VCE Food Studies 2023–2027 – Frequently asked questions

(updated September 2023)

What are the healthy eating recommendations of the Australian Dietary Guidelines?

Practical activities need to be underpinned by the healthy eating recommendations, which specifies that most of the ingredients need to come from the Grains (cereal foods, mostly wholegrain and/or high cereal fibre varieties) and Vegetables and legumes/beans sections. There should be a lesser amount from the Lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds and legumes/beans; Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives, and mostly reduced fat; and Fruit sections. It recommends small amounts of plant-based healthy fats. Discretionary foods are not part of the healthy eating recommendations.

Can we include discretionary food in the practical activities for   
VCE Food Studies?

No. The study design refers to applying the healthy eating recommendations of the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating. These recommendations indicate a variety of foods from the Five Food Groups: Vegetables and legumes/beans; Grain (cereal) foods; Fruits; Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts, seeds, and legumes or beans; and Dairy and alternatives. In addition, plant-based oils are recommended in small amounts.

Discretionary choices are not an essential or necessary part of our dietary patterns. Additional serves of the Five Food Groups or unsaturated spreads and oils or discretionary choices are needed only by individuals who are taller, more active or at the higher end of a particular age band, to meet additional energy requirements. Therefore, the focus of healthy eating in each unit of VCE Food Studies is on the foods from the Five Food Groups and does not include discretionary foods.

The use of discretionary foods in practical activities to discuss how a recipe could be modified does not promote the recommendations outlined in the Australian Dietary Guidelines and is outside the scope of the study design.

Is it appropriate for students to map their ingredients, recipes or food to the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating?

No. The Australian Dietary Guidelines are a framework for healthy eating among the general population. They are not designed for individuals nor activities such as students mapping their food intake to the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating. These types of activities are not the purpose of the guidelines. The Australian Dietary Guidelines are used by a variety of health professionals, policy makers, researchers, etc. to assist the Australian population with eating healthy diets and may not be exactly right for individuals. Individual nutrition advice needs to come from a health professional such as an Accredited Practising Dietitian. There is no purpose for students to map their ingredients, recipes or foods to the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating in VCE Food Studies.

Do students need to know the five main recommendations featured in the Australian Dietary Guidelines?

No. The study design only states that students need to understand the nutritional rationale and evidence-based principles of the Australian Dietary Guidelines and the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating. The study design also states that students need to apply the healthy eating recommendations of the Australian Dietary Guidelines when undertaking practical activities. There is no need for students to know the five main recommendations featured in the Australian Dietary Guidelines. These recommendations could be used as stimulus for students to apply their understanding of content, but it is not stated in the VCE Food Studies Study Design that students need to know these five recommendations.

What is the nutritional rationale of the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating?

In Unit 3 Outcome 1, students need to discuss the nutritional rationale of the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating. The nutritional rationale of the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating refers to grouping foods primarily on the basis of their type and nutrient contribution. It promotes the importance of enjoying healthy choices and provides reasons for choosing foods from a range within and across each of the Five Food Groups on average every day. The nutritional rationale also highlights why some foods that contain unsaturated fats need to be consumed and that foods included as discretionary choices are not needed to meet nutrient requirements and do not fit into the Five Food Groups. Refer to chapter two of the [Eat for Health Educator Guide](https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/the_guidelines/n55b_eat_for_health_educators_guide.pdf) for further information.

Can students collect information for food diaries and personal food intakes?

No. Recording food diaries and personal food intakes is not relevant because it does not align with the key knowledge and key skills in the study design. In addition, research has shown that these types of activities:

* contribute to the production of shame and weight stigma, which is problematic (see Evans et al, 2008; Rich, Holroyd and Evans, 2004; Rich and Evans, 2005; Leahy, 2009, 2014)
* support obsessive eating practices and dietary culture that is associated with eating disorders and including the activity in everyday classrooms serves to normalise these practices (Musolino et al, 2015)
* contribute to young people internalising obsessive practices that are deemed healthy but at the same time deemed problematic in psychiatry contexts (Musolino et al, 2015).

Research articles regarding the association of judgement, shame and obsession with students completing food diaries and personal food intakes are listed below for teacher reference.

