



PACIFIC PARENTING TOOLKIT

MODULE 3: HEALTHY NUTRITION

1. Background

The Pacific faces a triple burden of malnutrition, characterised by the coexistence of undernutrition (stunting and wasting), micronutrient deficiencies (often termed hidden hunger), and overnutrition (overweight and obesity). Rapid growth, urbanisation, and changing lifestyles have led to major changes in diets. (1) In many places, traditional foods are being replaced by imported, highly processed foods that are high in energy but low in nutrients. This shift in diet has contributed to the rise of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which are the leading cause of premature death in the Pacific. (2) According to 2023 World Health Organisation (WHO) data. (3) six of the top ten countries in the world for age-standardized NCD mortality rate (per 100 000 population) are in the Pacific region. This problem is made worse by poor nutrient absorption. Some children experience chronic inflammation of the small intestine, known as environmental enteric dysfunction. This condition is more common in places with inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services, where children are repeatedly exposed to faecal pathogens. (4)

Research suggests that children are likely to maintain their dietary habits into adulthood. (5) The eating habits of parents and caregivers strongly influence the eating habits of children. This is true across ages, genders, socioeconomic backgrounds, and countries. Parents and caregivers shape the home food environment by deciding what foods are available and accessible. Their choices and behaviours also influence how children think about food and how they develop their own food preferences and eating habits. (6)

Although most Pacific countries have adopted national nutrition policies or included nutrition objectives in broader health or development frameworks, few policies explicitly address the role of parents and caregivers in promoting healthy eating. Fiji and Samoa have taken some steps through school canteen guidelines, sugar-sweetened beverage taxation, and breastfeeding promotion efforts, while Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Palau have specific national nutrition policies. However, these initiatives largely represent isolated examples of parental and caregiver engagement, and comprehensive multi-sectoral action plans that address the full spectrum of malnutrition remain limited in both coverage and scope. Regional frameworks, including the [Pacific Guidelines for Healthy Living](#) and [FAO/UNICEF regional nutrition strategies](#), have guided policy development, but implementation is uneven, and many documents are outdated or lack enforcement mechanisms.

Although the following module is focused on nutrition, it is important to recognise that good nutrition (food and hygiene) and regular physical activity work hand-in-hand across the life course. A balanced diet absorbed by a healthy digestive system provides the energy and nutrients needed for growth, brain development, and overall health, while exercise and active play strengthen muscles, bones, and cardiovascular health,

support healthy weight, and promote mental well-being. (7) Together, they help children and adolescents establish lifelong healthy habits.

Module Structure 1.1

The module follows the structure outlined in Chapter 1 Section 1.4 Content Overview. In addition, there are five annexes at the end of this module, which provide further information or guidance for facilitators and programme managers. These include:

1. **Guidance on Multi-sectoral integration:** identifying potential entry points for healthy nutrition activities across other sectors to encourage a holistic approach to parenting
2. **Programmes from the Region:** Programmes or interventions in the Pacific and globally that make reference to specific healthy nutrition skills.
3. **Facilitator Checklist:** A simple checklist per skill designed to support facilitators in preparing for and delivering the content related to healthy nutrition.
4. **Additional Pacific resources:** A list of resources with links for additional materials including factsheets, videos and posters, to support the skills included in this module.
5. **Nutritious Pacific Foods:** A list of examples of local foods found in the Pacific which can support discussions around how to ensure a healthy and balanced diet.



Practical guidance and knowledge on encouraging physical activity at different ages is covered in the Module 0: Foundational Parenting Knowledge and Practice.

2. Best Practices Across the Life Course

This section focuses on four core skills that support healthy nutrition and well-being across the life course, from pregnancy through early childhood (0–5 years), middle childhood (6–10 years), and adolescence (11–18 years).

These skills include:

- 1. Making Family Meals a Daily Routine**
- 2. Understanding and Choosing a Healthy Diet**
- 3. Supporting your Child or Adolescent to Prepare and Choose their Own Food**
- 4. Ensuring Adequate Hydration**

While these skills are relevant at every stage of development, how parents and caregivers apply them will change as children grow and become more independent. During pregnancy and early childhood, parents and caregivers take the lead in food choices and routines. As children grow older, parents and caregivers gradually guide, support, and model healthy choices while encouraging independence. Together, these skills help build strong foundations for healthy growth, positive relationships with food, and lifelong healthy habits. The skills included are applicable to both female and male caregivers, recognising the important role everyone plays in shaping children's eating habits and well-being.

At the end of this section, there are sample activities for facilitators to take and use directly with parents and caregivers to support the skills in this section.

Skill 1: Making Family Meals a Daily Routine

Why It Matters

Making family meals a regular routine, even when this is not possible every day, supports children's nutrition, development, and well-being across the life course, from pregnancy through adolescence. Predictable meal and snack times help children recognise hunger and fullness cues, develop healthy eating habits, and build a positive relationship with food. (8, 9) In many Pacific contexts, families face long working hours, irregular schedules, high food costs, climate-related disruptions, and periods of food shortage, meaning shared meals may be brief, simple, or happen at different times.(10) What matters most is creating regular opportunities to eat together, when possible, whether that is a main meal or a shared snack, so children experience consistency and care. Eating together allows parents and caregivers to model balanced eating, encourage local and traditional foods, support hydration, and strengthen family connection. Further, mealtime conversations build children's social and emotional skills and sense of belonging. (11,12) In Pacific cultures, where eating together is a valued practice, strengthening family meal routines that are adapted to each family's realities supports healthier eating patterns, stronger relationships, and long-term well-being. (8,13)

Why this skill matters across the life-course:

- **Pregnancy:** Eating regularly and including a variety of nutritious foods supports the health of both mother and baby. Consistent routines help the mother maintain energy, support foetal growth, and reinforce positive habits for the family.
- **0–5 years (Early Childhood):** Children under 6 months should be exclusively breastfed (this means giving them only breastmilk, no other food or drink). From 6 months solid foods can be introduced slowly together with water to complement breastfeeding. Breastmilk should continue to be offered and encouraged until the child is 2 years old. Offering a variety of nutritious foods and maintaining regular meal and snack times helps toddlers get the nutrients they need for growth and brain development, supports healthy appetite regulation, and encourages long-term healthy eating habits. (14) Establishing regular meal and snack times helps children learn healthy eating patterns, prevents excessive snacking on sugary foods, and supports appetite regulation. (15) Shared meals teach children healthy eating habits, encourage them to try new foods, and help them learn to recognise hunger and fullness cues. Eating together also builds social and emotional skills such as communication, patience, and confidence. (16)
- **6–10 years (Middle Childhood):** This age is critical for developing lifelong eating habits. Regular family meals provide an opportunity to guide children's choices, expose them to a variety of healthy foods, and reinforce cultural food practices.

Shared meals support social skills, strengthen family bonds, and reduce reliance on sugary or highly processed snacks. (8,13,16)



Disability Considerations

Parents and caregivers should be encouraged to make mealtimes inclusive for children with disabilities.

- Create inclusive seating and adapted utensils for children with mobility or motor challenges.
 - Ensure the child sits together with the family in their mobility device which often has a tray.
- Encourage participation in conversation and mealtime routines in ways that the child can engage meaningfully.
 - Adaptations to family dining areas should be considered to ensure the child is engaged and a part of the group

- **11–18 years (Adolescence):** Adolescence is a time of rapid growth and increasing independence. (17) Consistent routines and shared family meals provide a calm, predictable space for connection, conversation, and learning while reinforcing healthy eating habits. Eating together exposes teens to balanced meals, local foods, and positive role modelling from parents and caregivers, helping them develop responsible food choices and maintain a balanced diet. (16) As adolescents become busier with peers and activities, identifying at least 2–3 days each week to share meals as a family helps maintain strong family connections. (18) Involving teens in meal planning and food preparation supports their growing autonomy, builds cooking skills, and encourages lifelong healthy habits. (19) Family meals also provide opportunities to reinforce cultural food practices, strengthen family bonds, and support adolescents’ social and emotional development.



Disability Considerations

Parents, caregivers, and families should make shared meals and food preparation inclusive for adolescents with disabilities by ensuring mealtime environments are accessible.



See Activity 1 at the end of this section for a facilitator-led activity to do with parents and caregivers on making family meals a daily routine.



For more information on breastfeeding see the Early Childhood section of this module:

- **Skill 1: Establishing Healthy Feeding Practices in the First 6 Months**
- **Skill 2: How to Breastfeed**

Essential Building Blocks

- **Breastmilk only until 6 months:** Babies up to the age of 6 months should only be fed breastmilk, unless otherwise prescribed by a health professional. **Set predictable meal and snack times:** Help children learn healthy eating habits and regulate their appetite.
- **Offer healthy, local foods first:** These give children the nutrients they need to grow healthy and strong. Keep highly processed foods and sugary drinks for special occasions.
- **Water is best:** Serve water as the default drink to keep their bodies hydrated. Sugary drinks do not hydrate as well, and they have a high sugar content which is not healthy for children.
- **Know when you are full:** Encourage children to listen to their body and stop eating when they are full. Listen to your child and do not feed them more than what they want to eat.
- **Try new foods regularly:** Encourage children to try new foods and flavours, using local, traditional fruit and vegetables and traditional dishes.
- **Family meals reinforce good habits:** Use family meals to model balanced eating, positive conversation, and cultural food traditions. Avoid having screens at the table to prioritise conversations and positive engagement without distraction.

Social Media Messages

- Family meals matter! Eat together, enjoy taro, kumala, breadfruit, and local fish.
- Set regular mealtimes and serve water first – small habits, big benefits for healthy kids.
- Offer fresh fruits like pawpaw, banana, and mango, and keep sugary drinks for special occasions.
- Encourage your child to try local vegetables and leafy greens - listen to their hunger cues.

