

# Childcare centres serving too many unhealthy treats <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** The Courier Mail

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 28 Feb 2017

## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

Junk food is habitually served to children at childcare centres as educators are too afraid to question the established mealtime culture.

An Australian study of 1000 childcare workers has found staff let down children by routinely serving foods such as baked treats, processed meats and sausages, despite research showing the childcare setting influenced children's long-term eating habits.

Researchers from Edith Cowan University are calling for stronger regulation from the National Quality Standards to push centres to provide food consistent with Australian dietary guidelines and to ensure each meal does not include discretionary, or "sometimes", food.

Researcher Dr Ruth Wallace said training of early childhood staff often did not encapsulate nutrition.

"Unfortunately, if a sometimes food is routinely served up at each meal, it displaces good core foods and sets up bad habits for the future," she said.

"We all eat way too many discretionary items and over 30 per cent of our intake comes from these energy-dense and nutrient-poor foods."

Dietary guidelines recommend a child aged two to three should be restricted to zero to one discretionary foods a day.

Lucy Cook, director of Queensland's Amaze early education centres, said educators allowed "sometimes" foods, such as cupcakes, for birthdays.

"These treats are only for special occasions otherwise we cater for good-old fashioned simple food," she said.

"We are not vegan or paleo, the kids just eat like grandmother used to eat — real core food from the food groups that the kids enjoy.

"Today everyone is having apricot chicken and rice."

The study also found that many centres focused on sweet baked foods rather than healthy foods during cooking activities.

"We teach our children how to recognise and taste a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, and talk about where they come from and what you can create with them," Ms Cook said.

-reprinted from The Courier Mail

**Region:** Australia and New Zealand <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** child care <sup>[4]</sup>

food <sup>[5]</sup>

food culture <sup>[6]</sup>

meal-times <sup>[7]</sup>

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