

# Insights for nutrition education

Insights from surveys and focus groups commissioned by Meat & Livestock Australia on main meal choices, practices and nutrition information provide useful clues for nutrition education.

Since substitutive behaviour is one of the most common ways in which people respond to healthy eating advice<sup>1</sup>, the findings can help put Australian Dietary Guidelines in the context of everyday meals and practices.

## 1. Nutrition as meal ideas and tips

Six nights a week, meals are prepared in the home of average Australian households<sup>2</sup>. Most of these meals are cooked from scratch, with little difference by socio-economic status<sup>3</sup>.

Since 71% of meal preparers are keen to receive meal ideas and practical tips<sup>4</sup>, a meals-based approach provides a meaningful framework to recommend healthy portion sizes, healthier choices, variety and balance.

A meals-based approach is not only a practical and salient way to apply Australian Dietary Guidelines; it is also a way to consider relevant nutrient and food interactions<sup>5</sup> and to promote meal routines and practices associated with better diet quality<sup>6,7</sup>.

## 2. Meals by habits, not recipes

Few use recipes (21%) and only 38% had introduced new meals in the past month<sup>8</sup>. Meals tend to be 'twists' to standard recipes with meat and veg-style meals most popular.

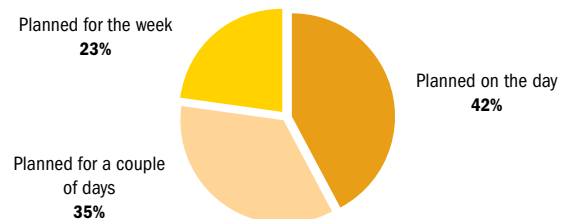
They are mostly confident cooks within their repertoire and capable of adapting recipes according to available ingredients<sup>9</sup>. They can prepare and cook meals in under 30 minutes but are less confident adapting meals to suit different ages or dietary requirements.

## 3. Meal planning starts with protein

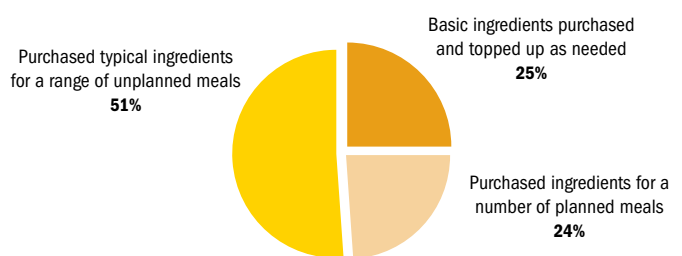
Their meal planning framework starts with protein foods with meals conceptualized around 3 core ingredients – protein foods; vegetables; and carbohydrate foods<sup>2</sup>.

A variety of different protein foods are chosen as a way of achieving variety within the weekly repertoire<sup>9</sup>. The most popular protein choices are beef, chicken, fish, eggs, lamb and pork with legumes used least frequently as a protein foundation; however, they may be used as a side.

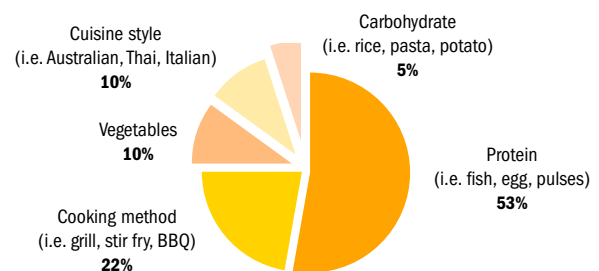
### Main meal planning



### Meal ingredient purchasing practices

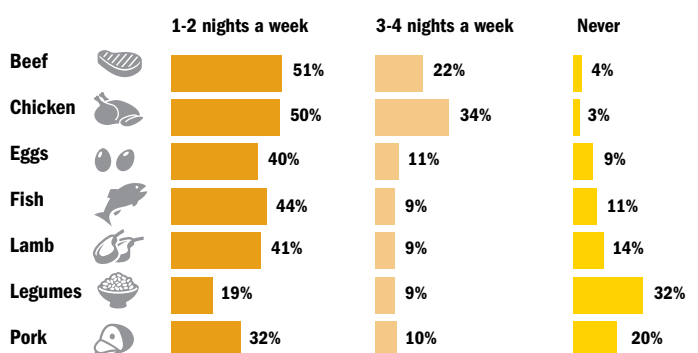


### When choosing what to make for the main meal which foundation do you typically start with?



### Different protein foods chosen for variety

How often would you base your evening meal around the following ingredients?



## 4. Flexibility, not a prescription

With a spontaneous, flexible approach to meal planning, meal preparers want freedom to adapt meal choice to suit their specific needs.

Meal choice differs by occasion and mood and includes: favourites 'my'/'partner'/'family'/'kids'; quick-and-easy/'can't be bothered' or 'don't have time to cook' meals; and inexpensive meals<sup>9</sup>.

Whilst health is important, taste preferences and convenience, which are stronger determinants of meal choice, must be accommodated.

Positive, constructive advice which can be integrated into their meal repertoire and habits without additional effort, expense or taste compromises is appreciated. Restrictive, prescriptive recommendations tend to be rejected.

## 5. Visual cues, not food weights

Meal preparation is intuitive based on available ingredients, simple cooking methods and utensils – they find instructions based on readily available i.e. utensils or tools easier to adopt<sup>8</sup>.

Others have also reported that use of familiar foods; positive substitutions; and an illustrative rather than a prescriptive approach has the potential to overcome barriers to healthy eating<sup>10</sup>.

## 6. Customised information, not one-size-fits-all

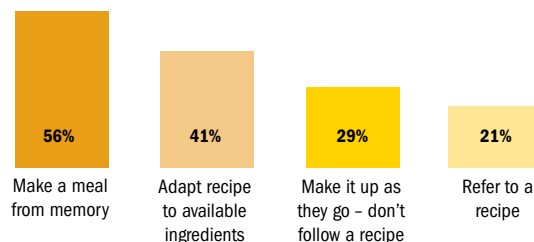
Motivation to adopt information depends on food involvement, life stage and dietary needs. "Foodies" are inspired by fresh, wholesome ingredients; young parents need coping skills; and those with health issues need reassurance.

A customized approach providing timely and relevant information related to different meal patterns, dietary behaviours and food involvement is recommended<sup>11,12</sup>.

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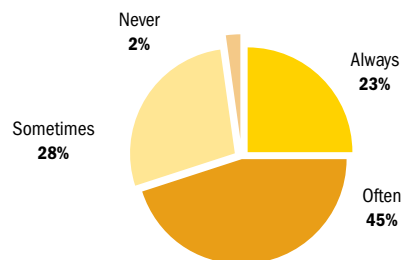
## When cooking meals that you regularly cook for dinner, would you usually...?



## Core ingredients used to make dinner



## Percentage of meals cooked from scratch



## Cooking confidence

