

## 4.0 Eating Attitudes, Practices and Preferences

This section of the report explores attitudes and practices as they relate to main meals, special occasions, and five specific areas of interest to HSC: snacks, takeaways, vegetables, fruit, fizzy drinks, and alcohol. It also gives an overview of differences between weekday and weekend eating practices, and identifies participants' favourite foods and drinks, less popular foods and drinks, and foods and drinks that were limited and encouraged in families/whānau in this study.

Differences between weekday and weekend eating, as well as differences between the eating practices of adults and children, are also noted throughout this section, as are cultural differences.

### 4.1 Attitudes and Practices – Meals

#### 4.1.1 Breakfast

##### Highlights

- Breakfast was emphasised for children, but was not always eaten by adults.
- Weekday breakfasts were a rushed affair, with many parents eating separately (e.g. later or somewhere else, such as at work) from their children.
- Weekend breakfasts represented a chance for family/whānau time and to break-out of the weekday routine. They were a more relaxed affair, but may have also been less healthy in terms of the food consumed.

##### Attitudes to Breakfast

###### *Weekday Breakfast*

- Weekday breakfasts tended to be fuel-focused, rather than being about pleasure or spending time with family/whānau members. Most parents believed it was important for their children to eat breakfast, but the pressure of weekday routines generally dictated that it was a quick meal, and parents did not necessarily actively supervise what their children ate.

- It was unusual for children not to eat breakfast. However, one mother of a six-year-old child reported that, although she preferred her son to eat breakfast, she did not make him do so.

*“He’s not an early riser. There are some days when he doesn’t want it [breakfast] – he’ll say he doesn’t want it. So we’ll have breakfast and he won’t, and we notice his behaviour – there’s a difference between having breakfast and not having it.”*

#### **Māori Female – Wairarapa**

- Family/whānau routines influenced what kind of meal breakfast was. The time by which parents needed to be out of the house, and the number of children to organise, both influenced how and where breakfast was eaten.
- Parents themselves often did not eat breakfast with their children during the week, with some eating it at work, others eating it once the children were at school, and some not eating it at all.

*“I always try and make them have breakfast even though I don’t, which is quite bad because usually you set the example.”*

#### **Pakeha Female – Auckland**

#### ***Weekend Breakfast***

- Weekend breakfasts tended to be a more leisurely affair. They were more likely to be seen as a time for family/whānau togetherness. It was more likely that at least some family/whānau members would eat together, sitting down to do so. People typically looked forward to weekend breakfasts, rather than regarding them as a staging post to getting on with the day.
- As a general rule, people typically ate breakfast later at the weekend, after the parents had had a lie-in (the exception to this was in households with toddlers and babies). They also ate a wider range of foods, with cooked food such as eggs often on the menu.
- The distinction between weekday and weekend breakfasts was less significant when there was a full-time homemaker. However, most families/whānau worked to morning deadlines during the week, and were more able to take their time at the weekend.

## Breakfast Practices

### *Weekday Breakfast*

- Weekday breakfasts tended to consist of continental breakfast type foods – cereals and toast – and sometimes heated up leftovers. Children typically drank water, juice, Raro, milk or hot Milo (more usual in winter). In families/whānau where fizzy drink was unrestricted, children may have consumed this at breakfast-time.
- Older children (i.e. eight years and older) tended to get their own breakfast, choosing from a set range of breakfast foods (e.g. cereals, toast and spreads). Older children may have also got their younger siblings' breakfast for them.
- A parent (usually the mother) or other caregiver usually got breakfast for younger children.
- Children often had a say in which cereals were purchased, with parents (usually the mother) having the final say. Parents tended to discriminate between healthier cereals and less healthy cereals on the basis of sugar content, but price was often as influential as health concerns.

*“... if I would buy him Milo cereal he would probably eat breakfast every day, but I read the packet of that Milo cereal and there's no cereal in that cereal – there's no cereal in it.”*

### **Pakeha Female – Auckland**

- Breakfast may be an on-the-run meal – eaten at the kitchen bench, in the car, or even walking to school. Some children were given money to buy breakfast on their way to school.
- Weekday breakfasts may have been eaten individually, even in large families/whānau – e.g. one child ate his/her cereal while another child was in the shower, and a third child was getting dressed. Some children ate breakfast in front of television.
- Breakfast for adults could mean anything from a cup of coffee with a cigarette, to a pie, a bowl of cereal or piece of toast, or some fruit.
- Working parents may have eaten breakfast at their place of work rather than at home.
- Full-time homemakers (usually mothers) often did not eat their own breakfast until after completing the school and pre-school runs. Then it might just have been a cup of tea or coffee and a piece of toast or leftovers.

