



Healthy Options WA

MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES EASIER

Frequently asked questions

“Why is there a Policy?”

We all need more fresh, nutritious food. Healthy food makes us feel good and is important for our health. Healthcare settings such as hospitals are one of the most important places for providing healthy retail food and drink options. The food and drink sold in healthcare settings should be consistent with the health messages provided by health professionals, healthcare authorities, and the Australian Dietary Guidelines (2013). Most states and territories in Australia have healthy food and drink policies in their healthcare settings, like this Policy.

The MP 0142/20 Healthy Options WA Food and Nutrition Policy (the Policy) aims to maintain and improve the health of staff and the broader community. The Policy is integral to ensuring that staff and visitors to WA health system entities are at all times offered plenty of healthy food and drink options.

“When did the Policy come about?”

The MP 0142/20 Healthy Options WA Food and Nutrition Policy was first introduced in 2008 and has been a mandatory policy ever since.

“Is this Policy relevant to me?”

This MP 0142/20 Healthy Options WA Food and Nutrition Policy (the Policy) is applicable to all WA health system entities as defined in the Policy.

The Policy **is relevant to you if:**

- you are a staff member at a WA health system entity and are responsible for ordering business catering or organising fundraising
- you manage or work in a retail outlet that sells food or drink of any kind on the premises of a WA health entity e.g. café, kiosk, newsagent, gift shop, pharmacy, florist, convenience store
- you stock or manage a vending machine on the premises of any WA health entity.

“Why doesn’t the Policy apply to hospital inpatient meals?”

Inpatient meals are governed by different guidelines and are tailored to individual dietary needs of the patient, which are sometimes very specialised. The [MP 0142/20 Healthy Options WA Food and Nutrition Policy](#) applies to the retail food and drink that is sold to the public on WA health system entity sites (e.g. in cafes and vending machines) and to food and drink used for staff business catering and fundraising.

“How was the traffic light system developed for the Policy?”

The traffic light system and associated nutrient criteria are based on the [Australian Dietary Guidelines \(2013\)](#), particularly Guidelines 2 and 3, which recommend:

Guideline 2: Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from these five food groups every day:

- Plenty of vegetables of different types and colours, and legumes/beans
- Fruit
- Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain and/or high cereal fibre varieties
- Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts, seeds, and legumes/beans
- Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or their alternatives, mostly reduced fat
- Drink plenty of water.

Guideline 3: Limit intake of foods containing saturated fat, added salt, added sugars and alcohol

- a. Limit intake of foods high in saturated fat such as many biscuits, cakes, pastries, pies, processed meats, commercial burgers, pizza, fried foods, potato chips, crisps and other savoury snacks
 - Replace high fat foods which contain predominately saturated fats such as butter, cream, cooking margarine, coconut and palm oil with foods which contain predominately polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats such as oils, spreads, nut butters/pastes and avocado
- b. Limit intake of foods and drinks containing added salt
 - Read labels to choose lower sodium options among similar foods
 - Do not add salt to foods in cooking or at the table
- c. Limit intake of foods and drinks containing added sugars such as confectionery, sugar-sweetened soft drinks and cordials, fruit drinks, vitamin waters, energy and sports drinks
- d. If you choose to drink alcohol, limit intake. For women who are pregnant, planning a pregnancy or breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is the safest option.

While the traffic light criteria are based on the [Australian Dietary Guidelines \(2013\)](#) to encourage healthier choices, some concessions are made to make implementation of the [MP 0142/20 Healthy Options WA Food and Nutrition Policy](#) more straightforward. The traffic light criteria have been developed by the Department of Health in consultation with health service providers, other jurisdictions and stakeholders.

“How is the percentage of Green, Amber and Red products on offer and display calculated?”

There are Microsoft Excel self-assessment tools provided for [assessing retail outlets](#) and [assessing vending machines](#). The tools provide a template for assessors to list all food and drink items in a retail outlet or vending machine, as well as the number of times they are on offer and display. The tools have inbuilt functions that will automatically determine the percentages of Green, Amber and Red items (this is the recommended method – to reduce manual calculation error).

To count the percentage manually, the [manual assessment template](#) can be used.

For instructions on how to count items, refer to the [Guide to counting food and drinks on offer and display](#).

“Are there any drinks that are classified as Green?”

Yes. As per the [Healthy Options WA: Making Healthy Choices Easier: How to Classify Food and Drinks Guide](#), drinks classified as Green include:

- water – flavoured and unflavoured (including carbonated water) with no added sugar or intense sweetener
- hot tea and coffee products with no added sugar or intense sweetener (with or without milk)
- hot-flavoured milk drinks made on-site with all Green ingredients
- dairy-based milk that is unflavoured

- dairy-free milks that are unflavoured with calcium as an added ingredient
- dairy-based flavoured milk in serve sizes of 300mL or less
- dairy-free flavoured milks with calcium as an added ingredient in serve sizes of 300mL or less
- vegetable juice that is 96-100% vegetables with no added sugar or intense sweetener.