Skill 2: Understanding and Choosing a Healthy Diet

Why It Matters

From pregnancy through adolescence, the foods children and adolescents eat have a profound impact on their growth, development, and long-term health. (20) Providing a variety of nutritious, locally sourced, and culturally appropriate foods helps meet essential nutrient needs, supports brain and body development, and reduces the risk of malnutrition or diet-related diseases, (21) Parents and caregivers play a central role in shaping these habits by modelling healthy eating, guiding children to make informed choices, and encouraging exploration of new foods. (22) Supporting good food choices from an early age empowers children to develop confidence in deciding what to eat, fosters a positive relationship with food, and establishes lifelong habits that promote physical, cognitive, and emotional well-being. (23)

In many Pacific communities, however, families may face challenges such as high food prices, limited access to fresh foods, or reliance on low-cost imported foods.(24) In these situations, parents and caregivers can be supported to make the healthiest choices possible within what is available and affordable, prioritising local foods when possible, and limiting frequent consumption of highly processed foods such as instant noodles and packaged snacks, which are often high in salt and low in essential nutrients. Nutrition guidance should recognise that families make food choices within the limits of availability, cost, and local food systems. The goal is to support the healthiest possible choices within those realities.

Why this skill matters across the life-course:

- **Pregnancy:** Eating a varied and nutritious diet during pregnancy supports the baby's growth and development. (25) It also helps mothers maintain energy, prevent anaemia, reduce pregnancy complications, and prepare for breastfeeding. (25) Choosing a wide range of nutritious Pacific foods supports the health of both mother and baby. Avoiding sugary drinks and sweetened beverages during pregnancy helps reduce the risk of excessive weight gain and gestational diabetes. (26)



Disability Considerations

Pregnancy: Pregnant mothers carrying babies with known health conditions or disabilities may benefit from tailored nutrition advice to support fetal growth. Health professionals should provide guidance on nutrient-dense foods, supplementation, and hydration.

- Collaborate with maternal health providers to monitor nutrient needs if the baby has or is at risk of a congenital condition.
- Encourage continued breastfeeding with guidance adapted to infants with oral-motor difficulties after birth.

- **0-5 years (Early Childhood):** The first five years are a critical period for growth, brain development, and shaping lifelong eating habits. (12) Breastmilk offers babies the best start in life and reduces risks of obesity and illness later in life. After 6 months, offering a variety of nutritious foods and responding to children’s hunger and fullness cues helps meet nutrient needs and builds a positive relationship with food. (11) Parents and caregivers play a key role by modelling healthy eating and encouraging children to explore new tastes and textures, laying the foundation for healthy habits later in life. (11)



Disability Considerations

Early Childhood (0-5 years):

Children with physical, sensory, or developmental disabilities may face challenges with feeding, chewing, swallowing, responding to food textures, or maintaining a good posture during meals. Early identification, supportive routines, and adaptive strategies can help promote safe feeding, adequate nutrition, and increasing independence.(12)

- Use adapted utensils, cups, or plate designs to support safe self-feeding and improve grip and coordination.
- Modify food textures (e.g., soft, mashed, or pureed) when needed to reduce choking risk while maintaining nutrient quality.
- Support appropriate positioning during meals. While upright positioning is commonly recommended for safe swallowing, it may not always be possible or safe for some children with physical disabilities, and alternative positioning should be guided by trained professionals.
- Provide consistent parent/caregiver support during mealtimes, modelling feeding techniques and responsive feeding practices while encouraging the child’s participation. Maintaining predictable mealtime routines can support learning and comfort during feeding.
- Seek collaboration with multidisciplinary professionals (e.g., physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and speech-language pathology) for children experiencing oral-motor, swallowing, or feeding coordination challenges.
- Recognise and support sensory-related feeding behaviours, including selective or “picky” eating that may be common among children on the autism spectrum.

- **6–10 years (Middle Childhood):** During middle childhood, children begin making more independent food choices and are influenced by peers, advertising, and school environments. (27) Parents and caregivers can guide healthy decision-making by shaping what foods are available in the home, talking with children about healthy options, and helping them understand why some foods fuel the body better than others. (28) Parents and caregivers have a unique opportunity to reinforce positive habits such as choosing fruits over packaged snacks or drinking water instead of sugary drinks. (29,30) By supporting these choices early, parents and caregivers help children develop confidence in making healthy decisions. (31)
- **11–18 years (Adolescence):** Adolescence is a time of transition when habits are formed that persist into adult life. Good nutrition during adolescence is essential because teens undergo rapid physical growth, hormonal changes, and significant brain development that increase their nutrient needs. (32) At the same time, being overweight as an adolescent is strongly associated with obesity as an adult. (33) Parents and caregivers can support their adolescents by providing balanced meals, involving them in food decisions and food preparation, modelling healthy eating behaviours, encouraging physical activity, promoting healthy snacking and hydration. (34)



See Activity 2 at the end of this section for a facilitator-led activity to do with parents and caregivers on understanding and choosing a healthy diet.

Essential Building Blocks

- **Children learn from what they see:** Show children how to enjoy healthy foods by eating them yourself.
- **Clean water is the best everyday drink.** Avoid sugary drinks like sodas and snacks high in salt and unhealthy fats, such as crisps and deep-fried foods. These foods are best kept for special occasions.
- **Talk positively about food:** Explain simply why certain foods are important for the body and mind.
- **Growing a baby? Choose foods that *feed* you both.** Eat taro, kumala, breadfruit, fresh fish, rourou, bele, papaya, bananas, and coconut water to keep you strong and nourished.

Social Media Messages

- When you're hungry, choose water and whole foods.
- Healthy habits start at home. Choose local, nutritious foods and let your child see you enjoy them.
- Keep healthy snacks easy to reach. Fruit on the table beats sugary snacks in the cupboard.
- Praise healthy choices. Encouragement builds confidence and lifelong habits.
- Fuel your teen with local foods like fish, taro, and fresh fruit.
- Pregnancy isn't "eating for two"- it's "nutrition for two." Choose whole, nourishing foods!
- Nourish your bump with local power foods: fish, bele, taro, sweet potato, pawpaw, and coconut. Your baby feels every good choice you make!

Skill 3: Supporting your Child or Adolescent to Prepare and Choose their Own Food

Why It matters

Involving children and adolescents in choosing and preparing food helps them develop a positive relationship with food, builds practical skills, and fosters independence and confidence. When children participate in selecting, preparing, and serving meals, they learn about nutrition, portion sizes, and healthy choices, which supports long-term healthy eating habits. (35) It also provides opportunities for parents and caregivers to guide, model, and reinforce safe and balanced food practices. (36) Across different ages, this involvement helps children understand where food comes from, encourages curiosity about local and nutritious foods, and promotes responsibility for their own and the family's nutrition. (23) Parenting support activities should progressively build children's food preparation skills across the life course, supporting safety, independence, healthy choices, and cultural food practices.

Why this skill matters across the life-course:

- **0–5 years (Early Childhood):** Encouraging toddlers to feed themselves with fingers or a spoon helps them develop fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and confidence in eating. (15,37) It also allows children to explore different textures and flavours, promoting a positive relationship with food. (38) Supporting safe self-feeding safely reduces the risk of choking and helps toddlers gradually become more independent in their eating. (38) Self-feeding sessions help children respond to hunger and fullness cues, allow mess as part of learning, and help model healthy eating habits. Practical guidance focuses on adapting family foods for toddlers using soft, locally available Pacific foods (e.g. mashed taro, pumpkin, breadfruit, fish flakes, fruits, and beans).
- **6–10 years (Middle Childhood):** At this age, children can start helping with simple food choices and preparation tasks appropriate for their skill level. (39) They can wash fruits and vegetables, help measure and mix ingredients, and prepare the eating area. (40) Involving children in these activities builds confidence, teaches basic cooking and nutrition skills, encourages curiosity about food, and helps them make healthier choices independently. (41) Parents and caregivers can guide and supervise to ensure safety and hygiene (supervision near heat or sharp tools), while allowing children to take a progressively more active role in preparing food. (39)
- **11–18 years (Adolescence):** Involving adolescents in meal planning, budgeting, grocery shopping, and food preparation is a great way to support them to develop a positive attitude to food and take responsibility for their own nutrition and that of their family. (42) Gradually shifting responsibility from the

parent/caregiver to the adolescent to plan and cook a family meal can instil pride in them and help adolescents to consciously think about what they will prepare. (42) Parents and caregivers can teach adolescents simple, safe recipes that they can prepare for themselves and the family. (43) Parents and caregivers can also encourage adolescents to cook family meals using traditional Pacific ingredients and promote shared mealtimes as a time for connection and well-being. Parents and caregivers should be guided to discuss nutrition myths, body image, and the link between food, energy, growth, and school performance in a supportive, non-judgemental way. (43)



Disability Considerations

Parents and caregivers should be encouraged to include adolescents with disabilities in meal planning and cooking in ways that match their abilities.

- Provide adaptive cooking tools, assistive devices, or support as needed.
- Assign roles that match ability while encouraging autonomy and skill development.



See Activity 2 at the end of this section for a facilitator-led activity to do with parents and caregivers on supporting children and adolescents in preparing or choosing their food.

Essential Building Blocks

- **Praise effort, not perfection.** Learning is part of the process. Involving children and adolescents in meal planning and cooking builds confidence, pride, and responsibility.
- **Let's go shopping together:** Grocery shopping as a family teaches budgeting and making healthy choices. It also creates an opportunity to spend time together.
- **Help children to learn** Start with simple, safe recipes you can do together and gradually increase their cooking skills.
- **Health and safety in the kitchen:** Teach kitchen safety and hygiene, including handwashing and clean utensils.
- **Let's cook together:** Cooking together strengthens family bonds and encourages lifelong healthy eating habits.

Social Media Messages

- Messy meals make strong skills! Let your children and adolescents explore food. It's how they learn.
- Let your teen cook! Pride and skills grow in the kitchen.
- Shop smart. Grocery trips teach budgeting and healthy choices.
- Family cooking = fun, bonding, and healthy habits for life.
- Small hands, big learning! Self-feeding helps little ones grow independent.
- Let your child listen to their tummy. When they're full, they're done.