### **Weekend Breakfast**

- Weekend breakfasts were more likely to be eaten as a family, or in stages, e.g. with children eating together in front of television and parents eating together later when they got up. Children may have snacked or eaten cereal prior to eating more breakfast later with their parents.
- Weekend breakfasts included a wider range of foods, including cooked foods such as pancakes and eggs. They were also likely to be more high-energy (due to both the nature and quantities of the food eaten).

*“In the weekends we are a bit naughty – my children have French toast or sometimes baked beans for breakfast. We make it together and then we all have it together.”*

#### **Māori Female – Gisborne**

- Weekend breakfasts were more likely to happen around the table (if there was one). Some families/whānau ate together in front of television.
- Saturday breakfast may have been a prelude to children’s sports fixtures.

*“On Saturday mornings all the kids converge on our house because they play soccer and my brother’s the coach. We make sure that they have Weetbix or porridge before soccer and we take mandarins for their half-time.”*

#### **Māori Female – Gisborne**

- Families/whānau may go out for breakfast at the weekend, eating breakfast at McDonalds, in a café, or at the local bakery or mall food-court. In this context, breakfast may have been replaced by brunch, and was often seen as a treat.

*“If he’s behaved himself we have McDonalds for breakfast on a Saturday.”*

#### **Pakeha Female – Auckland**

### **Breakfast Context and Dynamics**

#### **Weekday Breakfast**

- The household size and routine influenced weekday breakfasts. Larger families/whānau with working parents tended to have an earlier and more hectic start to the day, than did families/whānau where there was a full-time homemaker or only one or two children to get out the door to school or pre-school.

- Many larger families/whānau described breakfast as a rushed meal, with family/whānau members eating at different times (and often in different places).
- There may have been little parental supervision of older children (i.e. eight years and over), although parents reported that children tended to eat from an established range of acceptable breakfast foods, with little variation from day-to-day. This meant there was little portion control in some families/whānau. There was more supervision of smaller children.
- In this study, it was not usual for fathers to have responsibility for organising weekday breakfast or ensuring children ate it. Many working fathers were gone from the house before their children ate breakfast, and some ate their own breakfast at work.
- Some working parents chose to eat breakfast at work (food they had brought from home or bought on the way to work) because this was more relaxing than having a rushed breakfast at home.

### **Weekend Breakfast**

- As a rule, weekend breakfasts were more relaxed and less time constrained. They often represented an opportunity for family/whānau togetherness – for spending time with partners, and with children.
- In keeping with the more relaxed weekend schedule for many families/whānau, weekend breakfasts tended to be more elaborate – with more choice and variety of food on offer.
- Dads were often more involved with weekend breakfasts, and in some households dad was often the cook for this meal.

*“That’s when I cook – in the weekends. The kind of breakfast we have is a mixed grill all round.”*

### **Māori Male – Gisborne**

- Breakfast-time could still be constrained for families/whānau that played weekend sport, as well as those with a parent who worked weekends. In the latter case, a breakfast outing to somewhere like McDonalds may have been used to compensate for a parent having to work weekends.

(For breakfast decision-making and rules – see Sections 6.2.1 and 6.3.1 respectively, later in this report).

## 4.1.2 Lunch

### Highlights

- Sandwiches were no longer core to all children's lunchboxes. However, packaged lunchbox snacks such as muesli bars and chippies featured in many.
- Children's lunchboxes represented a major opportunity for fruit to be eaten – most lunchboxes contained at least one piece, most days.
- Schools appeared to be leading the charge in discouraging sugary drinks, and promoting water as the best option for children.
- Parents had less control over what older children were buying for lunch – many left it to trust that their children were making healthy choices (or rationalised that this one meal was not so important in the scheme of things).

### Attitudes to Lunch

#### *Weekday Lunch*

- Weekday lunch was regarded as an important source of energy for children during the school day. A number of parents talked about their children's lunchboxes in terms of balance – making sure that their lunchbox contained fruit was seen as a way of balancing the “snacky things”. Lunch was generally considered a less important meal nutritionally than dinner. Some families also regarded it as less nutritionally important than breakfast. From this perspective, lunch was more about energy than nutrition.
- Caregivers and homemakers often talked about lunch ‘on the run’. For them, lunch was something to be fitted in between picking children up from kindergarten, and doing the housework or gardening and other daily tasks.
- For parents in paid work, lunch was often viewed as a chance to take a break from work, and to socialise with friends and colleagues. In this context, lunch was a pleasurable and relaxing meal. Other working parents used their lunch-break as an opportunity to fit in a gym session.