* Evans, J., Rich, E., Davies, B. & Allwood, R. (2008). [Education, disordered eating and obesity discourse: fat fabrications](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203926710) (1st ed.). Routledge.
* Evans, J., Rich, E. & Holroyd, R. (2004). [Disordered eating and disordered schooling: what schools do to middle class girls](https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569042000205154). *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *25*(2), (pp. 123–142).
* Leahy, D. (2014). [Assembling a health[y] subject: risky and shameful pedagogies in health education](https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2013.871504). *Critical Public Health*, *24*(2), (pp. 171–181).
* Leahy, D. (2009). [Disgusting pedagogies](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203882061-17). *Biopolitics and the ‘Obesity Epidemic’*, (pp. 180–190). Routledge.
* Musolino, C., Warin, M., Wade, T. & Gilchrist, P., (2015). ‘Healthy anorexia’: The complexity of care in disordered eating. *Social Science & Medicine*, *139*, (pp. 18–25).
* Welch, R. & Leahy, D. (2018). Beyond the pyramid or plate: contemporary approaches to Food and Nutrition education. *ACHPER Active and Healthy Magazine*, *25*(2/3), (pp. 22–31).

How are practical activities used in the teaching and learning program?

Teachers need to ensure that students have opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of content through practical activities in the teaching and learning program. It is important that students are exposed to a variety of practical activities as listed on p. 12 in the cross-study specifications in the study design. There are explicit references in the key skills in each unit for students to use practical activities to demonstrate their understanding of content − the linking of practical activities with explicit key knowledge and key skills will facilitate the delivery of a teaching program that is within the scope of the study design. Teachers can also use practical activities to teach other relevant content identified in the study design.

What is a range of practical activities?

A range of practical activities needs to be used in assessment for each of the outcomes of Units 1, 3 and 4. A ‘range’ refers to three practical activities being undertaken to assess the student’s understanding of the outcome (refer to p. 12 in the cross-study specifications in the study design). One of the assessment tasks for each of the outcomes in Units 1 and 3 and in Unit 4 Outcome 1 states that a range of practical activities, and two records of practical activities, is used. Therefore, three practical activities and two records of practical activities need to be used for these assessment tasks. Practical activities are also used to assess Unit 2, but the study design does not state the need for a range for this unit. A range of practical activities is used for the assessment of Unit 4 Outcome 2, but records of practical activities do not need to be included in this research inquiry report. (Note: there are also practical activities listed in the ‘other assessment task type’ such as ‘demonstration’ for Units 1, 3 and 4.)

What are records of practical activities?

Records of practical activities are information created by the student as evidence of their learning in the classroom. These records need to relate specifically to the key knowledge and key skills being taught, and can come in a variety of formats, such as notes, data, checklists, photos, video, audio, drawing, diagrams, etc. These records can then be used in the assessment program. It is not appropriate to assess records collected in the teaching program; the purpose of the records that are used in assessment is for students to apply information from the records to demonstrate their understanding of the content being assessed. Teachers need to ensure that they authenticate student work (records of practical activities) that is used for assessment. The VCAA has produced a video to support teachers with understanding how to collect records of practical activities in the classroom as part of the teaching and learning program and how to use them for assessment. Refer to the [VCE Food Studies on-demand implementation videos](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/news-and-events/professional-learning/VCE/Pages/VCEFoodStudies.aspx).

Do we need to evaluate the practical or cooking skills of students?

No. According to the key knowledge and key skills, there is no requirement for students to be evaluated on their practical or cooking skills. Rather, students need to undertake practical activities to apply and demonstrate the key knowledge and key skills as stated in the study design. Therefore, practical activities need to be planned according to the key knowledge and key skills specific to an area of study. Further information about practical activities can be found in the cross-study specifications in the study design.

Do students need to complete a production plan?

No. According to the key knowledge and key skills, there is no requirement for students to complete a production plan. This type of activity is generally not suitable for VCE level.

Do we need to teach hygiene and safety in VCE Food Studies?

The importance of a safe food supply to assist with food citizenship, food sovereignty and food security is an important concept in VCE Food Studies. Specifically, in Unit 2 Area of Study 1, students explain reasons for Australia’s governance and regulation of food standards and food safety, and in Unit 4 Area of Study 2 students explore issues about the environment, climate, ecology, ethics and farming practices that include the challenges of food safety.