Skill 4: Ensuring Adequate Hydration

Why It matters

Water makes up between 50 per cent and 75 per cent of our body, with babies having 75 per cent, and adults about 55 per cent. (44) Water is essential during all stages of life for the body to function properly. Proper hydration supports physical growth, brain development, digestion, and overall health. (44) Parents and caregivers play a critical role in helping children and adolescents develop lifelong healthy hydration habits by providing access to clean water, modelling water-drinking behaviour, and limiting sugary drinks. (45)



See Hygiene module, Best Practices across the Lifecourse Skill2 on Using Safe Water and Water Storage Containers.



See Activity 3 at the end of this section for a facilitator-led activity to do with parents and caregivers on ensuring adequate hydration.

Why this skill matters across the life-course:

- **Pregnancy:** Staying well hydrated supports maternal blood volume, digestion, nutrient transport, and amniotic fluid levels. (46) Pregnant mothers should be encouraged to drink water regularly throughout the day and limit sugary beverages. (47) After birth, drinking plenty of water helps with the healthy production of breastmilk. (48)
- **0–5 years (Early Childhood):** Once children start eating solid foods (around 6 months), they can also start drinking clean water as well as continuing to drink milk. (49) Young children are especially vulnerable to dehydration and drinking contaminated water. Parents and caregivers should offer water frequently, especially between meals and alongside milk or other healthy beverages. Safe drinking practices, such as the boiling of children’s drinking water and using clean cups or bottles, are also important. (50)
- **6–10 years (Middle Childhood):** Children at this age are beginning to make independent choices and may be influenced by peers and school environments. (51) Parents and caregivers can guide healthy habits by ensuring clean water is the default drink at home, packing water for school, where possible, and explaining why sugary drinks should be occasional treats. (45)
- **11–18 years (Adolescence):** Teens have higher fluid needs due to growth, activity, and hormonal changes. (52) Parents and caregivers can support healthy hydration by making water easy to access, encouraging children to drink water before, during, and after exercise, and modelling healthy drinking habits

themselves. Open discussions about the impact of sugary drinks on energy, teeth, and overall health can also help adolescents make informed choices. (45)

Essential Building Blocks

- **Make water the default drink across the life course:** Promote safe drinking water as the healthiest and most affordable drink for children, adolescents, and adults. Encourage regular water intake at home, at school, and during physical activity, especially in hot and humid Pacific climates.
- **Limit sugary and sweetened drinks:** Support parents and caregivers to reduce consumption of sugary beverages (sodas, sweetened juices, energy drinks), positioning them as occasional treats rather than daily drinks.
- **Model and support healthy hydration habits:** Encourage parents and caregivers to model regular water drinking, ensure children have access to water throughout the day, and reinforce hydration as part of daily routines, meals, and active play.

Social Media Messages

- Stay Hydrated to stay healthy and strong
- Skip the soda. Healthier drinks = healthier lives.



Activities for Facilitators

Activity 1

Supporting Skill 1: Making Family Meals a Daily Routine

Purpose: To help parents and caregivers identify ways of making family meals a regular routine.



Disability adaptation considerations

Support parents and caregivers of children with disabilities to involve all their children in family meals, accommodating for the children with disability and ensuring their full participation.

Time: 30 minutes

Build Your Family Mealtime Routine:

- Hand out to parents and caregivers picture cards (morning, noon, evening, snacks, playtime).
- Ask parents and caregivers to arrange the cards to show how their day usually goes.
- Ask them to identify one time slot where a predictable meal or snack time can be added or strengthened.
- Encourage parents and caregivers to share routines with the group and discuss what might help them stick to the plan.

Simple routine ideas facilitators can share:

- Three meals and two small snacks at roughly the same times each day.
- Water between meals, not sugary drinks.
- A calm place to sit (mat, table, or parent's lap).
- Family-style eating where everyone shares the same foods.
- Short, predictable mealtime rituals (wash hands, sit together, eat, tidy up).

Activity 2

Supporting:

- **Skill 2:** Understanding and Choosing a healthy diet
- **Skill 3:** Supporting your Child or Adolescent to Prepare and Choose their Own Food

Purpose: To empower parents and caregivers with the knowledge to identify balanced, locally-sourced meals using the Simple Plate Model, while establishing practical strategies to involve children and adolescents in the food preparation process to foster lifelong healthy eating habits.

Time: 60 minutes

1. **Discuss Local Meals:** Ask parents and caregivers to share common family meals and cooking methods. Adapt familiar dishes using local foods.
2. **Build a Plate Together:** Use the **Simple Plate Model** below to assemble a balanced meal with Pacific foods. Refer to **Annex 5: Nutritious Pacific Foods for Examples and Seasonal Options**
 - a. **Simple Plate Model:**
 - ½ Vegetables & Fruit:
Leafy greens, pumpkin, cabbage, tomatoes
Pawpaw, banana, mango, citrus
 - ¼ Protein:
Fresh fish, eggs, chicken
Beans, lentils, tofu
 - ¼ Whole grains or starchy staples:
Taro, kumala (sweet potato), cassava
Breadfruit, rice
 - Small amounts of healthy fats:
Coconut, avocado
3. **Reflect and Practise:** Discuss how children and adolescents can help with shopping, cooking, or serving meals at home.

Activity 3

Supporting Skill 4: Ensuring Adequate Hydration

Purpose: To increase parent and caregiver confidence in prioritizing water as the primary beverage for children by identifying common barriers to hydration, demonstrating cost-effective ways to naturally flavor water, and establishing a consistent family routine that reduces reliance on sugary drinks.

Time: 45 min

Step 1: Open the Conversation

Explain briefly that water supports children's growth, brain function, energy, digestion, and overall health, especially in hot and humid Pacific climates. Discuss how sugary drinks (sodas, sweetened juices, energy drinks) increase risks of tooth decay and poor nutrition when consumed regularly.

Step 2: Reflect on Current Habits

Ask parents and caregivers:

- What do children usually drink at home or school?
- When do children drink the least water?
- What makes it hard to choose water instead of sweet drinks?

Acknowledge barriers without judgement.

Step 3: Make Water Appealing

Demonstrate simple, low-cost ways to encourage water intake:

- Add natural flavour using local fruits or herbs (e.g. citrus, pawpaw, guava, mint, pandanus).
- Use clean, child-friendly cups or small bottles.
- Offer water before and after play, meals, and outdoor activities.

Highlight water breaks during traditional games, dancing, fishing, or sports.

Step 4: Family Hydration Plan

Parents and caregivers create a simple plan

- When will we offer water each day?
- How will we reduce sugary drinks?
- How will adults model drinking water?

Key messages:

- Water is the healthiest drink for all ages.
- Make water the default drink.
- Sugary drinks are for occasions, not every day.
- Children copy adults – your example matters.

3. Age-Specific Skills Sections

This section builds on the life course skills outlined in the previous section and identifies specific skills that apply to children's healthy nutrition at different stages of growth. The section is organised by age group: early childhood (0–5 years), middle childhood (6–10 years), and adolescence (11–18 years).

To avoid repetition, the life course skills are not described in full again here. Instead, this section highlights the **priority skills** that are most important at each stage of growth and development. These skills reflect the same core principles introduced earlier but provide more practical guidance for parents and caregivers at each stage. Where skills overlap with those described in **Best Practices Across the Life Course**, readers are directed back to that section for full details. This approach helps facilitators focus discussions, activities, and messages on the skills that matter most at each stage, while still reinforcing continuity across the life course.

At the end of each developmental stage, the module provides sample activities that facilitators can use with parents and caregivers. These activities can help parents and caregivers understand, practise, and apply the skills discussed in the module. Parent support programmes and activities should pull the relevant content applicable to the parents and caregivers they are supporting and the age of the children they would like support with.

3.a. Early Childhood (0–5 years)

This section focuses on practical, age-specific skills for supporting healthy nutrition in early childhood (0–5 years). It highlights three key skills through which parents and caregivers can have a strong influence on their child’s growth, development, and lifelong eating habits:

- 1. Establishing Healthy Feeding Practices in the First 6 Months**
- 2. How to Breastfeed**
- 3. Introduce Solid Foods Safely and Confidently**

Each skill includes guidance, practical tips, and examples to help parents and caregivers build healthy habits while supporting independence and confidence in young children.



Disability Considerations

Facilitators should ensure that discussions on infant feeding and early nutrition include children with disabilities. Parents and caregivers may need small adjustments in feeding positions, tools, or food preparation so that children can eat safely and comfortably.

Skill 1: Establishing Healthy Feeding Practices in the First 6 Months

Why It Matters

The first six months of life are a critical window for infant survival, growth, and development. (53) Exclusive breastfeeding means giving only breast milk, with no additional foods or liquids, including water, unless medically indicated, as infants' digestive systems are not yet ready for other substances. (54) Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months provides complete nutrition, strengthens immune protection, supports healthy weight gain, and reduces the risk of common infections, particularly in settings where access to safe water and sanitation may be uneven. (55) Breastfeeding also supports maternal recovery after birth and contributes to long-term maternal health. (56)

Babies who are exclusively breastfed are 14 times less likely to die in the first six months than babies who are not breastfed. However, only about 50 per cent of infants six months and below in the Pacific are exclusively breastfed. (57) Breastfeeding stigma is leading to declining breastfeeding rates and early introduction of formula in the Pacific region, driven by a combination of social, commercial, and structural factors. Despite its traditional value, modern pressures, including the stigma associated with public breastfeeding and the influence of aggressive marketing of breast-milk substitutes (formula), have created a challenging environment for mothers across the Pacific. (58) Inadequate lactation facilities and limited maternity leave, as well as family and economic pressures also discourage working mothers from continuing to breastfeed. (59) These low and declining rates of breastfeeding are contributing to higher rates of obesity and related illnesses, which are a significant concern in Pacific Islander populations. (57)

Responsive feeding is a core component of effective breastfeeding support. Newborns have small stomachs and need to feed frequently (often 8–12 times in 24 hours) to meet their nutritional needs. (58) Recognising early hunger cues (such as rooting, sucking movements, or increased alertness) and responding promptly supports milk production, healthy growth, and successful breastfeeding continuation. (59) Parenting support programmes play an important role in reinforcing clear, evidence-based guidance on responsive feeding and exclusive breastfeeding. They also help ensure that families who cannot breastfeed receive appropriate support. This includes guidance on the safe use of expressed breast milk or infant formula prepared with clean, safe water, in line with global and national recommendations. (8,60)



Disability Considerations:

- For infants with physical disabilities, provide guidance on specialised feeding positions or adaptive cups.
- Work with parents and caregivers to ensure responsive feeding is possible even with mobility or sensory limitations.
- When feeding challenges persist, recommend referral to specialised feeding clinics and consultation with speech-language pathologists to support safe swallowing and oral-motor development.