- Packaged snacks had become a core component of many children's lunchboxes. They were regarded as convenient and time saving for parents assembling lunches, and had a treat factor for children, meaning that they were likely to be eaten.

*"It's probably more to do with me being too lazy to sort out four lunches in the morning than anything else. It's just easy to take a packet of that and we'll pop that in there, and I'll make the sandwiches before they go to bed."*

#### **Pakeha Female – Wairarapa**

- For some children buying lunches was a semi-regular treat (e.g. once a term, once a month or once a week), for others buying lunch was the norm. Where lunch buying was limited, this was driven by both cost and health considerations; many people saw buying lunch as more expensive and less healthy than taking a packed lunch.
- Some parents allowed their (usually older) children to buy their lunch frequently – or every day – because the children had stopped eating their packed lunches. For some teenagers, taking a lunchbox or packed lunch from home was not cool.

*"When they were at primary school, they didn't like any lunch, prepared lunch. But when they go to high school, I don't know if they [are] ashamed of eating their homemade lunch at school while other children are buying their lunch from the canteen. So I find that they just come home and just eat their lunch [after school]."*

#### **Samoan Female – Christchurch**

- In one such family, the mother gave her child lunch money because she considered uneaten packed lunches a waste of money (and good food) and preferred to know that her child was eating something at lunchtime.

#### **Weekend Lunches**

- Weekend lunches differed markedly from weekday lunches. Saturday lunches were more unstructured and might have involved going out for lunch or buying takeaways or special bread as part of the day's activities (e.g. after sports).
- Sunday lunches often represented a chance for family/whānau to come together. As such, there might have been a cooked meal (e.g. a roast) and generally the meal was more elaborate.

## Lunch Practices

### **Weekdays – Children**

- Sandwiches were no longer the biggest core component of a school lunch, as they were in many parents' day. While some children's lunchboxes did contain sandwiches, many did not.
- Common lunchbox components were: sandwiches (some), packaged snacks, e.g. chippies, muesli bars, 'strings' (a sweet, gelatinous-based snack) (most); yoghurt (some), and fruit (most). Water was a common drink.
- In some lunchboxes, packaged snacks were a major part of the content (reportedly as many as six items), with sweet snacks such as muesli bars included as well as other sweet items such as biscuits or muffins.
- Children often bought lunch at school or from the dairy or bakery on the way to school. From the intermediate years on, parents typically had less control over what their children were buying and where from. Some teenagers worked part-time and used their own money to buy lunch food such as hot chips.
- Some children pooled their lunch money to buy greater quantities of (usually junk) foods such as hot chips, chippies or fizzy drink.
- Some rural Māori whānau reported that their children were instructed to share the content of their lunchboxes with whānau members such as cousins.

### **Weekdays – Adults**

- Adults often ate leftovers at home or as part of a packed lunch.
- For mothers at home during the day (or parents working from home) lunch was often a quick sandwich or snack with coffee or tea, e.g. a banana wrapped in bread.
- Some fathers took a packed lunch from home – it may be packed by them or their partner at the same time she did the children's lunches. Mothers packing lunch for fathers could be motivated by a desire to save money, or to ensure he ate properly and/or to manage his weight.

*"I make lunches for everyone before I go to bed, husband included ... well, otherwise he spends all his money at the dairy when he comes home. So I make him lunch and it means he eats properly as well."*

**Pakeha Female – Wairarapa**

- Some working parents bought lunch (and breakfast) from a work canteen.
- Other working parents bought lunch from places such as a café, a bakery, or from a takeaway outlet. Examples of lunches in the latter category included KFC, pies, Thai food, hot chips and Subway.

### ***Weekend – Adults and Children***

- Saturday lunches varied widely. If eaten at home they might have consisted of leftovers, or a mix of whatever was in the fridge and cupboards (e.g. bread and ham, salad, nachos, baked beans, or eggs).
- In families/whānau with mainly older children (e.g. about ten years plus), individuals may have helped themselves to what they felt like, or grazed on the contents of the fridge.
- In families/whānau with younger children, one parent would make or assemble lunch. This may or may not have been eaten together, depending on family/whānau members' commitments, such as sports fixtures.

### **Lunch Context and Dynamics**

#### ***Weekday***

- Making the children's lunches was a potentially time consuming chore in larger families/whānau. Mothers typically controlled what went into children's lunchboxes, directly with younger children, and indirectly with older children (i.e. by controlling what was bought at the supermarket).
- There was an element for some parents of giving the children what they knew they would eat (i.e. basing lunches around foods they knew were popular with the children). From this point of view, food that was uneaten often came home spoiled and was therefore wasted. This was an issue from a financial point of view (particularly for less well-off families/whānau), but also from a nutritional point of view – if children were not getting fuel at midday they could not perform as well in the afternoon at school. In addition, some people simply did not like the idea of wasting food. (This was one of the reasons why packaged lunchbox snacks were popular with parents – unopened snacks that were brought home in lunchboxes could be 'recycled').

- There was an aspirational element to packaged lunchbox snacks. Parents reported that their children asked for what ‘other children’ had, and parents did not want them to miss out or feel that their lunches were somehow not as good (packaged lunchbox snacks reportedly also had considerable barter value).

*“If I sent my kids to school with just a sandwich or say two sandwiches, maybe a yoghurt and a whole lot of fruit, and no chips, no biscuits, no crackers – I’d feel so guilty because nobody else does. They come home and they go, ‘Mum, why can’t we have those ‘strings?’’ ... the cost of them for me to do the whole family is just beyond a joke.”*

#### **Pakeha Female – Christchurch**

- Allowing children to buy lunch was time saving for parents and won them brownie points with their children. Both cost and health factors influenced some parents to restrict bought lunches, e.g. to a monthly treat.
- While some working parents took a cut lunch or leftovers from home, many lacked the time or motivation to do so, and preferred to buy something at or near their workplace. Some saw lunchtime as an opportunity to socialise with friends and colleagues off-site, and would buy their lunch in this context.

#### **Weekend**

- Breakfast and lunch may have been replaced by brunch.
- Weekend lunches occurred in the context of family/whānau time and represented a break from weekday routines (except in households where parents worked at the weekend). Food may have reflected this by including more treat items such as fizzy drink, sweet foods, or takeaways.
- In households with a homemaker and very small children, weekend lunches may have been very similar to what was on offer at home during the week. The household routine varied less between weekdays and weekends, with parents trying to maintain structure for little children (e.g. in terms of meal times, what was eaten, and nap times).
- Sunday lunches often represented a chance for family/whānau to come together. As such, there may have been a cooked meal (e.g. a roast) and generally the meal was more elaborate, and may have included a pudding. In this context, lunch became the main and most substantial meal of the day (in contrast to all other days, where the evening meal was regarded as the main meal).

- Sunday lunch may have simply been a repeat (with variation) of Saturday lunch, i.e. a casual meal consisting of ‘bits and pieces’ from the fridge and cupboards, or takeaways.

(For lunch decision-making and rules – see Sections 6.2.2 and 6.3.2 respectively, later in this report).

## **Cultural Differences**

### ***Pakeha***

Some Pakeha families in this study often had a Sunday roast with all the trimmings (e.g. various roast vegetables and gravy) and a pudding. This was often associated with having the in-laws or other guests over for lunch.

### ***Māori***

The concept of manakitanga or sharing was a key practice among Māori whānau in this study. This was evident in attitudes toward sharing food with other members of the whānau. For Māori whānau, practicing manakitanga started in childhood. For example, one mother in this study told her children that if they could not finish their lunch at school they should share it with their cousins.

Māori families/whānau often used Sunday lunch as an opportunity for the wider whānau to come together. For churchgoers, this was often an after-church ritual. However, the Sunday lunch also applied in non-church going Māori whānau.

*“Our weekends are pretty much about our whole whānau. So because our house is the family home, they all come over with all the kids, which is a good thing.”*

### **Māori Female – Gisborne**

It was typical for whānau to bring food with them to share with the hosts. As with Pakeha, a typical Sunday lunch might have included a roast with all the trimmings and a pudding, or a barbeque in the warmer months.

### ***Pacific Peoples***

Pacific families/whānau also regarded Sunday lunch as a wider family occasion, to be shared with grandparents, adult siblings and their children. Sunday lunches often included traditional Pacific foods such as taro, green banana, and curry and boil-up. Traditionally, Sunday lunch involved a lot of meat and carbohydrate-based dishes, but not necessarily many vegetables. One Tongan family also drank Kava as part of this Sunday ritual.

