

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

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Finding nutrition resources that are appropriate for specific cultural groups is an important aspect of delivering culturally responsive and safe dietetic services. Food, food practices and meal patterns all vary between Australia's many migrant groups, so 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.

It is important not to assume a client's cultural background or that they want to identify as someone from a specific cultural background. For this reason, you should check before seeking culture-specific resources.

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](mailto: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.

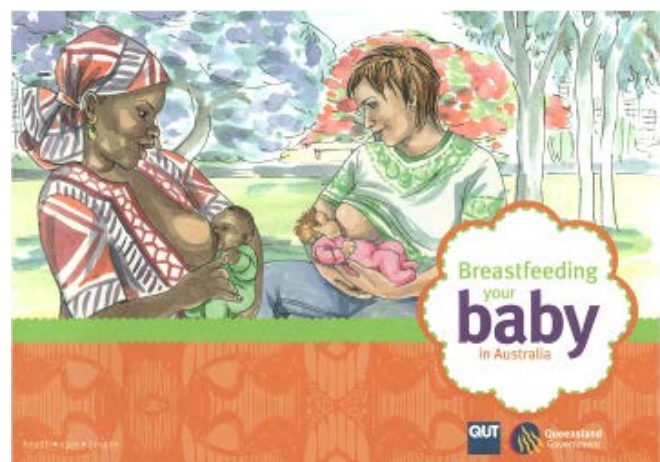
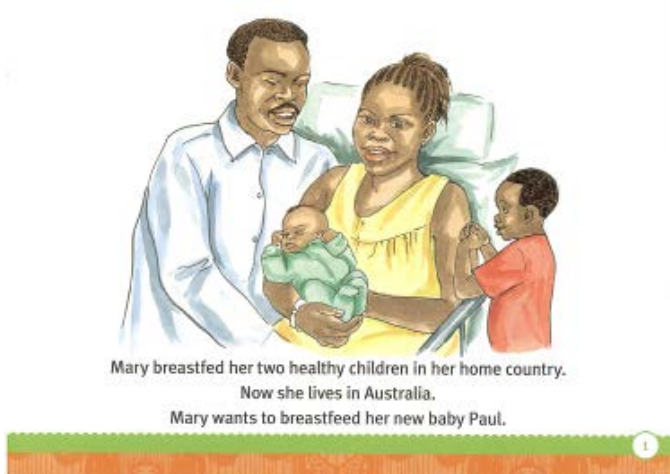
The most appropriate food and nutrition resources:

- 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.

### Breastfeeding your baby in Australia resources

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



Water is the best drink.  
It is safe to drink from the tap.



It is good to have only water, fruit, vegetables and milk between meals to leave more room for family meals.



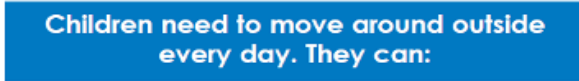
## Appetite



There are many reasons why young children don't want to eat.



Moving from one country to another.



## Children need to move around outside every day. They can:

Play outside in the back yard.



Go to the park with an adult.



Walk to school with an adult.

Drinking too much soft drink, cordial, juice and milk.  
Not growing as fast as a baby and therefore needing less food.



Not moving around as much as before.



This resource was produced by the Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASTTS) and the East Metropolitan Population Health Unit in Perth, Western Australia for the National Child Nutrition Program, 2003. Please see [www.astts.org.au](http://www.astts.org.au) for information on where to access 'Good Food for New Arrivals' resources.

## The Healthy Taro Leaf



*The Healthy Taro Leaf* is an example of another culturally appropriate resource. It was developed in consultation with? ..... when?. The resource is a cultural adaption of the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating. The artwork and concepts are culturally customised using Maori and Pacific Islander foods, motifs and artwork. It supports eating healthy traditional foods but also incorporates healthy foods available in Australia. .... something about the significance of taro in the diet/lives of the people.

Multiple community groups and over 20 community members were involved in the reviewing, marketing and distributing of the final resource.

# 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.

**Suavai = Fluid**

*Information for people with heart failure*

**What is suavai?**  
Suavai is a fluid, which is water or other liquids you eat or drink that flows freely.

**Why do I need to manage my suavai intake?**  
Heart failure means that the heart muscle isn't pumping the blood around the body as well as it used to. This can cause your body to hold on to too much suavai, making it even harder for your heart to pump blood. It is important to watch the amount of suavai you take in from food and drink to help manage symptoms such as puffy legs and feet.