Essential Building Blocks

- **Exclusive milk feeding for the first 6 months:** Babies need *only* breast milk for the first six months, unless advised by a health worker. Other sources of food or liquid are not necessary and are more likely to be contaminated with bacteria.
- **Breastmilk leads to better health:** Exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months, and then continued breastfeeding until 2 years reduces risks of obesity and illness.
- **Breastmilk is free and best:** Explain to parents and caregivers that despite marketing pressures encouraging mothers to switch to formula, breastmilk is free, is better for babies and should be exclusive for 6 months.
- **Breastfeed on demand, day and night:** Feed whenever the baby shows hunger cues, including at night; frequent feeding supports healthy growth and keeps milk supply strong. Newborns have small stomachs and need feeding every 2–3 hours, including overnight, especially in the early weeks.
- **Support milk production through hydration and rest:** Mothers should drink plenty of safe, clean water before and during feeds, and be supported by family to rest and eat well.
- **Safe alternatives when breastfeeding is not possible:** If a mother cannot breastfeed, expressed breast milk or appropriate infant formula should be given using a clean cup, with safe water and hygiene practices.

Social Media Messages

- Breastfeeding is nature's way of ensuring your baby gets all they need for the 6 months.
- Breastmilk is free and the safest milk for your baby
- Don't believe everything you hear - formula is not better for your baby!
- Going back to work? You can express breastmilk and feed your baby with a clean cup.

- Breast is best, but when that's not possible, expressed breastmilk or formula can still give your baby what they need. Because at the end of the day, fed is best.

Skill 2: How to Breastfeed

Why It Matters:

Breastfeeding gives babies the best start in life, providing all the nutrients they need in the first six months. (62). A good latch and comfortable positioning help babies feed well and help mothers avoid pain, stress, and feeding difficulties. When parents and caregivers understand *how* to breastfeed, they feel confident and supported from the earliest days. Learning to breastfeed can be very challenging. Fathers and other family members should offer emotional support to mothers who are struggling to breastfeed, as well as encouragement and help them to seek medical advice to help both the mother and baby.



See Activity 4 at the end of this section for a facilitator-led activity to do with parents and caregivers on how to breastfeed.



Disability Considerations

- Include alternative positions and supports for mothers or babies with physical challenges.
- Offer visual or tactile guides for parents and caregivers with hearing or vision impairments.

Essential Building Blocks:

- **Help mothers get comfortable first:** Encourage them to support their back, arms, and baby with pillows, rolled mats, or clothing so feeding feels relaxed and sustainable.
- **Guide positioning (tummy-to-tummy):** Support parents in bringing the baby in close, ensuring the baby's head, shoulders, and hips are aligned to allow for easier swallowing.
- **Highlight early feeding cues:** Help parents recognize signs such as the baby turning their head, opening their mouth, sucking on hands, or soft fussing as indicators the baby is ready to feed.
- **Support a deep latch:** Demonstrate how to gently touch the baby's lip with the nipple, wait for a wide-open mouth, and then guide the parent to bring the baby toward the breast.
- **Teach signs of an effective latch:** Encourage parents to look for comfortable tugging (not pain), a wide mouth, full cheeks, and steady swallowing.
- **Reinforce "baby to breast" movement:** Remind parents to bring the baby toward the breast (rather than leaning forward), helping the baby take a full mouthful of the nipple.

- **Normalize frequent, responsive feeding:** Explain that most newborns feed 8–12 times in 24 hours and support parents in following the baby’s rhythm, allowing them to finish one breast before offering the other.
- **Encourage burping and post-feed connection:** Suggest holding the baby upright after feeds to release air and promote bonding.
- **Introduce different breastfeeding positions:** Support parents in exploring positions such as cradle, cross-cradle, football hold, side-lying, and laid-back breastfeeding to find what works best.
- **Promote early help-seeking:** Encourage parents to seek support if feeding is painful or difficult, the baby is not gaining weight, or breasts feel hard, hot, or uncomfortable.

Social Media Messages:

- A deep latch = a happy baby and comfortable mum. Bring baby to the breast, mouth wide open, taking in as much breast as possible.
- Feeding signs come before crying. Look for hand-sucking and mouth movements.
- Comfort matters! Find a position that supports your body and relaxes your shoulders.
- Don’t give up - if breastfeeding is difficult seek help from a trained professional

Skill 3: Introduce Solid Foods Safely and Confidently

Why It Matters

From 6 months, babies need more nutrients than breast milk alone can provide, to support rapid growth and brain development. (14, 63) At this age, most babies are developmentally ready to start eating solids, sitting with support, and swallowing pureed or soft foods. (55) Introducing a variety of safe, nutritious foods helps prevent malnutrition, supports healthy growth, and encourages good eating habits. (14,55) Breastfeeding should continue alongside complementary foods to maintain immune protection and overall health until 24 months if possible, and beyond if desired. (53) Foods should change as the child grows: smooth purées or well-mashed foods (6–8 months), soft mashed foods or small pieces (8–10 months), and soft finger foods for self-feeding (10–12 months). (64)



See Activity 5 at the end of this section for a facilitator-led activity to do with parents and caregivers on introducing solid foods safely and confidently.



Disability Considerations:

- Adjust food texture and cut sizes for children with swallowing difficulties or oral-motor delays.
- Encourage adaptive utensils for children learning to self-feed.

Essential Building Blocks

- **Start solids at around 6 months:** Babies are developmentally ready for complementary foods at about 6 months, while continuing breastfeeding.
- **Soft, mashed local foods first:** Begin with soft, mashed or pureed local foods (no hard pieces or chewing needed) to reduce choking risk and support digestion.
- **Boil all water first:** Any water for mixing with baby food or drinking should be boiled before use to neutralise any bacteria or chlorine.
- **Let babies explore food:** Messy eating is part of learning. Touching, smelling, and tasting food helps babies develop feeding skills and confidence.
- **Introduce one new food at a time:** Offer one new food or flavour at a time to help babies get used to different tastes and to notice any reactions.
- **Safe and responsive feeding:** Ensure clean preparation spaces, clean utensils, and clean hands of the parent/caregiver and child. Sit with the baby, offer small amounts, watch hunger and fullness cues.
- **Making feeding times as part of daily routines:** As babies start eating solid foods, encourage parents and caregivers to introduce feeding times into daily

family routines and allow babies and toddlers to eat together with the rest of the family.



This essential building block builds on the concepts introduced earlier in this module under:

- **Best Practices Across the Life Course: Skill 1: Making Family Meals a Daily Routine.**

Social Media Messages

- Start solids at 6 months: Soft foods like mashed kumala (sweet potato), taro, pumpkin, or avocado give your baby a healthy start.
- Breastfeed + solids: Your baby gets nutrients & immune protection at the same time.
- Stay patient: It can take several tries before your baby learns to like a new food - be patient and keep offering it!
- Sit down to eat together: Mealtime is learning time. Babies copy what you do.



Activities for Facilitators

Activity 4

Supporting Early Childhood Skill 1: How to Breastfeed

Purpose: To help mothers and caregivers learn comfortable breastfeeding positions and correct latching techniques through guided demonstration and practice.

Time: 60 min

Materials (optional):

- Baby dolls or rolled towels
- Cushions or folded cloths for support
- Mats or comfortable seating

Steps:

1. Introduce the topic:

The facilitator opens the discussion on breastfeeding by explaining what the benefits of breastmilk are for the baby but acknowledging that there is stigma and misinformation on breastfeeding.

2. Group Reflection:

Ask parents and caregivers to share reflections on breastfeeding:

- Do they feel comfortable breastfeeding?
- What have they heard about breastmilk vs formula?
- How long should breastfeeding continue for, exclusively and with food?
- Who can support breastfeeding? What role can fathers and other caregivers play?

Activity A: “The Comfortable Mum Challenge”

Steps:

1. Demonstrate positioning:

The facilitator explains that breastfeeding should be comfortable for both mother and baby, and that different positions may work better for different mothers.

The facilitator demonstrates a few comfortable positions, such as:

- Sitting upright with back support
- Slightly reclining
- Supporting the baby’s body with pillows, cushions, or folded cloths

Explain that positioning the baby so the head and body are aligned and facing the breast can make feeding easier.

2. Practise together:

Mothers take turns practising positions using dolls or rolled towels to represent babies.

3. Peer feedback:

Participants observe each other and share suggestions on what looks comfortable and supportive.

4. Group reflection:

Ask participants:

- “Which position felt most comfortable?”
- “What helped support the baby’s body?”
- “What challenges did you notice?”

Activity B: “Practise the Latch”

Steps:

1. Facilitator demonstration:

The facilitator demonstrates the key steps for a good latch:

- Position the baby tummy-to-tummy with the mother
- Align the baby nose-to-nipple
- Gently brush the nipple against the baby’s top lip to encourage a wide-open mouth
- Wait for a wide gape
- Bring the baby quickly to the breast (chin first), rather than leaning the breast toward the baby

2. Practise in pairs:

Parents and caregivers pair up, and practise positioning using dolls or rolled towels.

3. Teach safe latch release:

Demonstrate how to gently break the latch by inserting a clean finger into the corner of the baby’s mouth before removing the breast.

4. Practise and observe:

Participants practise the steps and support each other with guidance from the facilitator.

5. Group discussion: Encourage mothers to share tips on what worked for them to make breastfeeding easier.

Ask participants:

- “What has worked for you, or for someone in your family, when getting comfortable for feeding?”
- “What tips or advice have you learned from other mothers or family members?”
- “What would you share with another parent who is just starting?”

Activity 5

Supporting Early Childhood Skill 3: Introducing Solid Foods Safely and Confidently

Purpose: To help parents and caregivers confidently introduce solid foods from around 6 months using responsive feeding, age-appropriate textures, and local foods.

