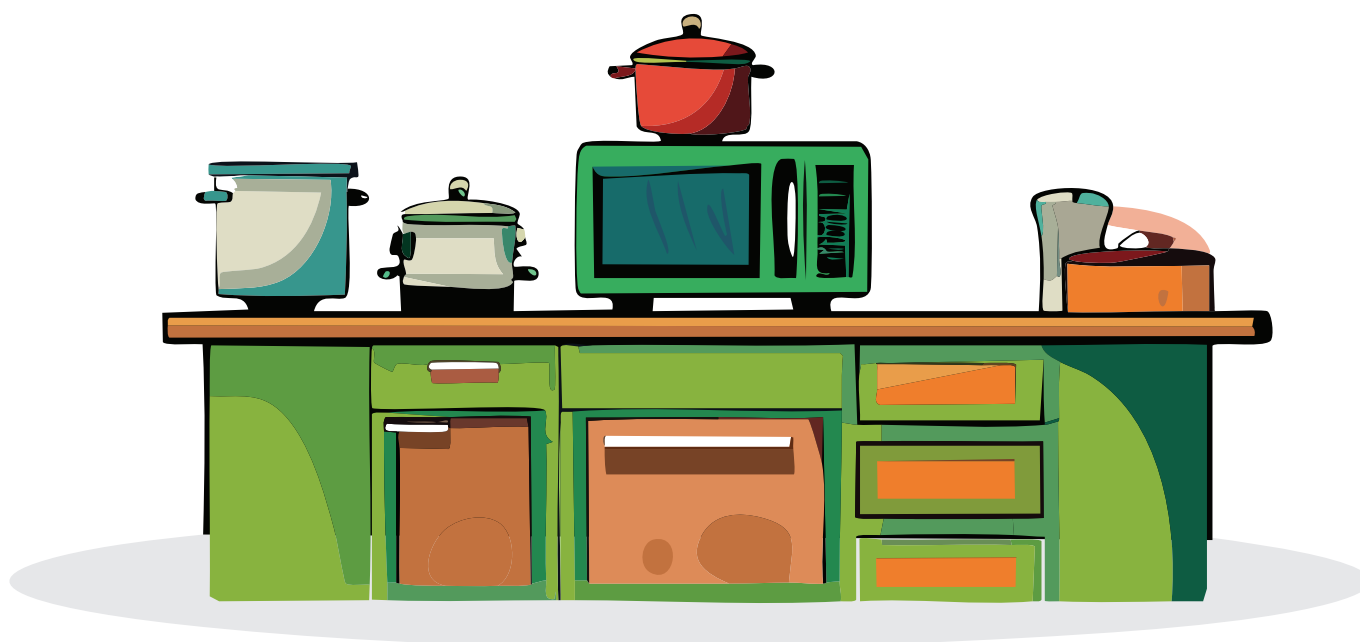
| General requirements | Check box | Comments |
|--|-----------|----------|
| I have identified how the program will be funded (e.g. grants, donations, participant contributions). | | |
| I have explored low-cost or donated food options (e.g. rescued food, community gardens). | | |
| I have completed the <i>Community Cooking Program Budget Planner</i> . | | |
| I have planned for essential costs: food, venue hire, equipment, printed materials, volunteer support. | | |

Nutrition information and support

| General requirements | Check box | Comments |
|--|-----------|----------|
| I understand the possible food and nutrition issues that participants may experience | | |
| I understand that food allergies and intolerances must be considered as part of the planning process <i>(refer to Risk Assessment - Allergies and intolerances checklist)</i> | | |
| I have checked the confidence and knowledge of co-Facilitators or volunteers. | | |
| I have arranged support or accessed reliable nutrition information if needed. | | |
| I have referred to the <i>Nutrition Information</i> section in this manual and used the <i>Recipe Planner Checklist</i> | | |
| Recipes align with healthy eating messages and are suited to the group. | | |

Kitchen set-up checklist

Use this checklist to ensure your kitchen is equipped for a successful community cooking session. The right tools and equipment will help the group work together efficiently and safely. Depending on the number of participants and their abilities, you may need to adjust the quantities or types of equipment. This guide will help you plan based on your group size and their cooking experience.