Younger New Zealand-born or educated Pacific participants often tried to inject more western dishes and healthier foods such as salads into these occasions, because they (and their children) preferred these foods and they were typically more health conscious than their parents.

For some 'white collar' Pacific families, packaged lunchbox snacks symbolised the things they were able to give their children that they had not had as a child. In one case, the parents noted that they wanted their children to have what their Pakeha peers had.

*"I don't want my kids to go without, and so when they go to school I want them to have what the other kids are having, and I want them to have – I'm not saying this is a racial remark. I want them to have what Pakeha kids have. I know that my kids have friends that don't have that sort of stuff and I don't want to feel ... because their families may be on benefits, you know .... and I don't want to have that feeling for my kids – I want my kids to have what I didn't have. I think that's it – I want my kids to have what I didn't have."*

#### **Niuean Female – Wellington**

Some Pacific parents with older children (i.e. from intermediate school age) did not enquire into what their children were eating for lunch. Some of these parents assumed that schools would not be selling food that was really bad for their children. Others were content that as long as their children were physically active during the day, what they bought for lunch was not a big issue. (The researchers note that parents themselves may have grown up eating tuck shop food such as pies, and felt it was okay for their children to be eating the same kinds of foods at school).

#### **Asian Peoples**

Asian participants in this study were often experimenting with western foods as part of assimilating into New Zealand society. In this context, lunches often included western foods and ingredients, such as yoghurt and sandwiches filled with salad ingredients such as lettuce, grated carrot, tomato, and cheese.

### 4.1.3 Dinner

#### Highlights

- Dinner was regarded as the main meal (i.e. the biggest and most nutritionally important meal) of the day.
- 'Getting dinner on the table' was a chore for time-poor families/whānau, particularly where both parents worked. Convenience foods and takeaways had significant appeal when families/whānau were busy or felt under pressure.
- Eating in front of television had replaced evening meals at the table for many families/whānau. Some of these families/whānau did not own a table; others simply did not use it for meals.
- Vegetable consumption was much more strongly associated with dinner than any other meal. However, some families did not eat vegetables on a daily basis. Not all those who did make a point of serving vegetables were willing to insist that children ate them, because of the emotional toll this could take on the parent.

#### Attitudes to Dinner

- Dinner was almost always regarded as the main meal of the day (with the exception of Sunday in some households). As such, it was typically a larger meal and considered to be more important nutrition-wise than lunch. Where vegetables were eaten regularly by a family/whānau, they were most likely to be eaten as part of the evening meal.
- Dinner represented an opportunity for many families/whānau to eat together, perhaps for the first and only time that day (particularly during the working week).
- Getting dinner on the table day after day represented a significant chore for many households with children. In families/whānau with two working parents, preparing the evening meal after work was done under considerable time pressure – such families/whānau were often looking for quick, easy options. Homemakers also reported feeling the pressure as dinner-time approached. Although they may have more time in which to prepare dinner, these individuals (usually mothers) were often tired come evening, and sometimes lacked the motivation and energy to follow through on their good intentions regarding what to cook and serve the family/whānau.

- A few people reported that while there was considerable routine involved in getting evening meals on the table every day, they enjoyed planning dinners and trying out new foods or recipes on occasions. More occasional cooks may have also enjoyed the process. For example, one father noted that he particularly enjoyed cooking dinner at the weekend because he could take his time.
- Parents of small children may have been keen to get the dinner and bed-time routine out of the way, so that they could have some adult-time with their partner.

### **Dinner Practices**

- Many families/whānau in this study were eating dinner around the television.
- In some cases, this was because the family/whānau did not have a table big enough to accommodate them, or did not have room for such a table. In other cases, the family/whānau preferred to eat in the lounge in winter because it was warmer than the room that housed the table.
- Some families/whānau did not want dinner-time to disturb their television viewing habits.
- Some families/whānau ate dinner around a table. For these families/whānau, eating dinner together at the table represented an opportunity for family/whānau togetherness.
- In some households in this study, there was fragmentation at dinner-time, with different family/whānau members eating in different places, perhaps at different times. For example, in one Pakeha family, the parents ate in front of the television with the baby, while older children sat at the dining table in an adjoining room, and a younger child sat at a child-sized table in view of his parents.
- Teenage children sometimes excluded themselves from family/whānau dinners by eating in their bedrooms. This might have been because they had friends around at dinner-time, or they did not want to eat in front of the television news with their parents.
- Some older children who arrived home late because of after-school activities were also eating separately some of the time. In such cases, the teenager might also eat a different meal from the rest of the family, e.g. a 'heat and eat' meal.

