How to choose culturally appropriate education resources: a guide for dietitians and nutritionists

Finding nutrition resources that are appropriate for specific cultural groups is an important aspect of delivering culturally responsive and safe dietetic services. Because food, food practices and meal patterns all vary between Australia’s many migrant groups, providing customised education resources is a fundamental element of best practice. Using generic resources based on the typical ‘Australian’ diet may strengthen misconceptions of the intrinsic healthiness of the ‘Australia diet’ and undermine healthy traditional diets. The ‘healthy migrant effect’ describes the fact that when people migrate to Australia, changes to their food patterns often contribute to an increasing risk of nutrition-related chronic disease over time. For this reason supporting the consumption of healthy traditional foods and assisting clients from other cultures to incorporate appropriate local foods are important dietetic roles.

This guide has been developed to assist dietitians to choose culturally appropriate nutrition education resources. Please let us know if this document has been useful or if you have any suggestions for improvement by emailing the Metro South Health, Access and Capacity-building Team at access&capacity@health.qld.gov.au.

1. Characteristics of culturally appropriate food and nutrition resources:

For some cultural groups, low literacy resources in English are more appropriate than translated ones. This is because individuals may not be literate in their own language but may be learning how to read and write for the first time in English in Australia.

The most appropriate food and nutrition resources:

• match the client’s language and literacy level
• have been customised to their cultural and religious background and food habits
• have been developed using consultation with local community members.

An example of a culturally appropriate resource is *Breastfeeding your baby in Australia*. This is a TAFE reader written in simple English for African refugees with low literacy. The illustrations have been customised to represent the cultural group. The resource was developed with and approved by women of the local Brisbane African community.
Below is another example of a culturally appropriate resource developed for refugees with low English literacy but little or no literacy in their traditional language. It uses simple English and relevant pictures to convey messages.

**Good food for new arrivals resource**

![Image of food guide]

**The Healthy Fale**

*The Healthy Fale* is an example of another culturally appropriate resource. It was developed in consultation with the Samoan community living in Logan in 1995. This resource is translated into the Samoan language. The artwork and concepts are culturally customised using Samoan foods, motifs and artwork. It supports eating healthy traditional foods but also incorporates healthy foods available in Australia.

Representatives from the Samoan community were shown various food guides, including the *Healthy Food Pyramid* and the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating*. This group decided that none of the existing guides were culturally appropriate. Instead, they recommended that a new food guide be created based on a traditional Samoan food hut or *Fale*, incorporating traditional foods. A local artist was employed to complete the artwork. Community members...
were involved in reviewing, marketing and distributing the final product.

1.1 Use of bi-cultural coding

Some cultural groups may have relatively high levels of literacy in English but have a preference for resources in their first language. This is the case for many Māori and Pacific Islander migrants, especially older people from these communities. Resources in a person’s preferred language are often more effective and show respect.

Where English literacy may be high, bi-cultural coding may be used. Here key symbols or words from traditional culture or language are used within English text to add cultural meaning. In some cases, having two versions of the same resource ensures an increase in the reach of a single resource. See the examples below of bi-cultural coding and translated resources on fluid restrictions for Samoan community members experiencing heart failure.

1.2 Use of pictures and diagrams

Use of primarily pictorial resources, such as the ones on the next page on making school lunches, can be useful when the target group does not have literacy in any language. This is most appropriate for members of some newly arrived refugee communities. The Nourishing New Communities suite of school lunchbox resources, which is translated into 15 different languages, is also customised to include traditional foods and meal choices.
1.3 Audio files

For communities where there is little or no literacy in any language, audio files in a person’s first language can be useful. They can be used to explain complex concepts, where pictures don’t convey the whole story. Audio files can be used as a ‘stand alone’ resource or to complement a pictorial resource. Make sure you read or listen to the English version before you recommend it to a client.

1.4 Relevance to your clients

Within the same cultural group, communities living in different locations in Australia may have different preferences and interpretations of the same resource. Intergenerational differences may also apply, with younger people often more comfortable with English versions. For these reasons, it is important to check the resource you plan to use is relevant and appropriate for the clients of your particular service. To obtain information on how to do this, and who might be the best community person to consult with, please contact the Metro South Health, Access and Capacity-building Team at access&capacity@health.qld.gov.au.

2. Characteristics of culturally inappropriate resources

Unfortunately, there are many food and nutrition resources that are not appropriate for use with clients and may provide ineffective, unsafe, or offensive messages.
Characteristics of resources that reduce their effectiveness:

- ‘word for word’ translations that don’t represent the foods, food practices or the cultural or religious beliefs of the client
- inappropriate graphics (e.g. the thumbs up sign is a sign of agreement in Australia; however, this is an offensive gesture in some other cultures and should not be used as a graphic; exclusive use of photos of white, middle class people and the foods they eat)
- high level readability
- use of Australian colloquialisms or terms with different meaning to people from other cultures that may confuse the client (e.g. Measure Up).