The equipment below has been estimated for a group of 8 participants.

| Cooking equipment | Per 8 | Check box | Pots and pans | Per 8 | Check box |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|------------------|--|--------------|------------------|
| Oven | 1 | | Large pots | 1-2 | |
| Stove top | 2 | | Frying pans - nonstick, med/ large or electric | 2-4 | |
| Portable cooktop | As needed | | Large saucepans | 1 | |
| Microwave | As needed | | Medium and small saucepans | 2 | |
| Food preparation equipment | | | Oven proof dish | 2 | |
| Large sharp knife | 4-5 | | Glass or aluminum roasting tray | 2 | |
| Small sharp knife | 4-5 | | Baking tray - flat | 2 | |
| Chopping board for vegetables | 4 | | Cake tin | 1 | |
| Chopping board for meat | 2-3 | | Wok | 1 | |
| Vegetable peeler | 2 | | Mixing bowls | | |
| Grater | 2 | | Large mixing bowls | 4-5 | |
| Colander/sTrainer | 2 | | Small mixing bowls | 6+ | |
| Can opener | 1 | | Measuring equipment | | |
| Slotted spoon | 1-2 | | Set measuring cups | 2-3 | |
| Wooden spoons (stirring spoons) | 4 | | Teaspoon, tablespoon measures | 2-3 | |
| Whisk | 1-2 | | Large measuring jug (1L) | 1 | |
| Ladle | 1 | | Measuring scales | 1 | |
| Masher | 1 | | Serving items | | |
| Handheld fruit juicer | 1 | | Serving plates | 4 | |
| Spatula | 2 | | Large bowls | 2 | |
| Pastry brush | 1 | | Serving spoons | 3 | |
| Tongs | 4 | | Plates - per person | 8+ | |
| Egg flip | 2 | | Bowls - per person | 8+ | |
| Cleaning/first aid | | | Mugs/glasses/cups | 8+ | |
| Tea towels | 4-6 | | Knives/forks/spoons (set) | 8+ | |
| Dish washing liquid | 1 | | Food wrap/containers | | |
| Sponge/dish cloth | 3-4 | | Cling wrap and foil | 1 | |
| Pot scrubber | 2 | | Reusable containers for storing in fridge (as needed) | | |
| Apron - per person | 8+ | | Other optional | | |
| Broom/dustpan | 1 | | Mortar and pestle | | |
| Mop and bucket | 1 | | Handheld blender | | |
| First Aid Kit and Fire extinguisher | 1 each | | Thermometer | | |

Budgeting for your cooking program

Use this tool to plan and keep track of costs for your cooking group. Tick off each section as you go. Write down how much you think things will cost and how much you actually spend. Remember to review your budget and spending regularly.

Step 1: Plan What You Need to Pay For

| Item | Do I Need This? | Estimated Cost | Actual Cost | Notes (e.g. who is paying or donating) |
|---|-----------------|----------------|-------------|--|
| Venue hire | | | | |
| Ingredients/food | | | | Try local food relief or donations |
| Food containers for storage and takeaway | | | | |
| Equipment (e.g. pots, frypans, knives) | | | | |
| Cleaning supplies (e.g. gloves, soap, cloths) | | | | |
| Printed materials (recipes, handouts) | | | | |
| Volunteer support (thank you cards, travel) | | | | |
| Facilitator payment (if needed) | | | | |
| Transport (if you pick up food or equipment) | | | | |
| Training (e.g. food safety) | | | | |
| Other (write here): | | | | |



Step 2: Add up your budget

| | Estimated Total | Actual Total |
|---------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Total Program Costs | | |

Step 3: Where will the money or support come from?

| Source | What are they giving? (money or items) | Confirmed? |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Grant or funding | | <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| Donations (e.g. food, money, goods) | | <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| Organisation or host support | | <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| Participants (small fee, if any) | | <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |
| Other (write here): | | <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No |

Tips: Use this at the start of planning and update it when things change.

- Try to plan recipes around available budget.
- Keep receipts and track what you spend.
- Where appropriate, approach local businesses or organisations for support or donations.

