

Fairfield Refugee Nutrition Project

Food Experiences in Australia

LESSON PLAN FOOD EXPERIENCES

Background

Refugees flee their home countries because their lives and security are at risk and their basic human rights are violated. Most leave their homes unwillingly with little or no planning; flee with few if any belongings; suffer extreme adversity and inconceivable atrocities in the form of persecution, degradation, and violation; and witness the destruction of their fundamental rights and home lands¹.

There are many new experiences to deal with when arriving in a new country, including changes to the monetary system, social stratification, housing, schooling, language, health, food availability, access and utilisation². Upon resettlement, refugees must carry the burden of the past whilst facing current challenges such as being resettled in the poorest neighbourhoods and having limited economic opportunities. The dual burden of resettlement and past experiences may undermine a family's ability to cope in their new environment and increase the risk of food insecurity³.

Food experiences in people's country of origin and in Australia will help shape the food choices and eating behaviours of refugees. This session will allow for discussion and sharing of the meaning, value and structure of eating behaviours, which can only be understood within the context of people's culture, of a culture and people in transition.

Messages Maintain traditional food practices
 Find health substitutes for difficult to access traditional foods
 Eat at least 2 fruit and 5 vegetables every day
 Eat a varied diet

Topic Food Experiences

Focus Questions

How has my access to foods changed? Has this affected healthy or unhealthy foods?

How is the food system in Australia different?

How is cooking in Australia different?

How have my eating habits changed?

Learning Experiences

Competency	Activity	Resources
Dietary transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Group leader introduces the topic.- Discuss common reasons for dietary changes in a new country.- Discuss the variances in peoples experience but also the commonality, and the importance of sharing experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Background reading (see bellow).- Changing food habits for refugees (main points) www.refugeehealth.org.au reading www.rph.wa.gov.au/hpnetwork/GFNA/Goodfood.htm.- White board or butchers paper and marker.

Food Access in Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read the introduction to this topic. - Ask the group to discuss how this topic relates to them and share their experiences. - Record the stories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activity sheet; Food access in Australia www.refugeehealth.org.au. - White board/ butchers paper.
Food system in Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read the introduction to this topic. - Ask the group to discuss how this topic relates to them and share their experiences. - Record the stories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activity sheet; Food system in Australia www.refugeehealth.org.au. - White board/ butchers paper.
Cooking food in Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read the introduction to this topic. - Ask the group to discuss how this topic relates to them and share their experiences. - Record the stories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activity sheet; cooking food in Australia www.refugeehealth.org.au. - White board/ butchers paper.
Maintaining traditional food practices in Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read the introduction to this topic. - Ask the group to discuss how this topic relates to them and share their experiences. - Record the stories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activity sheet; maintaining traditional foods in Australia www.refugeehealth.org.au. - White board/ butchers paper.
Food abundance in Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read the introduction to this topic. - Ask the group to discuss how this topic relates to them and share their experiences. - Record the stories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activity sheet; Food abundance in Australia www.refugeehealth.org.au. - White board/ butchers paper.

Review Questions

Do you appreciate sharing your experiences and learning's with others?

What foods (aspects of nutrition) would you most like to learn more about?

Discuss topics to be covered over the coming sessions.

Evaluation

- Participants will complete evaluation form which asks them to indicate changes to eating in Australia and the importance of sharing experiences.
- Records of peoples experiences documented in English.

Other resources and lessons

From 'Good Food for New Arrivals', 'Changing food habits for refugees'.
www.rph.wa.gov.au/hpnetwork/GFNA/Goodfood.htm.

From 'Good Food for New Arrivals', 'Food habits'
www.rph.wa.gov.au/hpnetwork/GFNA/Goodfood.htm.

From 'Easing the Transition', 'The experience of settling in a new country', pp20.
www.foundationhouse.org.au

From 'Easing the Transition', 'The diet and lifestyle context for new arrivals', pp16.
www.foundationhouse.org.au

From 'Easing the Transition', 'Sharing food stories', pp35.
www.foundationhouse.org.au

3. Segal UA, Mayadas NS, 2005. Assessment of issues facing immigrant and refugee families. Child Welfare 85(5): 563-583.
4. Asetts, Good Food for New Arrivals., 2004 Fact Sheet; Food Habits. <http://members.iinet.net.au/~asetts/Food%20habits.pdf>
5. Hadley C, Sellen D, 2006. Food security and child hunger among recently resettled Liberian refugees and asylum seekers; A pilot study. J Immigrant Health 8:369- 375.

Topic 1: Food Access in Australia

Many people who come to Australia as refugees have experienced periods of food shortage.

When arriving in Australia people may experience difficulties in;

- Locating markets and supermarkets;
- Locating traditional foods;
- Ability to afford traditional foods or appropriate substitutes.
- Obtaining foods permitted in their religion;
- Adjusting to different ways of buying food;
- Finding transport to and from shops;
- And knowing the names of foods in English.

Difficulties in accessing food may result in:

- being unable to maintain traditional food practices;
- substituting traditional foods with other more available foods;
- Insufficient food intake or limited variety in the diet;
- Anxiety and problems associated with shopping.

Q *How do you think access to food in Australia has influenced your eating habits?*

Topic 2: Food system in Australia

The food supply in Australia is very different from that of many other countries.

- Australia's food supply is abundant and varied.
- There is easier access to foods which may be considered luxuries in other countries, like butter, oil, sugar, soft drink and sweets.
- There are foods available which are not found in other countries.
- There are many processed foods available.
- There are more takeaway and convenience foods available.
- Many foods have a long shelf life.
- Preservatives and additives are more widely used.
- Foods are heavily marketed in the media.

Q *How do you think the food system in Australia has influenced your eating habits?*

Topic 3: Cooking food in Australia

- All houses have access to modern cooking appliances like an oven and refrigerator.
- The times at which meals are eaten in Australia are different from many countries.
- People in Australia often have little time available for cooking.
- Children may not want to eat foods cooked at home.
- People may not be able to buy all the ingredients needed for cooking traditional foods.

Q *Have you changed the types of foods or the way you cook foods in Australia?*

Topic 4: Maintaining traditional food in Australia

For many refugees maintaining traditional food practices is very important for both their spiritual wellbeing and physical health^{1,2}. The foods we eat are important for many reasons. They connect us to our:

- Culture;
- Traditions;
- Beliefs;
- Religion;
- And our family.

Q *Is it important to you to maintain your traditional food practices? Why?*

Q *Is it difficult to maintain traditional food practices in Australia? Why?*

Topic 5: Food abundance in Australia

- Food in Australia is abundant and varied.
- There is easier access to foods which may be considered luxuries in other countries, like butter, oil, sugar, soft drink and sweets.
- There are foods available which are not found in other countries.
- There are many processed foods available.
- There are more takeaway and convenience foods available.

Food abundance can lead to many health problems. When food is unavailable problems of malnutrition affect people. When food is abundant and accessible problems of overweight, diabetes, cancer, and heart disease affect people. In Australia these illnesses are common.

Q *Do you think the abundance of food in Australia affects people in your community?*

Q *Do you know people who have gained weight or become sick with heart disease or diabetes in Australia?*