However, when completing practical activities in VCE Food Studies, students are expected to apply their understanding of hygiene and safety from the Victorian Curriculum F−10. Both Health and Physical Education and Design and Technologies provide opportunities for this content to be taught from Levels F−2 in the Victorian Curriculum F−10. Safety is also identified in the curriculum in other learning areas such as Science. If students are unfamiliar with hygiene and safety considerations related to conducting practical activities, this content should be taught but it cannot be assessed as part of VCE Food Studies because it is not listed in the key knowledge and key skills. Further information about hygiene and safety can be found in the cross-study specifications in the study design. It is the responsibility of the school to ensure that duty of care is exercised in relation to the health and safety of all students undertaking the study.

What are the cross-study specifications?

The cross-study specifications in VCE Food Studies refer to content that underpins the study. They are listed under two headings: ‘key concepts’ and ‘applied practical activities’. It is important that teachers use the cross-study specifications when planning and teaching content, and refer to the key concepts and applied practical activities in each unit where appropriate. The cross-study specifications are examinable.

What content related to fermentable oligosaccharides, disaccharides, monosaccharides and polyols (FODMAPs) needs to be taught?

Content related to the symptoms, causes and management of fermentable oligosaccharides, disaccharides, monosaccharides and polyols (FODMAPs) intolerance needs to be taught in Unit 3 Area of Study 1. FODMAPs are a group of short-chain carbohydrates. FODMAP intolerance is a condition whereby foods high in these short-chain carbohydrates are not completely digested or absorbed in the gut by some people, resulting in symptoms including bloating, abdominal pain and changes in bowel habits. To justify suggestions of suitable dietary substitutes to manage the symptoms of FODMAP intolerance, students need to know examples of each type of these short-chain carbohydrates as well as food sources that are high in these carbohydrates. For example:

* oligosaccharides such as raffinose found in legumes and broccoli
* disaccharides such as lactose found in milk and other dairy products
* monosaccharides such as fructose found in many fruits, including apples and grapes
* polyols such as sorbitol found in apples and blackberries.

Students also need to understand that a low FODMAP diet is a restrictive, but temporary, eating plan used to identify the foods that cause symptoms.

Are the terms ‘gut microbiota’ and ‘gut microbiome’ interchangeable?

No. The gut microbiota refers to the microorganisms in a person’s gastrointestinal system that include bacteria, fungi, viruses and other organisms. The microbiome refers to the collection of genomes from all the microorganisms in the environment. Students need to understand the gut microbiota in VCE Food Studies.

Is starch required for the Maillard reaction?

No. The Maillard reaction (a chemical reaction that causes food to brown and different flavours to be produced) occurs between amino acids (the components of proteins) and reducing sugars (a category of carbohydrate) when food is heated. The presence of water inhibits the reaction. No enzymes are involved. Examples of reducing sugars include all monosaccharides and some disaccharides, such as lactose. Starch is a polysaccharide; like most polysaccharides it is a non-reducing sugar. Therefore, starch is not involved in the Maillard reaction. Essentially the Maillard reaction is amino acid + reducing sugar + heat → browning + flavours.

What is the role of bile in the digestion of fats?

Bile contains bile acids and other substances that are important for the digestion and absorption of fats and fat-soluble vitamins in the small intestine. Digestion involves the breakdown of food and can be physical or chemical. Physical digestion is the breaking down of food particles into smaller particles by physical processes such as chewing and smashing, and is mainly achieved by teeth, stomach contractions and bile. Chemical digestion involves the use of enzymes to break large molecules into smaller (different) molecules so that they can be absorbed into the bloodstream. Physical digestion results in an increase in the surface area of food, which then allows enzymes to complete chemical digestion.

Bile acids emulsify large fat globules from partly digested food into smaller fat globules (physical change), so that lipases can then break down the fats into their component fatty acid and glycerol molecules (chemical change).

Therefore, bile is not involved in the chemical digestion of fats (breakdown of fats into component molecules) but is involved in physical digestion (the breaking down of fat globules into smaller fat globules), which increases the surface area of fat globules and therefore makes the fat molecules available for digestion by lipases.

Where does fat digestion occur?