Community cooking risk assessment tool

This tool helps Facilitators plan ahead, reduce risks, and keep everyone safe during community cooking sessions. Use it before your first session and review it regularly. Tick off each action and add notes to suit your group.

| Risk area | Potential issue | Recommended actions |
|---|---|---|
| Food safety | Unsafe food handling or foodborne illness | <input type="checkbox"/> Food safety training has been completed. <input type="checkbox"/> Handwashing and safe food handling are demonstrated and encouraged. <input type="checkbox"/> High-risk foods are limited and/or managed appropriately (e.g. raw egg, undercooked meats). <input type="checkbox"/> Safe storage, temperature, and hygiene requirements are followed. |
| Food allergies or intolerances | Allergic reactions or dietary issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Allergy and dietary needs are collected in registration forms. <input type="checkbox"/> Ingredients are listed each week and available to participants. <input type="checkbox"/> Safe substitutes are offered where possible. <input type="checkbox"/> Cross-contamination in preparation areas is avoided. |
| Injury – cuts, burns or slips | Unsafe use of knives or equipment; hot surfaces; wet floors | <input type="checkbox"/> Safe use of knives and kitchen tools are taught. <input type="checkbox"/> Use of sharp or hot items is supervised as needed. <input type="checkbox"/> Sharp tools are stored safely when not in use. <input type="checkbox"/> Walkways are clear and dry and clean spills are managed promptly. <input type="checkbox"/> First aid training has been completed and a first aid kit is on hand. |
| Manual handling & equipment safety | Injury from lifting or using unsafe/untested appliances | <input type="checkbox"/> Safe lifting and setup practices are followed. <input type="checkbox"/> Heavy items (e.g. pots, boxes) are moved with assistance. <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical items are tagged/tested where required. <input type="checkbox"/> Equipment is inspected before use. |

| Risk area | Potential issue | Recommended actions |
|---|---|--|
| Emergency situations | Fire, evacuation, or medical emergency | <input type="radio"/> The venue's emergency procedures and exits are known and discussed with participants. <input type="radio"/> Location of fire extinguishers and first aid kits are known. <input type="radio"/> Emergency contact details for participants are available. <input type="radio"/> A phone is available during the session. |
| Low attendance | Poor engagement or program drop-out | <input type="radio"/> A welcoming, inclusive environment is created. <input type="radio"/> Participants are regularly checked in with and feedback is encouraged. <input type="radio"/> Barriers (e.g. transport, childcare) are addressed with partners. <input type="radio"/> The program is promoted through trusted local networks. |
| Emotional safety & inclusion | Participants feel excluded, uncomfortable or unsafe | <input type="radio"/> Inclusive, respectful language and behaviour are used. <input type="radio"/> Group agreements are developed and followed. <input type="radio"/> Participation options are offered based on ability and comfort. <input type="radio"/> Feedback and group dynamics are handled sensitively. |
| Cultural safety and diversity | Recipes or practices may not reflect or respect diverse food cultures | <input type="radio"/> The community is consulted about recipes and ingredients. <input type="radio"/> Participants are encouraged to share food stories and preferences. <input type="radio"/> Diverse, culturally appropriate ingredients are included when possible. |
| Child safety (if applicable) | Children may be present during sessions | <input type="radio"/> Children are supervised at all times. <input type="radio"/> Child-safe utensils and tasks are provided. <input type="radio"/> Relevant child safety guidelines are followed eg. working with children's check. |
| Waste management and clean up | Food waste or inadequate cleaning practices | <input type="radio"/> Food waste is minimised and composting is encouraged. <input type="radio"/> Cleaning roles and waste disposal are planned and shared. |

Acknowledgement: This tool was adapted from a Risk Assessment Tool developed by 2020 Nutrition Australia ACT Inc and modified to support community needs.

Guide to choosing and adapting a healthy recipe

Use this checklist to help you select or adapt recipes that are suitable for your cooking group. Recipes are an important part of teaching food skills and supporting healthy eating habits. This tool is based on the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating and supports the goals of your community cooking program.

