

Food culture in aged care

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Food, n.
Any nutritious substance that people or animals eat or drink or that plants absorb in order to maintain life and growth. Nourishing substances that give us energy, support growth and keep us alive. (Oxford Dictionary).

For the World Health Organisation safe, sufficient and nutritious food is the key sustaining life and promoting good health.

Up until 2022, the Aged Care Quality Standard, ‘Services and support for daily living’ was rather vague stating, ‘Where meals are provided, they are varied and of suitable quality and quantity.’

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (2018) received numerous evidence of malnutrition, and inadequate meals offered to seniors. According to the Commission’s Report in 2021, **food in aged care was one of the areas requiring immediate attention.**

Food is so important in aged care in fact that the Revised Aged Care Quality Standard 6 is dedicated solely to Food and Nutrition.

To meet the Standard, quality of food served and dining experience is assessed. It was recognised that dining should be an enjoyable experience. New resources from the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission provide tips for the providers, for the staff

and for the residents as highlighted in the last issue of *Seniors Voice*.

Food & CaLD (culturally and linguistically diverse) seniors

Food is strongly connected with one’s culture and country. Different countries have different and diverse ways of presenting and working with different ingredients depending on their availability and geographic situation.

Connections can be so strong that the smell of just a few ingredients is sufficient to trigger memories. When the smell of an apple pie comes from the oven for example, one might remember baking a pie with loved ones.

People from CaLD backgrounds will have certain preferences, opinions and even rules about food connected with their country of origin. But it is not just preferences. A glass of milk may be the cause of unpleasant side effects for people from Asian or African backgrounds. Why? Likely because they do not have lactase, an enzyme needed to digest lactose, a complex sugar in milk.

We should be respectful of other people’s habits and whatever their preferences or opinions, no explanation should be required.

Lack of culturally appropriate choices is a common complaint. Meals may be nutritious and balanced, but the flavours of traditional cuisines are not there.

Lasagne Serves 6

Modification by Sophie Wright-Pedersen, Dietitian, Alice Springs

✕ Original Ingredients	✎ Modifications	✓ Modified Ingredients
250g instant lasagne sheets	Nil	250g instant lasagne sheets
1 tablespoon olive oil	Nil	1 tablespoon olive oil
1 brown onion	Nil	1 brown onion
2 cloves garlic	Nil	2 cloves garlic
1 carrot	Extra vegetables for increased fibre, vitamins and minerals	1 carrot 1 large red capsicum 150g baby spinach 2 cups mushrooms
500g beef mince	Choose lean mince	500g lean beef mince
9 tablespoons tomato paste	Reduced, choose no added salt variety	2 tablespoons no added salt tomato paste
1 cup tomato passata	Increased, choose no added salt option	2 x 400g tin no added salt diced tomatoes
1 cup liquid chicken stock	Removed	
½ cup white wine	Use salt reduced stock to lower the energy of the meal	½ cup reduced salt stock
½ teaspoon oregano	Nil	½ teaspoon oregano
¼ teaspoon nutmeg	Extra flavour from more herbs and spices to replace stock	¼ teaspoon nutmeg 2 tablespoon basil ½ teaspoon paprika
1/3 cup regular mozzarella	Swap to reduced fat cottage cheese	
60g butter	Removed, using cottage cheese instead	500g reduced fat cottage cheese
¼ cup white flour	Removed, using cottage cheese instead	
¼ cup parmesan	Increased for flavour	½ cup parmesan
450mL full cream milk	Choose low fat variety	125mL reduced fat milk

Method

1. Preheat oven to 180°C.

2. Spray a large frying pan with oil and place over medium heat. Sauté onion and garlic until soft. Add mince and brown, breaking up with a wooden spoon. Add mushrooms, carrot and capsicum and cook for 5 minutes.

3. Add tomatoes, tomato paste, wine (or stock), paprika, nutmeg and herbs. Simmer for 20 minutes, until liquid has reduced by a third. Add spinach to the mince sauce, stir and cook for a few minutes until wilted. Remove from heat.

4. Meanwhile, make the cheese sauce. Blend cottage cheese, milk and all the parmesan except 2 tablespoons until smooth and creamy.

5. Lightly spray a deep lasagne dish with oil. Spread a third of the mince sauce over the base. Follow with a layer of pasta, a layer of sauce, a layer of cheese. Repeat layering, finishing with the cheese. Sprinkle top with remaining parmesan and bake for 30–40 minutes. Stand for 5 minutes before serving with salad.



	Original Recipe		Modified Recipe	
	Per Serve	Per 100g	Per Serve	Per 100g
Energy	2385kJ	588kJ	1970kJ	389kJ
Protein	32.9g	8.1g	41.4g	8.2g
Fat total	26.9g	6.6g	14.0g	2.8g
– Saturated	11.9g	2.9g	6.4g	1.3g
Carbohydrate	45.6g	11.3g	41.1g	8.1g
Fibre	5.1g	1.3g	6.8g	1.3g
Sodium	629mg	155mg	436mg	86mg

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Recipes

Seniors can do their part, sharing not only preferences, but recipes too. It’s no problem if the recipe is incomplete or if alternatives need to be found.

There are many food-based websites that offer culturally appropriate recipes such as [SBS Food](#), where hundreds of recipes are available (e.g. Armenian lavosh, Indigenous Quandong Christmas cake, Greek spanakopita etc.).

Recipe modifications

Converting all-time favourites into healthier versions is easy

with Healthy Living NT. Their database of recipes explains why some ingredients are healthier than others and still deliver great flavours. Try the Lasagne Recipe Modification above.

More information

Call PICAC NT Manager Cecilia on **08 8941 1004** during office hours, Mondays to Fridays, 9am to 3pm.

With thanks to:

