

Oral Eating & Drinking Plans

For Education, Childcare & Community Support Services

Children that require physical assistance and supervision at mealtimes due to specific swallowing difficulties will require the information to be documented in a care plan. This care plan helps staff within educational, childcare or community support settings manage the mealtime, and provide the child with safe and consistent support at mealtimes.

Care plan for oral eating and drinking

The care plan will include information about:

- How much support is needed (eg degree of supervision/assistance)
- The type of support needed (eg preparation, equipment, environmental changes, positioning, feeding strategies and after mealtime care)
- Time required for mealtimes
- Communication (eg child and staff)
- Preparation and presentation of food and drink (texture/consistency, size of bites or sips, rate and order of intake, specific strategies for spoon and finger food and drinking)
- Learning targets (eg increasing independence, managing behaviour, increasing intake)
- Information to enable staff members to maximise the effectiveness of their support to the student
- Training needs of staff to undertake the plan effectively (eg first aid training, practical training with the speech pathologist)
- Care plan review date and expiry date.

The care plan must be written by a speech pathologist or a qualified health professional with specialist skills in eating, drinking and swallowing management, and signed and released by the parent, guardian or adult student. This care plan will form the basis of an individual child or student health support plan. Staff members in the educational setting should follow the recommendations in the care plan.



Training for workers

Education, childcare and community settings are responsible for ensuring their staff have access to up to date individual personal care plans and access to adequate and appropriate training and qualifications to undertake specific health and personal care plans.

In South Australia Health Support, First Aid and Personal Care Support Training is available through the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) Child Health and Education Services (CHESS). Further information is available at their website.

Workers should ensure they have received the recommended training in order to carry out a care plan. Minimum training recommendations include participation and completion of the Health Support Planning Module 3 Oral Eating and Drinking Support, a generic mealtime assistance training program and basic first aid including CPR (cardio pulmonary resuscitation), EAR (expired air resuscitation) and choking management.

Some care plans will require additional training or information provision with the health professional writing the care plan. Workers should ensure they have received this training and or information prior to undertaking the care plan. The health professional should be available to provide training, additional information, clarification or demonstration as requested.

Reviewing the care plan

Care plans should be reviewed routinely (usually every 12 – 18 months) or more frequently for students whose skills may be developing or deteriorating. The oral eating and drinking care plan should have a suggested review date and expiry date on the front page. It is the responsibility of parents/guardians to initiate this review prior to the plan expiring. This will enable staff in educational settings to continue to provide support to your child at mealtimes otherwise staff can refuse to provide support at mealtimes.

Care plans can be reviewed at any time as requested by the parent/guardian and/or staff in educational settings. A review of the plan should be requested if you observe:

- Changes in your child's ability to chew, swallow or manage food/drinks
- Frequent and repeated coughing, spluttering, gagging, near-choking, or distress in your child during or soon after mealtimes
- Weight loss
- Frequent and repeated chest infections and/or hospitalisations.



Nature of support

Support for oral eating and drinking in education, childcare and community support services can be considered in three categories:

Category 1:

- **Supervision and guidance where there is no physical impediment to safe eating and drinking**

These children and students can manage their own eating and drinking but may need to be supervised to ensure they eat safely (eg able to chew hard foods) or learning to eat socially. Education, childcare and respite workers *routinely* provide assistance of this nature. These students do not require an eating and drinking care plan.

Category 2:

- **Supervision and assistance where children and students have difficulty with oral eating and drinking**

Some children and students have individual safety and learning requirements for oral eating and drinking and should have an oral eating and drinking care plan documented by a speech pathologist or other relevant health professional with specialist skills in eating, drinking and swallowing management. This care plan will be used to develop an education, childcare and or community support services health support plan.

Category 3:

- **Supervision and assistance with nasal or gastric tube feeding and/or suctioning during intake**

Some children and students take food or fluid via a tube through their nose or directly into their stomach. Others have an identified risk of aspiration (inhaling food or fluid into the lung) and require suctioning. Planning support for tube feeding and suctioning will involve a registered nurse.