“Why is fruit juice classified as Amber and not Green?”

The [Australian Dietary Guidelines \(2013\)](#) recommend fruit juice with no added sugar is consumed **only occasionally and in small amounts** i.e. a serve size of 125mL or half a cup.

- When fruit is eaten in its whole form, it provides the body with natural sugar, vitamins, minerals, and fibre.
- Fruit juice is a concentrated form of fruit. Fruit juice provides natural sugar at a higher concentration than the whole fruit form but without the benefit of fruit fibre.
- Fruit juice sold in retail settings and vending machines is sold in serve sizes greater than the recommended amount and is therefore easy to overconsume.
- Over consumption of fruit juice can lead to dental erosion and dental decay.

For these reasons, fruit juice is classified Amber.

For more information about the Australian Dietary Guidelines (2013), visit the [Eat for Health website](#).

“Why are intensely (or artificially) sweetened drinks restricted to no more than 25 percent of all drinks?”

Intensely sweetened drinks usually have a high acid content, which is a known cause of dental erosion, which can lead to dental disease¹. For this reason, it is recommended that these drinks are limited in the diet and they not be consumed by children.

“Does the classification of products take additives and preservatives into account?”

No. The [MP 0142/20 Healthy Options WA Food and Nutrition Policy](#) supports the Australian Dietary Guidelines (2013). While these guidelines do not take additives and preservatives into account, the recommendation is to minimise processed food and consume wholefoods where possible, thereby reducing the overall consumption of additives and preservatives. For more information visit the [Eat for Health website](#).

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) are the government body that set limits for all additives and preservatives in food made in or imported to Australia. For more information visit the [FSANZ website](#).

¹ Oral Health Cooperative Research Centre (2015). Briefing paper (for the Australian Government Department of Industry and Science): The potential of sugar-free beverages, sugar-free confectionery and sports drinks to cause dental erosion. Available [here](#).

“Can a mixed meal (e.g. a sandwich/wrap/roll) be classified as Green if it contains any Amber ingredients?”

Yes, the [Healthy Options WA: Making Healthy Choices Easier: How to Classify Food and Drinks Guide](#) explains how a mixed meal could be Green if it contains Amber ingredients, if those Amber ingredients have an allocated allowance.

Example allowances of Amber or Red ingredients include mayonnaise, butter or margarine spread thinly in a sandwich.

For further information refer to section 1 (cooking and allowances) and section 3 (mixed meals and the ingredients method) of the Guide.

“Where can I find healthy recipes?”

You can find healthy recipe ideas on the following websites:

- [Freshsnap](#)
- [LiveLighter®](#)
- [Eat for Health](#)

Handy hint

Visit [Freshsnap](#) for some healthy recipe ideas

“Why do some Amber and Red ingredients have allowances and others not?”

The traffic light system that underpins the [MP 0142/20 Healthy Options WA Food and Nutrition Policy](#) (the Policy) classifies foods and drinks into three categories (Green, Amber, and Red) which represent the healthiest to least healthy, respectively. The Policy is designed to be used in retail outlet settings, including food service where meals are made from fresh ingredients on-site. Some Amber and Red ingredients have been allocated an allowance as they are used commonly and in small amounts. This means that they may be added in small amounts to a meal that contains Green ingredients and the meal will still be classified as Green.

For more information see section 1 (cooking and allowances) of the [Healthy Options WA: Making Healthy Choices Easier: How to Classify Food and Drinks Guide](#).

“Why are kombucha drinks classified as Red?”

Analysis of kombucha drinks shows that quality, processing and production methods are not standardised. Emerging evidence has raised concerns around residual alcohol in kombucha drinks as a by-product of the fermentation process used to make them.

This poses a potential risk if undeclared and may be harmful to children, pregnant and lactating women, people on certain medications, those on restricted driving licences and workers who must be alcohol free. There is currently insufficient evidence to support the health claims being made about kombucha drinks.

“Why are ham and other processed meats classified as Red?”

Processed meat is meat that has been transformed through food processing methods such as: salting, curing, fermentation, smoking or adding preservatives to preserve and add flavour to the meat. Examples of processed meat include: ham, salami, bacon, pastrami and some sausages.

The World Cancer Research Fund and the World Health Organization² recommend limiting the consumption of processed meat as much as possible. Processed meat is classified as a Group 1 carcinogen and there is strong evidence that eating processed meat causes colorectal cancer. Processed meat is also energy dense and high in salt.

“Where can I find resources to assist me?”

The Healthy Options WA [website](#) has many useful resources, tools and links to further information. If you have any further questions, email the Healthy Options WA team at healthyoptions@health.wa.gov.au.

² [World Health Organization](#)