**If you have heart failure, too much suavai can cause:**

- Shortness of breath
- Swollen legs, ankles, feet and hands
- High blood pressure
- Strain on heart
- Cramps and headaches

These can make you feel washed out **BUT some people may still feel well.** It is important to know where suavai is in the food and drink that you have each day. Your doctor or dietitian will tell you how much you can have.

**Tips for managing suavai intake**

- Drink from a small cup or have half cups rather than a big cup. This way you will have less.
- It's best not to have salty foods or add salt at the table as this will make you thirsty.
- If you are thirsty, brush your teeth or chew a mint/gum instead of drinking to refresh your mouth.
- Spread your suavai allowance out over the day, do not drink all at one time!

Suavai DAILY ALLOWANCE = \_\_\_\_\_  
(suavai and other fluids)

It is important for you to take healthy steps to ensure your community stays well. If you have heart failure this may mean watching your suavai intake. Let's do it for our aiga!

**Suavai = Fluid**

*Fa'amatalaga mo tagata e a'afia i gasegase o le fatu*

**O lea le suavai?**  
O le suavai, o le vai lea po'o isi suavai e te inuina ma taumafa e faigofie lava pe a taumafaina.

**Aisea e tatau ai ona faaititia suavai ou te inuina?**  
A fa'aletonu le fatu, o lona uiga ua le mafai ona pamu fa'ata'amilo le toto o le tino pei ona masani ai. E ono ma'ua ai ona tzoifi e lou tino le tele o le suavai, ma atili ai ona faigata ona pamu e le fatu le toto. E taua ona va'ai lelei le malosi o le suavai mai au mea'ai ma vai-nu e fesoasoani ai e va'ai lelei ni fa'aloga e tulua'i mai pei o vae ma alofi vae e fa'afala.

**Afai e te gasegase i le fatu, a ova le suavai ona maua lea i le:**

- Faaititia lau manava
- Fufula vae, tapuvae, alofi vae ma lima
- Masaluga le toto
- Pagatia le fatu ma lima
- Migi uaua ma tigi le ulu

O mea nei e lagona ai lou faalitonu, a'o nisi e tumau fa'alagona lelei. Ma o le mafua'aga lea, e taua ai lou iloa o suavai o lo'o i mea taumafa ma vai inu e te taumafa i aso uma. E mafai ona fa'aikos atu e lau fsma'i po'o le dietician le aofa'i e tatau ona e taumafaina.

**Fa'iala mo le va'aia lelei o suavai e te taumafaina**

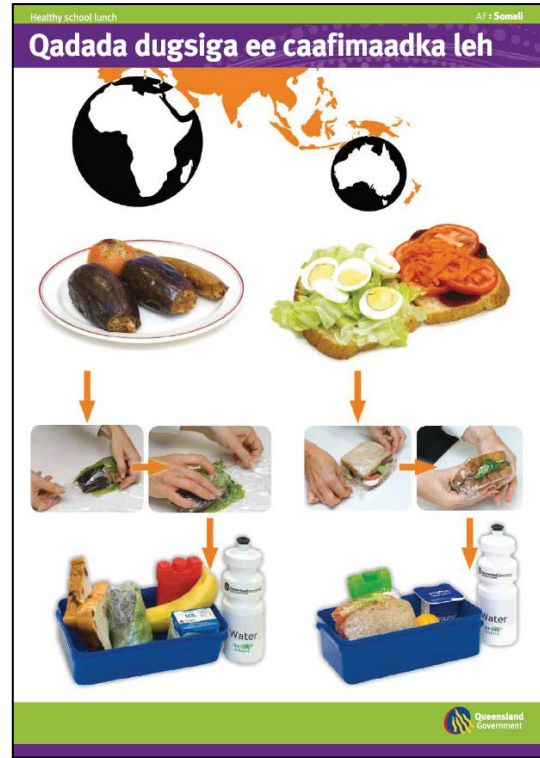
- Inu mai ipu laiti pe 'afa ipu nai lo le ipu lapo'a. O se auala lea e fa'aititia ai le vai.
- E taua pe a leai ni mea 'ai e tele ai masima pe e te toe faamasima mea 'ai i le laulau 'ai, e lagona ai lou fia inu.
- A lagona lou fia inu, fufulu ou nifo pe lamulamu sau loto/pulu loto nai lo'o le inu e fa'afelesi ai ou fofoga.
- Fa'a-vava le aofa'iga au suavai inu o le aso, aua le taumafaina uma i le taimi e tasi.