Who this is for: Parents and caregivers of babies aged 6–12 months (or preparing for solids).

Time: 50 min

Steps

1. Welcome and Framing

- Welcome participants and agree on respect and sharing.
- Explain that starting solids is an exciting but sometimes uncertain time.
- Emphasise: safe, responsive feeding builds healthy bodies and lifelong eating habits.

Message to reinforce: Confidence and patience help babies learn to eat.

2. Readiness and Timing

- Ask parents and caregivers: *How do you know when a baby is ready for solids?*
- Reinforce signs of readiness at around 6 months (sitting with support, interest in food).
- Confirm continued breastfeeding alongside solids.

Message to reinforce: Start at around 6 months and follow the baby's cues.

3. Textures, Foods, and Exploration

- Discuss or demonstrate textures by age:
 - 6–8 months: smooth purées or well-mashed foods
 - 8–10 months: soft mashed foods or small pieces
 - 10–12 months: soft finger foods
- Talk through local foods that provide energy, protein, and iron.
- Normalise mess: babies learn by touching, tasting, and playing with food.
- Encourage introducing one new food at a time.

Message to reinforce: Soft foods, variety, and messiness help babies learn safely.

4. Safe and Responsive Feeding

- Discuss sitting with the baby, offering small amounts, and watching hunger and fullness cues.
- Brief reminders on handwashing, clean utensils, and safe storage.

Message to reinforce: Clean, calm, and responsive feeding keeps babies safe.

5. Commitment and Wrap-Up

- Each parent/caregiver shares one food or practice they will try this week.
- Encourage sharing support with partners, grandparents, or health workers.

Message to reinforce: Small, confident steps build healthy feeding routines.

Facilitator Tips

- Use familiar Pacific foods and local weaning practices.
- Keep the tone practical and reassuring. There is no “perfect” way.
- Reinforce coordination with child health visits and community advice.

3.b. Middle Childhood (6–10 years)

This section focuses on supporting healthy nutrition in children aged 6–10 years. At this stage, children are beginning to make more independent food choices while still relying on parents and caregivers for guidance. Parents and caregivers can reinforce positive eating habits, encourage autonomy, and strengthen family connections through consistent routines around meals and snacks, everyday practices that model balanced eating, and shared family experiences.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Establishing predictable routines helps children feel secure, supports healthy habits, and provides opportunities to practise making nutritious choices.

The skill covered in this section is:

1. Help Your Child Make Healthy Choices

Together, these practices help children develop the knowledge, habits, and confidence needed to make healthy food choices as they grow.

Skill 1: Help Your Child Make Healthy Choices

Why It Matters:

Children aged 6–10 are starting to make more of their own food choices, both at home and at school. At this age, they are easily influenced by friends, advertising, and the foods they see around them. (27) Parents and caregivers can guide healthy decision-making by shaping what foods are available in the home, talking with children about healthy options, and helping them understand why some foods fuel the body better than others. (28) In many Pacific communities, where family routines and shared meals are central to daily life, parents and caregivers have a unique opportunity to reinforce positive habits such as choosing fruits over packaged snacks or drinking water instead of sugary drinks. (29,30) By supporting these choices early, parents and caregivers help children develop confidence in making healthy decisions that align with family values and school nutrition messages. (31)



Disability Considerations

Facilitators should support parents and caregivers in helping children with disabilities learn about healthy choices and build everyday decision-making skills.

Facilitators should:

- Provide simplified explanations or visual guides for children with learning or cognitive disabilities.
- Support decision-making with prompts or step-by-step guidance if needed.



In middle childhood, the key skill is helping children practise making healthy food choices within supportive routines. Rather than introducing entirely new practices, this stage builds on several best practices introduced earlier in this module.

- **Best Practices Across the Life Course: Skill 1: Making Family Meals a Daily Routine.**
- **Best Practices Across the Life Course: Skill 4: Ensuring Adequate Hydration.**



See Activity 6 at the end of this section for a facilitator-led activity to do with parents and caregivers on helping children make healthy choices.

Essential Building Blocks

- **Model healthy eating at home:** Children learn by watching adults. Regular family meals with fruits, vegetables, and balanced local foods help children grow well and stay focused.
- **Make healthy choices:** Keep fruit, vegetables, and drinking water easy to see and in reach. Limit sugary snacks and drinks at home.
- **Involve children in food decisions:** Let children help choose, prepare, or cook meals using local foods where available and possible. This builds confidence, skills, and long-term healthy habits.
- **Support healthy school days:** Encourage parents and caregivers to provide guidance to children on making healthy lunch choices, including fruits, vegetables, and safe drinking water to support learning, energy, and concentration.
- **Talk about food and well-being:** Simple conversations about how food helps bodies grow strong and minds stay sharp empower children to make healthier choices outside the home.

Social Media Messages

- Healthy habits start at home. Choose local, nutritious foods and let your child see you enjoy them.
- Get kids involved in cooking. When they help prepare food, they're more excited to eat it.
- Praise healthy choices. Encouragement builds confidence and lifelong habits.



Activities for Facilitators

Activity 6

Supporting Middle Childhood Skill 1: Help Your Child Make Healthy Choices

Purpose: To guide parents and caregivers on supporting their children to make healthy food choices.

Time: 60 min

Materials Needed:

- Play food (fruits, vegetables, packaged snacks, local staples), printed pictures of foods. If these aren't available, participants could draw different foods in pieces of paper to use instead.
- Tables or mats to arrange the foods
- Worksheets or cards for discussion prompts
- Optional: basket or "shopping bag" props

Steps

Step 1: Set the Context

- Explain the purpose: *"Children learn healthy eating when parents and caregivers guide them to explore and choose foods. Today, we will practise ways parents and caregivers can support their child's choices."*
- Highlight key points for parents and caregivers:
 - Ask open-ended questions instead of giving answers.
 - Praise curiosity and participation.
 - Use everyday meals and snacks as opportunities for learning.

Step 2: Role-Play Setup

- Arrange the play foods or picture cards on a table.
- Divide participants into pairs or small groups: one participant plays the parent/caregiver, another plays the child.
- Scenario examples:
 1. The child wants a packaged snack; the parent/caregiver guides them to consider other options.
 2. The child is curious about a new fruit or vegetable; the parent/caregiver encourages exploration and discussion.

Step 3: Practise Guiding Choices

- Ask parents and caregivers to practise:
 - Asking questions like: *“Which of these foods do you think will give you energy for school?”*
 - Comparing options: taste, texture, preparation, local availability.
 - Making a choice: the child selects 1–2 foods, the parent/caregiver guides reasoning without forcing a decision.
- Observe and provide feedback, highlighting:
 - Positive communication
 - Encouraging exploration
 - Modelling calm and supportive behaviour

Step 4: Group Reflection

- Discuss experiences:
 - *What felt easy or challenging when guiding your child?*
 - *How did your approach help the “child” make a decision?*
 - *How could you apply this at home during meals or snack times?*



Reinforce link to routines and shared meals mentioned in Best Practices Across the Life Course: Skill 1: Making Family Meals a Daily Routine and corresponding Activity 1.

3.c. Adolescence (11–18 years)

This section highlights practical skills for supporting healthy nutrition and lifestyle habits in adolescents aged 11–18 years. Adolescence is considered a “second window of opportunity” for catch-up growth after the first 1,000 days (from conception through the first two years of life) (66)¹. During this stage, adolescents develop independence, form lifelong habits, and experience rapid physical, cognitive, and emotional growth.

The skills covered in this section are:

1. **Support Healthy Eating and Lifestyle Habits in Adolescents**
2. **Support Positive Body Image and Healthy Eating in Adolescents**



These skills complement, but do not duplicate, the guidance provided in the Best Practices Across the Life Course section. For example, foundational practices such as:

- **Skill 1: Making Family Meals a Daily Routine**
- **Skill 3: Supporting your Child or Adolescent to Prepare and Choose their Own Food.**

Alongside these skills, parents and caregivers should continue to support adolescents in ensuring adequate hydration. Drinking enough water is critical for energy, concentration, growth, and overall well-being, and complements other practices such as balanced meals, snack planning, and shared family routines.

While those practices remain essential for reinforcing healthy habits, this section focuses specifically on how parents and caregivers can support adolescents’ decision-making, autonomy, and positive body image in the context of nutrition and lifestyle.



Disability Considerations

Facilitators should ensure that discussions about healthy eating and lifestyle habits include adolescents with disabilities. Some adolescents may need adjustments in activities, communication, or food preparation so they can take part fully.

¹ Sawyer, S. M., Azzopardi, P. S., Wickremarathne, D., & Patton, G. C. (2018). The age of adolescence. *The lancet child & adolescent health*, 2(3), 223-228.

Skill 1: Support Healthy Eating and Lifestyle Habits in Adolescents

Why It Matters

Adolescence is a time of transition when habits are formed that persist into adult life. Good habits, such as exercise and a healthy diet bring many benefits, including improved performance in school. (67) Good nutrition during adolescence (11–18 years) is essential because teens undergo rapid physical growth, hormonal changes, and significant brain development that increase their nutrient needs. Adolescents need more nutrients than adults because they gain at least 40 percent of their adult weight and 15 percent of their adult height during this period. Inadequate intake can lead to delayed sexual development and slower linear growth. (32) At the same time, being overweight as an adolescent is strongly associated with obesity as an adult. (33) Parents and caregivers can support their adolescents by providing balanced meals, involving them in food decisions and food preparation, modelling healthy eating behaviours, encouraging physical activity, promoting healthy snacking and hydration. (34)



See Activity 7 at the end of this section for a facilitator-led activity to do with parents and caregivers to support healthy eating and lifestyle habits in adolescents.



Disability Considerations

- Adapt meal planning activities for adolescents with physical or cognitive disabilities, e.g., step-by-step recipes or pre-chopped ingredients.
- Consider dietary restrictions related to medical conditions or disabilities.

Essential Building Blocks

- **Balanced nutrition and hydration for growing bodies:** Support regular meals with a variety of nutritious local foods, promote healthy snacks, encourage drinking water, and limit sugary drinks to support growth, energy, and concentration.
- **Positive role-modelling and shared responsibility:** Continue to model healthy eating habits and involve adolescents in meal planning, food shopping, and cooking to build skills, confidence, and autonomy.
- **Healthy lifestyles beyond food:** Encourage regular physical activity, sport, and active play as part of everyday life, supporting healthy physical development as adolescents grow as well as contributing to positive mental health.

- **Enabling healthy choices in and out of the home:** Help adolescents navigate food choices at school, with peers, and in the community by discussing balance, moderation, and well-being rather than restriction.

Social Media Messages

- Fuel your teen with local foods like fish, taro, and fresh fruit.
- Cook together. Learning in the kitchen builds healthy habits.
- Nutritious food for a healthy body and mind.

Skill 2: Support Positive Body Image and Healthy Eating in Adolescents

Why It Matters

As adolescents spend more time online and with their peers, others can strongly influence how they see their bodies and themselves, especially during puberty when their bodies are changing. (68) Parents and caregivers can support their adolescents in navigating social influences and social media related to dieting and food intake. (34) Parents and caregivers need to recognise the signs of unhealthy eating habits, such as gaining too much weight; binge eating; eating a lot and then going to the bathroom; refusing to eat and over exercising; obsession with weight and image.



For more guidance on supporting positive body image in adolescents, refer to the Health Module:

- **Middle Childhood Skill 3: Talking With Your Child About Body Changes and Preparing Them for Puberty in a Positive Way and**
- **Adolescence Skill 3: Supporting Positive Body Image and Good Self-Care Habits**



See Activity 8 at the end of this section for a facilitator-led activity to do with parents and caregivers to support positive body image and healthy eating in adolescents.



Disability Considerations

- Include discussions that are sensitive to body differences caused by disabilities.
- Encourage self-esteem through strengths beyond appearance.

Essential Building Blocks

- **Understand growth and body changes:** Support open, respectful conversations about puberty, growth, and physical changes, helping adolescents understand that bodies change at different times and in different ways.
- **Promote positive body image, self-worth, and healthy attitudes toward food:** Encourage respectful, stigma-free conversations about food, health, and bodies that avoid shame, dieting pressure, and weight bias. Support discussions on body diversity, beauty standards, and cultural values, recognising adolescence as a period of rapid physical and emotional change, to help young people develop a confident and healthy perspective on their bodies.

- **Focus on nourishment, not restriction:** Promote balanced eating and regular physical activity for health, strength, and energy, avoiding dieting, food restriction, or weight-based pressure.
- **Build critical thinking around media and peers:** Support adolescents to question unrealistic body ideals and food messages in social media, advertising, and peer groups, including how these may differ from Pacific norms.
- **Model healthy attitudes and behaviours:** Demonstrate positive body talk, balanced eating, enjoyment of movement, and self-care, reinforcing healthy norms at home.

Social Media Messages

- Social media isn't always real. Talk with your teen about beauty and health in your culture.
- Healthy eating and active play beat fad diets or extreme exercise.
- Watch for worrying signs like skipping meals or obsession with weight, and talk openly.
- Beautiful bodies come in all shapes and sizes.
- Praise your teen's skills, kindness, and effort. Remind them that who they are is just as important as how they look.



Activities for Facilitators

Activity 7

Supporting Adolescence Skill 1: Support Healthy Eating and Lifestyle Habits in Adolescents

Purpose: To support parents and caregivers in helping adolescents make healthy choices, cooking together and independently

Time: 60 min

Materials Needed:

- Picture cards or props of various foods (fruits, vegetables, local staples, proteins, snacks). If these aren't available, participants could draw different foods.
- Flipchart or worksheet for meal planning
- "Shopping basket" props (optional)
- Pens/pencils

Steps

Step 1: Set the Context

- Facilitator explains: *"Adolescents benefit from hands-on experience with meal planning, shopping, and cooking. Parents and caregivers can support them by guiding decisions, encouraging exploration, and building confidence."*
- Emphasise: the goal is not to control choices, but to coach teens in making balanced, practical decisions.

Step 2: Shared Meal Planning Simulation

- Parents and caregivers work in pairs or small groups. Each group is given:
 - A "teen profile" (scenario describing likes, dislikes, schedule, and budget constraints).
 - A set of food cards/props representing available ingredients.
- Task:
 - Plan a balanced meal or snack for the teen using the props.
 - Discuss how they would guide the teen to select ingredients and make decisions independently.
- Facilitator circulates, observing and giving prompts:
 - *"What questions could you ask your teen to encourage thinking about balance and nutrition?"*
 - *"How could you include culturally appropriate or locally available foods?"*

Step 3: Cooking/Assembly Role-Play

- Parents and caregivers simulate cooking or meal assembly using the props/cards:
 - Assign roles: one participant acts as the teen, the other as the parent/caregiver.
 - Practise guiding without taking over: encouraging the teen to chop, mix, or assemble ingredients safely.
- Focus on:
 - Encouraging autonomy
 - Highlighting nutrition and balance
 - Reinforcing confidence and skills

Step 4: Reflection and Discussion

- Facilitator leads a group debrief:
 - What strategies helped teens make healthy choices?
 - How did parents and caregivers support independence while still ensuring a balanced meal?
 - How can these approaches be applied in real home routines?



Facilitator to reinforce link to routines and shared meals mentioned in Best Practices Across the Life Course: Skill 1: Making Family Meals a Daily Routine and Activity 1.

Activity 8

Supporting Adolescence Skill 2: Support Positive Body Image and Healthy Eating in Adolescents

Purpose: To help parents and caregivers practise having positive food and body conversations at home with their adolescents

Time: 60 min

Materials Needed: Worksheet or flipchart

Steps

Step 1: Introduction

- Facilitator explains:
“Adolescents are sensitive to comments about body, food, or appearance. Parents and caregivers can support healthy self-image and eating habits by using language that emphasises strength, energy, and well-being rather than size or restriction.”
- Show examples of positive vs. negative phrasing:
 - Negative: *“You shouldn’t eat that; it’ll make you fat.”*
 - Positive: *“Let’s find foods that give you energy for school and sports.”*

Step 2: Scenario Practice

- Ask parents and caregivers to work in pairs or small groups. Each group comes up with three common scenarios that they encounter when speaking with their adolescents about food for both adolescent girls and adolescent boys.
- Ask parents and caregivers to explain how they usually handle these conversations.
- Ask parents to practise reframing the conversation using supportive language. For example:
 - Acknowledge feelings: *“I hear that you’re worried about your body.”*
 - Redirect focus to health and strength: *“Eating breakfast gives you energy for the day.”*
 - Encourage autonomy: *“Which foods do you think will give you energy and keep you strong?”*

Step 3: Group Sharing

- Invite parents and caregivers to share examples of positive phrasing.
- Discuss how these conversations can be used during mealtimes, snack choices, or discussions about sports and activity.
- Highlight that these strategies reinforce confidence, well-being, and lifelong healthy habits.

ANNEXES

1. Multi-Sectoral Integration

This annex provides guidance on how nutrition and parenting messages can be reinforced across multiple sectors and community actors. Children’s nutrition and healthy development are influenced by many services and daily interactions beyond the household. Health workers, teachers, social protection staff, community leaders, and other frontline actors all have opportunities to reinforce consistent messages to parents and caregivers.

In addition to in-person services, digital communication platforms such as SMS, WhatsApp, and Facebook can be used to reinforce key parenting messages at scale. These channels can provide reminders, practical tips, and prompts that encourage parents and caregivers to practise positive learning and caregiving behaviours at home.


The table below shows key opportunities to integrate nutrition messages across different sectors. This helps facilitators align their efforts and avoid giving fragmented or conflicting advice. By coordinating messages and activities across platforms, facilitators can better support parents and caregivers and increase the chances that healthy practices are adopted and maintained.

The table also identifies sectors and actors who regularly interact with families, the platforms they use to engage parents and caregivers, and practical tips for coordination at the community level. It highlights which parenting skills are reinforced at different ages, showing how multiple services can support the same life-course behaviours.

Facilitators can use this annex to:

- Identify opportunities for collaboration between sectors
- Align nutrition and parenting messages across services
- Strengthen referral pathways and information sharing
- Ensure parents and caregivers receive consistent guidance across community platforms

Table M3.1: Multi-Sectoral Integration for Healthy Nutrition

| Sector / Actors | Delivery Platform | Coordination Tips for Implementers to Support Parents and Caregivers | Parenting Skills Reinforced (Across Ages) |
|---|--|---|---|
| Health Clinics & Community Health Workers | <p>ANC classes, postnatal visits, well-child checks, vaccination sessions, community outreach.</p> <div data-bbox="507 689 788 1220" style="background-color: #f4a460; padding: 10px; border: 1px solid #f4a460;">  <p>Delivery platforms would include speech therapists/ occupational therapists or feeding clinics for children and adolescents with disabilities</p> </div> | Embed nutrition messaging into routine contacts; align breastfeeding and complementary feeding guidance; coordinate outreach schedules; reinforce consistent messages on hydration, obesity prevention and adolescent nutrition | Healthy feeding in first 6 months; breastfeeding; introducing solids safely; hydration; healthy diets; adolescent nutrition; body image; obesity prevention |
| Schools & ECD Centres | Classrooms, parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings, school feeding programmes, parent-child sessions | Coordinate nutrition education with parenting sessions; align school feeding initiatives with home practices; reinforce consistent messages on healthy eating, hydration and body image | Healthy diet choices; family meals; hydration; preparing food together; introducing solids; healthy lifestyle habits in adolescence; positive body image |
| Faith-Based Organisations and Churches | Church gatherings, marriage classes, community celebrations | Promote healthy food and water at events; reinforce nutrition messaging during counselling sessions; align messages with health services and schools | Healthy food choices; family meals; hydration; breastfeeding support; strengthening family connections through shared meals |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Community Groups & Local Initiatives | Parent groups, peer support groups, home gardens, agriculture projects, community events | Coordinate cooking demonstrations and garden initiatives with health guidance; inform parents and caregivers about schedules; reinforce complementary feeding and meal preparation skills | Food preparation skills; introducing solids; family meals; healthy feeding practices; hydration; community food production |
| Sports Clubs & Youth Groups | Sporting events, youth sessions, parent-child activities | Link nutrition to physical activity messaging; reinforce hydration practices; coordinate with schools and clinics to address obesity and healthy lifestyles | Healthy diet choices; hydration; adolescent healthy eating; body image; lifestyle habits |
| Hygiene & WASH Campaigns | Community campaigns, handwashing sessions | Link hygiene messaging with safe food preparation and nutrition guidance; coordinate sessions to reinforce complementary messaging | Safe food preparation; healthy feeding practices; family meal routines; preventing illness through hygiene and nutrition |

2. Programmes per skill

This annex highlights programmes, tools, and resources that support the parenting and caregiving skills presented in this module. Many organisations and initiatives have already developed materials that address similar topics on nutrition.

The table below lists programmes and resources that facilitators can use to learn more, access training materials, or find ideas for activities in their own settings. These resources provide additional guidance, examples, and evidence-based approaches that support the skills promoted in the Pacific Parenting Toolkit. Where links are not available, programme managers and facilitators are encouraged to reach out to the relevant organisation directly to get more information.

Facilitators are encouraged to explore these resources and adapt them to local contexts, while keeping key messages on caregiving and nutrition consistent.

Table M3.2: Programmes for Healthy Nutrition Skills

| Programmes and Guidance | Skill |
|---|---|
| <p>Name: Community Infant and Young Child Feeding Counselling Package Organization: UNICEF Country or Countries: Pacific Wide Date of programme: 2024 Short description or link to the module https://www.unicef.org/documents/community-iycf-package</p> | <p>Best Practices Across the Life Course Skill 1: Making family meals a daily routine</p> |
| <p>Name: Dietary Guidelines Organization: FAO Country or Countries: Global and country specific Date of programme: update regularly Short description or link to the module https://www.fao.org/nutrition/education/food-dietary-guidelines/home/en/</p> | <p>Best Practices Across the Life Course Skill 1: Making family meals a daily routine</p> <p>Early Childhood Skill 4: Setting routines around eating</p> <p>Adolescence Skill 4: Eat together as a family and celebrate your culture while teaching healthy habits</p> |
| <p>Name: Pacific Kids Food Revolution Organization: Pacific Island Food Revolution and UNICEF Country or Countries: Pacific wide Date of programme: 2021 Short description or link to the module: is a children’s cooking show that uses the power of reality television to share the important message on healthy eating https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/press-releases/pacific-kids-food-revolution-engages-children-across-region-promote-healthy-eating</p> | <p>Best Practices Across the Life Course Skill 2: Understanding and choosing a healthy diet</p> <p>Middle Childhood Skill 1: Help your child make healthy choices</p> <p>Adolescence Skill 1: Support Healthy Eating and Lifestyle Habits in Adolescents</p> |
| <p>Name: Fix my Food Organization: Government of Fiji and UNICEF Country or Countries: Pacific wide Date of programme: 2025 Short description or link to the module: youth-led advocacy initiative aimed at giving young</p> | <p>Best Practices Across the Life Course Skill 2: Understanding and choosing a healthy diet</p> <p>Middle Childhood Skill 1: Help your child make healthy choices</p> |

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| <p>people a platform to create a stronger voice for a healthier food environment for every child. https://pacific.un.org/en/310312-junk-food-invasion-fiji</p> | <p>Adolescence Skill 1: Support Healthy Eating and Lifestyle Habits in Adolescents</p> |
| <p>Name: Get Into Rugby Plus Organisation: Oceania Rugby and UNICEF Country or Countries: Fiji and Samoa Date of Programme: 2019-2021 Short Description or link: combines rugby with life skills, focusing on gender equality, positive behaviour, and, as part of its holistic approach to health, includes modules on nutrition and healthy lifestyle choices for participants https://www.teamup.gov.au/programs/get-rugby-plus-samoa</p> | <p>Best Practices Across the Life Course Skill 2: Understanding and choosing a healthy diet</p> <p>Adolescence Skill 1: Support Healthy Eating and Lifestyle Habits in Adolescents</p> |
| <p>Name: Salvos Kids In The Kitchen Organization: Country or Countries: Date of programme: Short description or link to the module A 10-week programme designed to introduce school-aged children (from 8–12 years of age) to cooking through hands-on demonstrations and making them feel comfortable in the kitchen while developing valuable life skills. https://my.salvos.org.au/toolkit/resource/salvos-kids-in-the-kitchen--for-corps-leaders/1356/</p> | <p>Best Practices Across the Life Course Skill 3: Supporting your child or adolescent to prepare and choose their own food</p> <p>Adolescence Skill 3: It's your turn to cook! Involve Adolescents in Planning, Preparing, and Cooking Meals</p> |
| <p>Name: Healthy School Canteen Policies Organization: Consumer Council of Fiji Country or Countries: Fiji Date of programme: 2005 (under revision) Short description or link to the module Promotes water as the primary drink and limits sugary beverages. https://consumersfiji.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Feature-article-School-Canteen-Policy.pdf</p> | <p>Best Practices Across the Life Course Skill 4: Ensuring adequate hydration</p> |
| <p>Name: Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative Organization: WHO and Ministry of Health Country or Countries: Cook Islands</p> | <p>Early Childhood Skill 1: Establishing healthy feeding practices in the first 6 months</p> |

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| <p>Date of programme: 2024 Short description or link to the module: 10-step plan for all maternity facilities to promote, protect and support breastfeeding. https://www.cookislandsnews.com/internal/national/local/health/ministry-of-health-launches-new-policy-to-promote-breastfeeding/</p> | <p>Early Childhood Skill 2: How to breastfeed</p> |
| <p>Name: Pacific Guidelines for Healthy Living Organization: SPC Country or Countries: Pacific Wide Date of programme: 2018 Short description or link to the module https://www.spc.int/sites/default/files/resources/2018-05/Pacific%20guidelines%20for%20healthy%20living.pdf</p> | <p>Early Childhood Skill 2: How to breastfeed Early Childhood Skill 3: Introduce Solid Foods Safely and Confidently</p> |
| <p>Name: HeadStart - Responsive Feeding Tool for Home Visitors Organization: US Government Country or Countries: Global Date of programme: Short description or link to the module: to help families set up a positive eating environment, and look for responsive feeding behaviors. https://headstart.gov/publication/responsive-feeding-tool-home-visitors</p> | <p>Early Childhood Skill 5: Letting children learn to feed themselves Middle Childhood Skill 1: Help your child make healthy choices Middle Childhood Skill 2: Let's all eat together: Strengthen family connections through meals Adolescence Skill 1: Support Healthy Eating and Lifestyle Habits in Adolescents Adolescence Skill 4: Eat together as a family and celebrate your culture while teaching healthy habits</p> |
| <p>Name: Free Being Me Organization: World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) Country or Countries: Global Date of programme: Short description or link to the module: A global educational initiative designed to help young people (and the adults who support them)</p> | <p>Adolescence Skill 2: Support Positive Body Image and Healthy Eating in Adolescents</p> |

understand and challenge unrealistic beauty ideals and build healthy body confidence.
<https://www.waggggs.org/en/what-we-do/action-body-confidence/>

3. Facilitator Checklists

This checklist helps facilitators prepare for and deliver the nutrition content of the Pacific Parenting Toolkit. It outlines key steps to follow before, during, and after each activity to ensure they are organised, inclusive, and supportive for parents and caregivers.

The checklist helps facilitators:

- prepare materials and plan activities in advance
- create a safe and respectful learning environment for participants
- guide discussions and practical exercises effectively
- reinforce key parenting and nutrition messages
- reflect on what worked well and identify areas for improvement.

Facilitators can use this checklist as a practical reminder when preparing and delivering activities. It helps maintain consistent quality and supports positive learning experiences for parents and caregivers.

Table M3.3: Facilitator Checklist for Healthy Nutrition Best Practices Across the Life Course

| Skill 1: Making Family Meals a Daily Routine |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide parents and caregivers in establishing at least one shared family meal each day, or on most days of the week. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate discussion on creating calm, screen-free mealtimes that encourage conversation and connection. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support parents and caregivers in setting regular, predictable times for meals and snacks. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce serving water as the default drink during meals. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the inclusion of Pacific-grown foods, where available, to support healthy eating practices and the use of locally available, nutritious foods |
| Skill 2: Understanding and Choosing a Healthy Diet |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide practical guidance on selecting a variety of foods across the week, |

including fruits, vegetables, protein sources, and staple foods.

- Encourage parents and caregivers to choose fresh market foods instead of highly processed or packaged foods when possible.
- Help parents and caregivers understand the importance of limiting sugary drinks, snacks, and foods high in salt and unhealthy fats.
- Support parents and caregivers to understand how different foods contribute to growth, energy, learning, and overall well-being at various developmental stages.

Skill 3: Supporting Children and Adolescents to Prepare and Choose their Own Food

- Guide parents and caregivers in encouraging age-appropriate self-feeding and independence in young children.
- Facilitate discussion on involving children in safe, age-appropriate food preparation tasks (e.g., washing, peeling, mixing, serving).
- Encourage involvement of school-aged children in snack choices and simple meal planning.
- Support adolescents in building skills in meal planning, budgeting, shopping, and cooking.
- Reinforce balancing parental guidance with opportunities for growing independence and learning.

Skill 4: Ensuring Adequate Hydration

- Emphasise the importance of ensuring clean, safe drinking water is available throughout the day.
- Reinforce water as the primary beverage for children and adolescents.
- Facilitate discussion on limiting sugary drinks and reserving them for special occasions when culturally appropriate.

Early Childhood (0-5 years)

Skill 1: Establishing Healthy Feeding Practices in the First 6 Months

- Provide clear guidance on exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months (no water or other foods unless medically advised).
- Address stigma around breastfeeding and any misconceptions, providing

guidance on why breastmilk is best for the baby.