Use this checklist when choosing a recipe or planning a menu. Aim to meet as many of the criteria as possible.

| Recipe Criteria | If not... adapt recipe |
|---|--|
| Uses low-cost, easy-to-find ingredients | Substitute with seasonal and commonly available items. |
| Uses basic kitchen equipment and appliances. | Simplify the method or find a similar recipe that uses standard tools. |
| Easy to follow and includes simple instructions. | Rewrite in plain language. Break down steps. Add visuals or demonstrations if helpful. |
| Measurements are in familiar terms (e.g. ½ cup, 1 tablespoon) | Convert unusual measurements to cups /spoons. Use standard measuring cups/spoons in class. |
| Includes at least 3 different types of vegetables (different colours and seasonal preferred) | Add veg to the dish, or serve with salad, roast or steamed veg. Frozen or canned are good options too. |
| Includes mostly whole grain carbohydrates (e.g. brown rice, barley, lentils, wholemeal pasta) | Swap out white/refined grains for whole grain options. |
| Includes a good quality protein (e.g. lean meat, chicken, fish, tofu, beans, lentils) | Adapt to include lean proteins or plant-based options for a balanced meal. |
| Avoids deep frying or heavily fried ingredients. | Use oven-baking, pan-frying with minimal oil, or air-frying instead. |
| Uses healthy fats (e.g. olive, canola, avocado, light dairy) | Replace saturated/trans fats (butter, cream, coconut oil) with healthier options. Check labels for palm oil, copha, shortening, etc. |
| Limits added sugar where possible | Identify hidden sugars (e.g. honey, jam, condensed milk). Reduce or replace with fruit (dates, banana, apple sauce) or natural sweeteners like stevia. |
| Uses monounsaturated or polyunsaturated oils in cooking and dressings. | Swap solid fats (like butter) for plant-based oils such as olive or canola. |
| Offers water as the main drink (for community meals) | Serve plain or sparkling water with fruit slices or a splash of juice. Avoid sweetened drinks. |

Acknowledgement: This tool was developed from the Recipe Development Guidelines created for the Grow Cook Share project by [Bendigo Foodshare](#).

Cooking group agreement and guidelines

Cooking groups bring people together to share and enjoy food while building skills and knowledge about selecting, preparing, cooking, and eating well. To ensure a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment for everyone, it is important to establish a set of agreements and guidelines. Below are key ideas to discuss with the group. These can be tailored, added to, or removed based on group feedback.

By setting clear expectations, you create a safe, inclusive, and enjoyable cooking group for all participants.

Group agreements

1. Respect

We agree to treat all members with respect and consideration, avoiding language or behaviour that is harmful or offensive.

2. Inclusivity

We commit to celebrating diversity and including everyone regardless of background, identity, or abilities. We will respect dietary restrictions and cultural preferences in planning and preparing meals.

3. Safety and Hygiene

We agree to follow food safety and kitchen hygiene standards. We will make sure cooking surfaces and utensils are clean and sanitised. Knives will be handled safely at all times.

4. Communication

We agree to communicate openly, respectfully, and listen actively. Interruptions will be avoided, and feedback given constructively and sensitively.

5. Shared Responsibility

We agree to share tasks equally, ensuring everyone can contribute to planning, cooking, and cleaning.

6. Conflict Resolution

We agree to manage disagreements calmly and respectfully, using open discussion to resolve issues.

7. Privacy

We agree to respect each other's privacy and keep personal information confidential unless consent is given to share.

8. Punctuality

We agree to arrive on time to support a smooth and efficient cooking session.

9. Feedback

We agree to provide feedback and suggestions constructively and at appropriate times to improve the group.

10. No Harassment or Discrimination

We agree that harassment or discrimination will not be tolerated and that any such behaviour will be addressed immediately and appropriately.

11. Enjoyment and Learning

We agree to support each other's learning at all skill levels and to foster an environment of enjoyment and mutual respect.

Guidelines for inclusion and safety

Dietary accommodations: We will respect and support members with allergies or dietary restrictions. Participants are responsible for managing their own needs and clearly informing Facilitators and the group. Where possible, we will offer recipe alternatives or encourage members to bring their own suitable ingredients.

Clear labelling: We will label all ingredients and prepared dishes clearly, especially when serving food to a group. We will highlight any common allergens.