The stomach cells secrete gastric lipases so there is some hydrolysis of fats in the stomach, but most fats are too large for these lipases to act on. Most lipases are secreted by the pancreas into the duodenum so that, after bile has emulsified the fats into smaller molecules, digestion of fat by these lipases takes place in the small intestine.

Do students need to know the differences between food fads, trends and diets?

No. The study design does not state that students need to know the differences between a food fad, trend and diet, especially because differences between these terms are nuanced and not universally well-defined. The focus of the content relates to the key skill ‘analysing the nutritional efficacy of contemporary food fads, trends and diets’. Therefore, students need to be exposed to a range of food fads, trends and diets to assess the credibility and reliability of claims, and draw evidence-based conclusions, taking into consideration the evidenced-based recommendations of the Australian Dietary Guidelines and the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating.

Can global food security issues outside of Australia be studied?

No. The focus of food security in VCE Food Studies is on Australian issues within a global context. (refer to p. 10 of the study design). Students need to understand that Australia (and all other countries) cannot claim to be fully self-sufficient in regard to food security, and so relies on international trade for key components of diets and access to inputs, machinery and services that allow the safe and affordable production of food for its population. Students need to understand that Australia is part of global food systems and focus on examining Australia’s food systems as a part of these global food systems.

What are political influences on the food systems for Unit 3 Area of Study 2?

Political influences include laws, policies and regulations, as well as activism by consumers, to influence food systems. Consumer activism can be done by individuals themselves or on behalf of individuals. The political influences on the food systems studied in Unit 3 Area of Study 2 need to refer to those stated in the VCE Food Studies study design. Therefore, political influences on the food systems need to refer to those:

* in the manufacturing industry, such as regulations through Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), which is part of the Australian Government Department of Health portfolio
* in the advertising industry, such as regulations through the Children’s Television Standards on free-to-air television regarding food advertising to children
* involved in consumer activism, such as Parents’ Voice, an online movement of parents who aim to improve food environments of Australian children.

The political influences need to be analysed and the potential impact on food choices, including food sovereignty, need to be discussed.

What food allergies need to be studied?

VCE Food Studies states that the allergies listed by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) need to be studied in Unit 3 Outcome 1. These allergies are listed on the [FSANZ website](https://www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumer/foodallergies/Pages/default.aspx): peanuts, tree nuts, milk, eggs, sesame seeds, fish and shellfish, soy, lupin and wheat.

Is coeliac disease the same as a wheat allergy?

No. Coeliac disease is different to a wheat allergy. Coeliac disease is a lifelong, medical condition in which the lining of the small intestine is damaged as a result of exposure to a protein called gluten The only treatment for coeliac disease is strict avoidance of all cereals containing gluten, such as wheat, barley, oats and rye. Coeliac disease is not a food allergy nor a food intolerance and is out of scope of the study design.

Wheat contains a number of different proteins and individuals who have a wheat allergy may have a reaction to one, or a combination, of these proteins. Gluten is one type of protein found in wheat. Individuals with a wheat allergy may tolerate other grains that contain gluten such as rye and oats. It is common for children to grow out of a wheat allergy. In Unit 3 Outcome 1, students need to demonstrate an understanding of the symptoms, causes and management of a wheat allergy and justify the substitution of ingredients in its management.

Is gluten intolerance the same as coeliac disease?

No. Gluten intolerance is different to coeliac disease. Gluten intolerance is a food intolerance that can cause problems with the digestive system as a result of eating gluten but does not cause permanent damage to the body. In Unit 3 Outcome 1, students need to demonstrate an understanding of the symptoms, causes and management of gluten intolerance and justify the substitution of ingredients in its management. In contrast, coeliac disease is an autoimmune disease that causes damage to the wall of the small intestine as a result of eating gluten; it is a disease that is a serious medical condition. Coeliac disease is not a food allergy nor a food intolerance and is out of scope of the study design.

Do you assess practical activities?

Yes. The outcome statements and key skills in Units 1−4 explicitly mention practical activities. Assessment tasks require students to reflect on these practical activities, and other assessment task types, such as demonstrations, are related to practical activities. Therefore, teachers should align their teaching programs with the study design by incorporating relevant practical activities. When designing assessment programs, they must refer to the key knowledge and key skills and ensure that practical activities directly address the specified content in the study design. It is important to note that content outside the scope of the study design should not be assessed through practical activities.