2.1 Inappropriate use of translations

While information directly translated from English language documents can be useful in some situations, they can also be confusing and miscommunicate some messages. As a starting point, make sure you read the English versions to identify any obvious concerns before using any translated resource.

The Samoan version of the Measure Up resources shown below is a ‘word for word’ translation that does not take into account specific cultural issues related to body image, food preferences, or culture-specific barriers or strengths to support healthy eating. The Samoan resource has a Caucasian male pictured. These resources are likely to be ineffective, not widely used and potentially offensive to Samoan clients.

**Samoan Measure Up resource**

**Australian Measure up resource**

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**Samoan Measure Up resource**

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**Australian Measure up resource**
2.2 Use of inappropriate graphics and images

‘Near enough is not good enough’ when using photos of people in resources targeting a particular cultural group e.g. the same photo was used for all the Measure Up translated resources shown below. If this resource were to be used, it may offend an Indonesian male client because the photo is clearly of someone from another ethnic group.

It is also important to think about the unintended cultural messages that images may have. For example, the African Measure Up resources below show a man dressed only in shorts. This would be offensive to the vast majority of Somalis and Swahilis of the Sunni Muslim faith because Moslem men should refrain from exposing their bodies, without a reasonable cause for doing so. There are no resources targeting women in this translated multicultural suite, although customised versions for women in English were developed.
2.3 Inappropriate use of high level readability

Another example of an inappropriate resource is the Khmer ‘word for word’ translation of one of the Go for 2&5 resources below. In this case, there appears to be no consideration of the literacy rates of the target group. Cambodian adult literacy rates dramatically decreased following the Khmer Rouge regime. The types of fruit and vegetables were also not customised to the target group. Without an ability to read and understand this resource, Khmer clients may perceive the key message is to eat the vegetables pictured, and not their own traditional fruits and vegetables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Khmer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fitting More Fruit and Vegetables Into Your Diet</strong></td>
<td><strong>Go for 2&amp;5</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOE WILL IS BREATHTAKING Don’t feel tired, bloated or unwell if you can’t get enough fruit and vegetables in your diet. A simple way to get more vitamins and improve your health is to eat more vegetables.</td>
<td><strong>Go for 2&amp;5</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are many different types of fru</td>
<td><strong>Go for 2&amp;5</strong></td>
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<td>*</td>
<td><strong>Go for 2&amp;5</strong></td>
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2.4 Out of date information

Finally, it is important to check the date of publication of the resources you review. With recent changes to the Australian Dietary Guidelines, especially around infant feeding, many resources are outdated.

3. Ready to choose a culturally appropriate resource?

A template has been provided at the end of this document. It will help you to review existing resources for their cultural appropriateness, taking into account the key points discussed above. Completed templates can also be used as a good tool for communicating your findings to other staff.

4. What if there are no culturally appropriate resources available?

In many situations, there may be no culturally appropriate resources available. For a client group that you see rarely, it is better not to provide inappropriate written information that could be
potentially offensive or confuse your messages. A better solution would be to use the interpreter to explain a couple of take home messages and to check the client understands using a Teach-back method. The interpreter may also be able to write these key messages down for the client if they are literate in their own language. Another solution might be to use a non-targeted but easy English resource that is free from potentially sensitive images and words.

If you are seeing many clients from a single cultural background, you may want to develop your own resource. Please contact the Metro South Health, Access and Capacity-building Team at access&capacity@health.qld.gov.au for advice and assistance on how to go about this.

5. More information on providing culturally responsive services:

*Food and Cultural profiles: dietetic consultation guides* for eight different communities

*Providing culturally responsive dietetic services: a self assessment tool for clinicians*

*Providing culturally responsive dietetic services: an organisational assessment tool*

Samoan food and nutrition resources
Review of culturally appropriate dietetic education materials
Documentations of findings

Finding nutrition resources that are appropriate for specific cultural groups is an important aspect of delivering culturally responsive and safe dietetic services. This document can assist you to review available resources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of review:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of reviewer:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name of resource:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author of resource:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural group the resource is for:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education topic (e.g. diabetes):</td>
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**Criteria for use**

- □ Resource is in preferred language for reading of community members (e.g. appropriately translated, low literacy in English). Note that this may not be the same as the preference for oral communication.
- □ Literacy level in the resource (in any language) is appropriate to members of community (e.g. low literacy in English, low literacy in another language or audio files for people with no literacy in any language)
- □ Resource developed in consultation with community members
- □ Images are culturally appropriate and relevant
- □ Messages and cultural appropriateness checked in local context when resources have been developed in other locations. Note that different communities within Australia from the same country of origin may have different dialects, ethnicities, religions and cultural understanding.
- □ Resource is consistent with current guidelines (up to date)

**Outcome of review**

- □ Resource recommended for use
- □ Resource recommended for use with minor modification
- □ Not approved. Reasons: