

Food and culture

The food we eat and how we cook it helps define who we are. Food and cooking are central to the many cultures and religions in the world. Cultures and religions have a range of traditions, which include eating particular foods cooked in particular ways.

People living in Australia come from many different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, and many of them enjoy continuing their food traditions as a way of keeping and valuing their culture and beliefs.

No one person's pattern of eating is quite the same as anyone else's, and no one cultural approach to food is better or worse than another. We should respect people's food cultures, even if they are different to ours.

Some of the different cultural and religious traditions some people follow are described below.

Religious and other beliefs

Roman Catholic Christians

- » May not eat meat on Good Friday.

Orthodox and Coptic Christians

- » May not eat meat, eggs, cheese or oil during Lent, the 40 days before Easter.

Jewish

- » Jewish religious beliefs specify which foods are 'kosher', that is the foods which Jewish people can and can't eat, and the ways in which they should be prepared. Jewish people differ in the degrees to which they 'keep kosher'.

- » The main rules are not eating pork meats and products (including bacon, ham and things made with pork fat), shellfish, and cooking meat and milk together, and/or eating them at the same meal. Some people use separate cooking spaces and equipment for these foods.
- » All meat must be killed and prepared in a specific way.
- » Kosher foods and non-kosher foods should not come into contact with each other.

Muslim

- » Islamic religious beliefs specify which foods are 'halal', that is the foods Muslim people can and can't eat, and how they should be prepared.
- » The main rules are not eating pork meats and products, (including bacon, ham and foods made with pork fat), and not drinking alcohol or eating food cooked with alcohol.
- » All meat must be killed and prepared in a specific way.
- » Food should not be cooked in pots that may have been used for cooking pork.
- » During Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, Muslims fast (do not eat) after sunrise and before sunset. During this time, people enjoy special foods at their evening meal.

Chinese

- » At Chinese New Year, no products from slaughtered animals are eaten, and meat is not eaten on New Year's Eve. On the seventh day of Chinese New Year, raw fish is eaten.
- » At Mid-autumn festival, moon cakes are a special food.
- » Winter Solstice festival – glutinous rice ball soup is enjoyed.

First Nations

'Bush tucker' refers to traditional foods that can be found and used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the lands or waterways of their Nations. There are many First Nations and variations of bush tucker across the diversity of Australia. Some foods are eaten raw, others are used medicinally, some are roasted or baked. Being able to prepare and eat tucker on Country has important aspects for peoples' social and emotional well-being.

What about people who don't eat their traditional way?

Many young people eat food that is easily available and may reject the food traditions of their family or culture. This is normal, and may be because they want to fit in with others, don't like their traditional foods, or want to try something new. If you've chosen not to eat the traditional foods of your family or culture anymore, you need some healthy alternatives.

See the *Yhunger fact sheets*:

- » *Healthy eating everyday* and
- » *Smart fast food choices*.

Need more information?

- » Download the Living Strong Healthy Lifestyle Cookbook for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recipes, at <https://kidney.org.au/uploads/resources/2-and-5-qld-atsi-cookbook-feb-09.pdf>
- » Check out My Food Story films we made with young people, Navitas, SSI and the NSW Refugee Health Service at <https://curiousworks.com.au/>
- » More great cooking videos from Outback Tom <https://www.outbacktomaustralia.com.au/> or on TikTok @outbacktom
- » Food and celebrations at the Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

This fact sheet has been developed by Youthblock Youth Health Service, Sydney Local Health District for the Yhunger program.