Aofa'iga tatau o le Suavai i aso ta'itasi (vai ma isi suavai) \_\_\_\_\_

E taua le faia o ni vaega soifua maloloina ma mautinoa ai le tumau ona manuia le komiuniti. Afai e gasegase i le fatu, o lona uiga e tatau ona mata'itu'au suavai taumafa. Tatou faia lea mo o tatou aiga!

## 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 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.

## 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. These include resources developed by government and non-government organisations. For example the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating*, provides culturally appropriate dietary guidance to only one segment of the Australian population, with no cultural tailored resources for other cultural groups.



Characteristics of resources that reduce their effectiveness include:

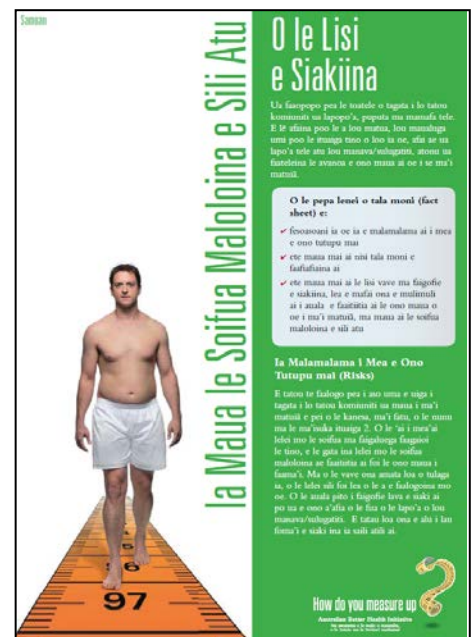
- 'word for word' translations that don't represent the foods, food practices or the cultural or religious beliefs of the client
- use of inappropriate graphics
- high level of readability
- and use of inappropriate language and concepts e.g. Australian colloquialisms or terms with different meaning to people from other cultures that may confuse the consumer.

### 2.1 Inappropriate use of direct translations

While information directly translated from English language documents can be useful in some situations, it can also can 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* resource is a 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.

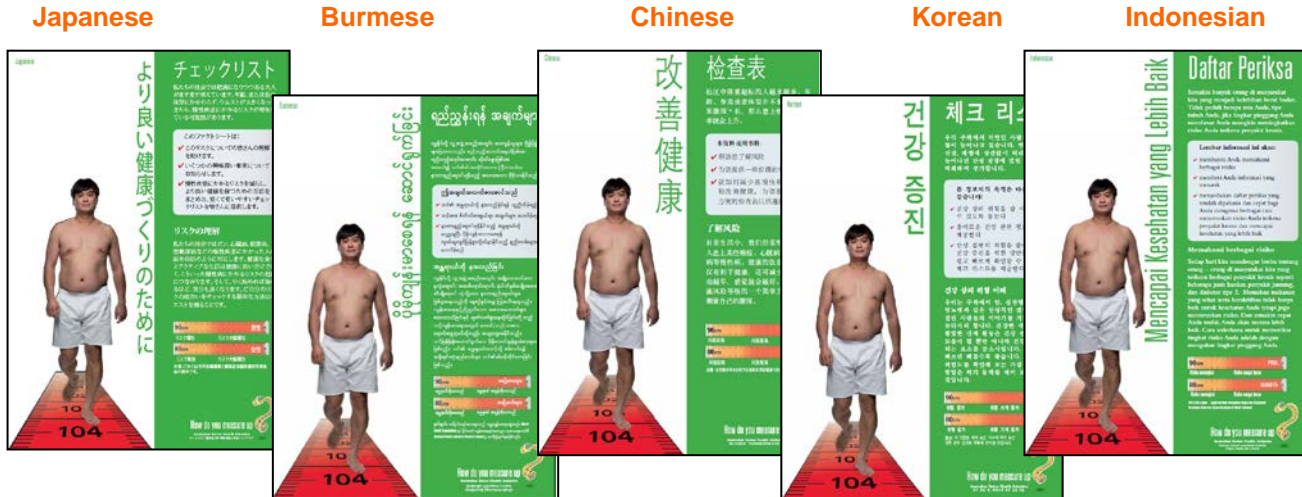
Translation of the food groups used in the Australian Guide to Health Eating can be difficult. For example, the term "vegetable" is somewhat arbitrary, and largely defined through culinary and cultural tradition. In some languages, there is either no collective term for 'vegetables' or for 'fruits' or foods are grouped in different ways. In these settings, translated resources developed for the general population may be confusing and inappropriate.