Safety precautions: We will use safe cooking practices, including proper knife handling, equipment use, and hygiene. Safety tools such as oven mitts and aprons will be available to use during sessions.

Accessibility: We will ensure the cooking space is accessible and welcoming to everyone, including those with mobility or other challenges. We will make reasonable adjustments where needed.

Emergency plan: We will have a clear emergency plan in place. This includes knowing where the first aid kit is and how to contact emergency services if needed.

Sustainability: We will aim to reduce food waste, recycle where possible, and use sustainable practices in our cooking group.

Equal participation: We will encourage everyone to take part in cooking, decision-making and group activities in a fair and inclusive way. Everyone's contribution is valued.

Guidelines for personal safety and hygiene

Personal hygiene: We will always wash our hands before food preparation or after touching face/nose/hair etc., tie back long hair, and remove jewellery. When leaving for the bathroom, we will take off our aprons and make sure our hands are washed on return.

Appropriate clothing: To prevent falls and burns, participants will wear closed-toed shoes that have rubber/low slip soles, tops with sleeves (but not oversized ones) and an apron when working in the kitchen.

Avoid sharing illness: If we are unwell, we will not attend the cooking session for that week. If we become unwell or have stomach upsets shortly after the cooking session, we will contact the Facilitator to let them know.

Shopping list for pantry staples

Use the list of staples below to help set up your community kitchen and maintain stocks.

| Grains & Pasta | | Canned & Jarred Goods | | Dried Goods | |
|--------------------|--|------------------------|---|-------------|---|
| | Brown rice or basmati rice | | Diced tomatoes or passata | | Lentils |
| | Pasta or noodles | | Tomato paste | | Chickpeas (dried) |
| | Rolled oats or quick oats | | Canned lentils, chickpeas, and beans | | Breadcrumbs |
| | Quinoa or couscous | | Canned vegetables (corn, asparagus) | | Sugar |
| | Polenta/semolina | | Canned fruit (peaches, apricots, pineapple) | | Dried fruit (sultanas, apricots) |
| | Rice noodles (vermicelli) | | Canned tuna/salmon (in water or oil) | | Wholemeal or plain flour (plain/self-raising) |
| | Wholemeal bread or multigrain wraps | | Coconut milk (regular or light) | | Yeast/baking powder |
| | Barley | | UHT or powdered milk | | Corn Flour |
| Cooking Essentials | | Herbs & Spices (Dried) | | | |
| | Olive oil or canola oil, cooking spray | | Bay leaves | | Curry powder |
| | Vinegar (white, balsamic) | | Paprika | | Garlic powder |
| | Soy sauce | | Cumin | | Cinnamon |
| | Salt and pepper | | Chilli flakes | | Nutmeg |
| | Fish sauce | | Mixed herbs | | turmeric |
| | Stock cubes | | Oregano | | Coriander |

Cooking group registration form

Participant Information

Full Name: _____

Preferred Name (if different): _____

Date of Birth: / / _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Emergency Contact Name: _____

Emergency Contact Phone: _____

Health & Dietary Information

Do you have any food allergies or intolerances?

Yes No

If yes, please list:

Do you have any health conditions we should be aware of (e.g. diabetes, coeliac disease, heart condition, mobility limitations)?

Yes No

If yes, please explain briefly:

Do you have any specific dietary needs (e.g. vegetarian, halal, gluten-free)?

Yes No

If yes, please specify:

Cooking & Nutrition Experience

How would you rate your cooking skills?

- Beginner – I rarely cook or need support
- Basic – I can follow simple recipes
- Intermediate – I cook regularly and can adapt recipes
- Advanced – I'm confident in the kitchen and enjoy experimenting

How would you rate your nutrition knowledge?

- Low – I'm not sure what makes a balanced meal
- Basic – I know some healthy eating principles
- Moderate – I make conscious choices about food
- High – I have strong knowledge of nutrition and food choices

What would you like to learn or get out of this cooking group?

Access & Support

Do you have any accessibility needs (e.g. mobility support, visual or hearing assistance)?

Yes No

If yes, please provide details:

Consent & Acknowledgement

I give permission for my information to be used for the purpose of running this cooking group.

Yes

I understand this is not a nutrition or medical service and any advice is general in nature.

Yes

I give permission for photos of me during the sessions to be used in reports or promotions.

Yes No

Signature:

Date: / / _____

Sample cooking group evaluation form

We would love to hear what you thought of the cooking program. Please answer these short questions to help us improve the sessions for the future.



1. What did you learn in this program? (Select all that apply)

- Cooking skills
 - Nutrition information
 - How to cook healthy meals
 - How to save money when shopping/cooking
 - Other:
-

2. What did you think about the recipes chosen for the sessions? (Select all that apply)

- Healthy
 - Easy/simple
 - Good variety
 - Not what I expected
 - comments:
-

3. Did you enjoy the cooking sessions?

- Yes, very much
- Mostly
- A little bit
- Not really

4. Was the program well organised?

- Yes
- Mostly
- No

Comments:

5. What did you like most about the program?

6. What would you change or do differently next time?

7. Any other feedback?

Nutrition information and healthy recipe resources

General Nutrition For All Ages

| Resource | Link |
|--|--|
| Eat for Health – Australian Guide to Healthy Eating | eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines/australian-guide-healthy-eating |
| Eat for Health – Homepage | eatforhealth.gov.au |
| Nutrition Australia – Homepage | nutritionaustralia.org |
| Nutrition Australia – AGTHE Standard Serves | nutritionaustralia.org/fact-sheets/adgs-standard-serves |
| Eat for Health – Tips for Eating Well | eatforhealth.gov.au/eating-well/tips-eating-well |
| Baker Institute – Portion Plate Guide | baker.edu.au/health-hub/fact-sheets/the-portion-guide |
| Taste (Recipe & Meal Inspiration) | taste.com.au |
| Food Allergy Aware – Basics | foodallergyaware.org.au |
| Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia | allergyfacts.org.au |

Children

| Resource | Link |
|--|--|
| Healthy Eating Advisory Service (HEAS) – Healthy Lunchboxes | heas.health.vic.gov.au |
| Nutrition Australia – Eating a Rainbow | nutritionaustralia.org/eat-a-rainbow |
| Nutrition Australia – Allergies | nutritionaustralia.org/food-allergies |
| Eat for Health – Healthy Eating for Children | eatforhealth.gov.au/healthy-eating-children |

Adults

| Resource | Link |
|---|--|
| Nutrition Australia – Healthy Eating on a Budget | nutritionaustralia.org/budget |
| Nutrition Australia – Family Breakfast Ideas | nutritionaustralia.org/family-breakfast |
| Nutrition Australia – Snacks at Work | nutritionaustralia.org/snacks-at-work |
| Nutrition Australia – Food and Mood | nutritionaustralia.org/food-and-mood |

Pregnant Women

| Resource | Link |
|---|---|
| Nutrition Australia – Iodine | nutritionaustralia.org/iodine |
| Nutrition Australia – Iron | nutritionaustralia.org/iron |
| Eat for Health – Pregnancy & Breastfeeding | eatforhealth.gov.au/pregnancy |
| NSW Food Authority – Foods to Avoid When Pregnant | foodauthority.nsw.gov.au |

Seniors 70+

| Resource | Link |
|---|---|
| Nutrition Australia – Fibre | nutritionaustralia.org/fibre |
| Nutrition Australia – Older Adults | nutritionaustralia.org/older-adults |
| Eat for Health – Healthy Eating When You're Older | eatforhealth.gov.au/older-adults |

Recipes

| Resource | Link |
|---|---|
| Nutrition Australia – Recipes | nutritionaustralia.org/category/recipes |
| Eat for Health – Healthy Recipes | eatforhealth.gov.au/eating-well/healthy-recipes |
| Baker Institute – Healthy Recipes | baker.edu.au/health-hub/recipes |
| Woolworths – Healthy Budget Dinner Ideas | woolworths.com.au |
| CSIRO – Quick and Easy Recipes | totalwellbeingdiet.com.au |
| Dietitians Australia – Recipes | dietitiansaustralia.org.au |
| Heart Foundation – Heart Healthy Recipes | heartfoundation.org.au/recipes |
| Healthy Eating Advisory Service – Recipes | heas.health.vic.gov.au/recipes |

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