- Educate parents and caregivers on breastfeeding on demand, day and night, and recognising early hunger cues (e.g., rooting, hand-sucking, restlessness).
- Reinforce hygienic practices, including clean hands, breasts, and feeding utensils or cups.
- Encourage adequate maternal nutrition, hydration, and rest to support milk production.
- When breastfeeding isn't possible, explore safe alternatives, such as expressed breastmilk or formula, using a cup.

Skill 2: How to Breastfeed

- Demonstrate correct positioning (e.g., baby held close, tummy-to-tummy) and support parents and caregivers in practising positioning techniques.
- Teach signs of a deep, comfortable latch and effective feeding. Explain that learning to breastfeed takes time and practice.
- Provide information on normal feeding frequency for newborns (8–12 feeds per day).
- Discuss different breastfeeding positions to improve comfort and sustainability.
- Encourage early help-seeking from trained health workers if breastfeeding is painful or if the baby is not gaining weight adequately.

Skill 3: Introduce Solid Foods Safely and Confidently (Around 6 Months+)

- Guide parents and caregivers on introducing solid foods at around 6 months while continuing breastfeeding.
- Teach parents and caregivers to recognise developmental readiness signs (e.g., sitting with support, ability to swallow food).
- Encourage starting with soft, mashed, home-prepared Pacific foods where available and appropriate.
- Promote safe food preparation practices, including handwashing, using clean utensils, and using safe or boiled water when preparing infant foods if water safety is uncertain.
- Support responsive feeding practices by recognising hunger and fullness cues.

Middle Childhood (6–11 years)

Skill 1: Help Your Child Make Healthy Food Choices

- Guide parents and caregivers in providing balanced meals that include Pacific fruits, vegetables, protein sources, and root crops where available.
- Reinforce water as the default drink and facilitate discussion on limiting sugary drinks and unhealthy snacks.
- Encourage parents and caregivers to model healthy eating behaviours during sessions and at home.
- Encourage parents and caregivers to involve children in meal planning, shopping, and safe food preparation to build their knowledge and skills.

Adolescence (11–18 years)

Skill 1: Support Healthy Eating and Lifestyle Habits

- Guide parents and caregivers in providing balanced daily meals that include fruits, vegetables, root vegetables, protein sources, and healthy fats.
- Encourage parents and caregivers to involve adolescents in planning at least one meal per week, including participating in food shopping and decision-making.
- Facilitate discussion on building lifelong healthy eating habits and shared responsibility for food choices.

Skill 2: Support Positive Body Image and Healthy Eating

- Support parents and caregivers in discussing body changes and puberty in a positive, respectful, and developmentally appropriate way.
- Demonstrate how to invite adolescents' questions and respond openly and accurately.
- Guide parents and caregivers to avoid weight-focused comments and instead praise skills, effort, strengths, and character.
- Reinforce the importance of focusing on health and well-being rather than appearance.

4. Pacific Resources

This annex includes a list of selected resources developed by Pacific partners working in nutrition, including the **Fiji National Food and Nutrition Centre** and the **Pacific Community (SPC)**. These materials provide additional guidance, tools, and information that can support facilitators and programme implementers in strengthening nutrition education and caregiving practices.

The resources complement the skills and messages presented in this Toolkit and may offer further practical examples, training materials, and context-specific guidance relevant to Pacific communities. Facilitators and implementers are encouraged to consult these resources to deepen their understanding and identify additional activities or approaches that can support parents, caregivers, and families.

| Category | Resource Title and Link |
|--|---|
| Understanding Foods and Nutrition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three Food Groups • Reading Food Labels • How Much Sugar Is In Your Drink • Notes on the Food Charts • Green Leafy Vegetables • Fish and Seafood • Starchy Foods • Fresh Fruits • Cereals |
| Healthy Eating Habits | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pacific Guidelines for Healthy Living • Pacific Guidelines for Healthy Living: a handbook for health professionals and educators • My Healthy Meal • My Health Plate of Food: Fiji • A balanced breakfast- 8 posters • Vili and the rainbow (plate) |
| Family & Caregiving | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeding Babies and Young Children |
| Reducing Salt, Sugar & Fat | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's in my food? Hidden Sugar • What's in my food? Hidden Fats • What's in my food? Hidden Salt • More Flavour Less Salt • Cook with Less Salt - A pinch is all you need • Easy ways to eat less salt • How much salt is in your Food • Look out for hidden salt |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop the Salt |
| Pacific Food & Culture | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cassava Fruit Lote • Grilled Eggplant in Lolo • Bila • Mango Drink (Otai) • Tropical Banana Dessert • Kokoda • Cassava Bibinka • Taro: A Symbol of the Pacific's Rich Cooking Heritage • Taro in Pacific Cooking: Traditional Pacific Island taro recipes • Pasifika Plates: Serving nutritious island flavours |
| Engagement and learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kokonut King: Comic Strip -Cook Islands • Think Twice: Comic Strip-Vanuatu • Pacific Nutrition bingo • Live healthy, stay healthy: your at-home wellness challenge |
| Disease Awareness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact Sheet 1 Anaemia • Fact Sheet 2 Cancer • Fact Sheet 3 Coronary Heart Disease • Fact Sheet 4 Dental Caries • Fact Sheet 5 Diabetes • Fact Sheet 6 Diarrhoeal Diseases in Children • Fact Sheet 7 Gout • Fact Sheet 8 Hypertension and Stroke • Fact Sheet 9 Iodine Deficiency Disorder • Fact Sheet 10 Overweight Obesity • Fact Sheet 11 Protein Energy Malnutrition • Fact Sheet 12 Vitamin A Deficiency • Fact Sheet 13 Zinc Deficiency |

5. Nutritious Pacific Foods: Examples and Seasonal Options

Pacific traditional foods such as root crops, leafy greens, fruits, fish, eggs, and coconut provide a variety of nutrients that support children's healthy growth and development .(69) A diverse diet supplies long-lasting energy and essential macronutrients like protein, which are needed to build muscles, organs, and tissues, and support immune function. (70) Fruits and vegetables provide vitamins and antioxidants that protect the

body and help strengthen immunity, while leafy greens supply folate, iron, and fibre, which are important for healthy brain development and preventing nutrient deficiencies. (70) Fish and seafood offer high-quality protein and fats such as omega-3 fatty acids, which are linked with healthy brain and eye development in children, and local seafood has long been a staple in Pacific diets (traditional Pacific diets include fish, root crops, green leaves, and fruits). (69) Coconut and its products contribute healthy fats and hydration, important for energy and nutrient absorption, while staple root crops like taro, sweet potato, and breadfruit provide steady energy and broad nutrient profiles that are well suited to supporting growth across the life course. (71) Eating a wide variety of these local foods helps ensure children meet the nutrient needs required for healthy bones, strong immunity, cognitive development, and overall well-being, especially during rapid growth phases such as infancy and early childhood. (70)

Specific examples of nutritious Pacific foods include:

1. Root Crops

- **Taro (dalo, talo)**
- **Cassava**
- **Sweet potato (kumala)**
- **Yam**

Benefits across the life-course: Rich in energy, fibre, and micronutrients.

For mothers and babies: These provide long-lasting energy and important nutrients for the mother and baby's growth.

2. Local Fruits

- **Papaya (pawpaw)** – rich in vitamins A and C (avoid unripe papaya in early pregnancy)
- **Banana and plantain** – potassium and energy
- **Mango** – vitamin A
- **Guava** – vitamin C
- **Pineapple (in moderation)**
- **Local citrus (lemon, orange)**

Benefits across the life-course: High in vitamins, especially vitamin C and antioxidants.

For mothers and babies: Local fruits support the immune system, iron absorption, and healthy fetal development.

3. Vegetables and Leafy Greens (Key for folate, iron, and fibre): Leafy greens are essential for preventing anemia and supporting the baby's brain and spine development.

- **Bele / slippery cabbage**
- **Taro leaves (rourou, palusami without too much coconut cream)**
- **Pumpkin leaves**
- **Kangkong / water spinach**
- **Cabbage and other local greens**

Benefits across the life-course: Supporting growth, digestion, and overall health.

For mothers and babies: Supports fetal brain and spine development, prevents anemia, aids digestion, and improves nutrient quality in breast milk.

4. Fish and Seafood (High-quality protein, iron, omega-3s)

- **Fresh reef fish** (e.g., tuna, mahi-mahi, parrotfish)
- **Canned tuna** in water or spring water
- **Small fish eaten with bones** (anchovies, tuna flakes, or local varieties) – provide calcium

Benefits across the life-course: Supports growth, bone health, and overall well-being.

For mothers and babies: Supports fetal brain development, maternal iron status, strong bones, and healthy growth in infants.

5. Protein Foods: Protein supports fetal growth, mother’s muscle strength, and iron levels.

- **Eggs:** high in protein and folate
- **Chicken**
- **Beans, lentils, and split peas**
- **Local nuts**

Benefits across the life-course: Supports growth, muscle health, and overall nutrition with protein, iron, and folate.

For mothers and babies: Promotes fetal growth, maternal muscle strength, and healthy iron levels.

6. Traditional Coconut Foods: Provides healthy fats needed for the baby’s brain development.

- **Fresh coconut flesh**
- **Coconut water** (hydration)
- **Coconut milk** (in moderation due to high fat)

Benefits across the life-course: Provides healthy fats, electrolytes, and hydration for overall energy and wellness.

For mothers and babies: Supports fetal brain development, maternal energy, and hydration.

7. Traditional Foods from the Sea and Land

- **Seaweed (limu)** – iodine for brain development
- **Breadfruit (ulu)** – energy and fibre
- **Pandanas fruit** – vitamin A

Benefits across the life-course: Provide energy for overall growth and health.

For mothers and babies: Supports fetal brain development, maternal energy, and healthy digestion.

Foods that are especially beneficial for both the mother and baby:

- **Leafy greens (bele, rourou)** – folate, iron, fibre
- **Fresh fish** – omega-3s for baby's brain and eyes
- **Papaya, banana, and mango** – vitamins for immunity
- **Eggs** – protein and choline for brain development
- **Root crops** – sustained energy
- **Breadfruit and coconut** – energy + healthy fats
- **Seaweed** – iodine for brain development