**Samoan Measure Up resource  
(Australian Better Health Initiative, 2008)**

## 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. An example of poor practice in this area is the use of the same photo for all South East Asian countries for the *Measure Up* translated resources. For some clients, this may be offensive or the client may conclude the practitioner has a lack of knowledge or interest in the **physical and** cultural differences of people of different nationalities.



South East Asian Measure Up resources (Australian Better Health Initiative, 2008)

It is also important to think about the unintended cultural messages that images may have. For example, all the African *Measure Up* resources show the same African man dressed only in shorts. This would be offensive to the vast majority of Somali community members because they follow the Muslim faith. Muslim men are expected to refrain from exposing their bodies, without a reasonable cause for doing so. It is also inappropriate for women from these cultures to view such images of men; however, there were no versions targeting women in this suite of resources, although customised versions for women in English were developed.

## 2.3 High level readability

Another example of an inappropriate resource is the translation of the *Go for 2&5* resource into the Khmer language of Cambodia. There appears to be no consideration of the literacy rates of this cultural group. The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of the English version is grade 9.5. This is much higher than the recommended level of grade six for the Australian general public. Cambodian adult literacy rates dramatically decreased following the Khmer Rouge regime, with only 77.2% of people aged 15 and over being able to read and write compared to 99% for the Australian population (CIA World Factbook, 2016). Literacy rates are even lower for Cambodian women (70.5%) who traditionally undertake cooking for the family (CIA World Factbook, 2016). In addition, the types of fruit and vegetables discussed and graphically represented within this resource were not customised to the target group and may be unfamiliar to them. Without an ability to read and understand this resource, Khmer consumers may perceive the key message is to eat the fruit and vegetables pictured, and not their own traditional fruits and vegetables.

## 2.4 Inappropriate language and concepts

Unfamiliar colloquial expressions can be confusing to consumers, especially when translated directly into another language. For example, use of the phrase 'get into a rut' is unlikely to have the same meaning when a word for word translation is used. Lack of customisation of resources to the dietary habits of consumers of different cultures also reduces their effectiveness. For example the multicultural *Go for 2&5* translated resources recommend culturally unfamiliar ways to prepare and eat fruit and vegetables for some cultural groups. For example, one suggestion is to 'do smoothies or milkshakes, made by adding soft fruit to milk and yoghurt in a blender'. Similarly the play on words used by the *Measure Up* campaign in its slogan (i.e. How do you measure up?) would be lost to most consumers reading these translated materials.

## 2.5 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 nutrition resources are outdated.

## 3. Ready to choose 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 may also be used as tool for communicating your findings to other staff in your team.

Another option is to choose resources that are published on the NEMO (Nutrition Education Materials Online) webpages in the culturally and linguistically diverse resource section at [https://www.health.qld.gov.au/nutrition/nemo\\_cald](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/nutrition/nemo_cald). These resources have undergone review by practitioners who work with culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Please note you will still have to check if resources are appropriate for your local community members.

## 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 an interpreter to explain take home messages and to check the client understands by asking them to restate these messages in their own words. 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. If you work for Metro South Health, the Access and Capacity-building Team can provide advice and assistance on how to go about this. Contact us by email at [access&capacity@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:access&capacity@health.qld.gov.au).

## 5. References

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## Review of culturally appropriate dietetic education materials

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 and keep a record of the resources you have reviewed.

<b>Name and author of resource:</b>	
<b>Criteria for use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 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.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 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)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Resource developed in consultation with community members. Don't be afraid to contact the authors and ask about this.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 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.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Resource is consistent with current dietary and other state and national health and/or evidence based?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Food and other images are culturally appropriate and relevant.</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome of review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Resource recommended for use</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Resource recommended for use with minor modification</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> There are concerns about its use but it is the best available resource. In this case, the resource should clarified and/or modified by a dietitian during the clinical consultation – not provided as a stand-alone resource. <i>Reason/s for concern</i> e.g. currency, readability:</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Not approved. <i>Reasons:</i></li> </ul>
<b>Date of review:</b>	
<b>Cultural/language group</b>	

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An electronic version of this document is available at:

[www.metrosouth.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural-nutrition-resources](http://www.metrosouth.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural-nutrition-resources)

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