- Families/whānau in this study were eating a wide variety of foods at dinner-time. Meals covered a wide spectrum, but typically fell into three broad categories:
  - Home-cooked meals, ‘cooked from scratch’ (or making light use of packaged ingredients). Such meals were most likely to have included fresh (or frozen) vegetables.
  - Home assembled meals, incorporating convenience foods and packaged items. Such meals may also have included fresh or frozen vegetables.
  - Takeaway meals that had been bought elsewhere but were eaten at home. This study showed that a wide range of foods came under the generic takeaways label (although the term ‘takeaways’ was still more often associated with fried and fatty foods such as fish and chips, burgers, McDonalds and KFC).
- Weekend dinners may have closely resembled weekday dinners – in terms of what was eaten, where, and by whom – or they may have reflected the different weekend routines of families/whānau. For example, weekend dinners may have been smaller, simpler meals such as eggs or instant noodles. Such ‘scratch’ meals may have lacked any vegetable component (other than potato). This was particularly true of Sunday dinners, which may have been preceded by a large, cooked lunch.

### **Dinner Context and Dynamics**

- Some families/whānau who regularly ate in front of television disputed the common wisdom that this reduced conversation at meal times. They reported that they did interact at mealtimes, with conversations arising out of what they were watching on television.
- Other families/whānau reported that one of their reasons for eating in front of television (apart from the programmes themselves) was that it provided a focus for small children, keeping them occupied long enough to finish their meal. (A number of parents reported that their pre-school children had short attention spans when it came to eating dinner at the table).

- The downside of regular meals in front of television, as reported by some families/whānau, was that children did not develop good table manners. Their bad eating habits (such as not finishing certain foods) or tendency to over-eat, may have gone undetected because their parents' focus was on the television.

*“We did have a stage where she [daughter] was being a bit sneaky and she was hiding broccoli under shelves and under the table ... so now she needs to show us her plate.”*

#### **Pakeha Female – Wairarapa**

- Families/whānau who regularly ate dinner at the table reported placing more emphasis on monitoring their children's manners and what was being eaten.
- Dinner-time could be a time of considerable conflict, focused on who was eating (or not eating) what. A number of mothers in particular, reported that their partners were not good role models when it came to eating vegetables. Where this was the case, it was difficult for the mother to insist that the children eat their vegetables.
- Picky eaters in families/whānau could lead to tense and prolonged meals. Some parents relaxed their eating rules, or gave up altogether, in order to keep the peace'.
- Some parents were not on the same page as each other regarding household eating rules and expectations. In a number of households in this study, one parent reported that they were willing to enforce vegetable eating, however, the other parent was not comfortable doing so (and, in some cases, would also prevent them from doing so). This lack of unity between parents undermined attempts to establish clear eating boundaries for children.

*“I started off doing it. ... I said, ‘no, eat your veges, eat what you're given, finish it’. After about two months it wasn't working. Our eldest daughter, quite young at the time, got rather emotional, well upset I should say. That's when [my wife] said, ‘don't force my kids into eating something they don't want to eat’.”*

#### **Samoan Male – Wellington**

- In this study, some teenage children were regularly eating dinner in their bedroom as a way of avoiding unwanted conversations with parents.
- Having takeaways for dinner released parents from the chore of planning, cooking and cleaning up. A relaxing, almost holiday-like atmosphere could develop as a result. In some households, takeaways also reduced conflict around getting children to eat their food.

## **Cultural Differences**

### ***Māori***

It was common for Māori whānau in this study to eat around the table and to place a value on this. Dinner-time was often regarded as 'whānau time' – a time to come together and share time and food.

### ***Pacific Peoples***

Some Pacific parents in this study grew up in families where some or all of the family ate on the floor sitting around a table cloth, because there was no table or insufficient room for a table large enough to seat the whole family. One such father was proud of using a family dining table with his own family.

A couple of Pacific families living in state houses reported that the rooms (kitchen and lounge) were too small to easily accommodate a dining table. These houses did not have separate dining rooms. In one case, the family routinely ate most meals in front of the television in the lounge during the winter months, because the kitchen (which housed the table) was cold.

Some Pacific teenagers in this study chose to eat separately from their parents because the children did not wish to observe Pacific protocols such as prayers at meal times (and in one case, to avoid only being able to talk about topics at the dinner table that were chosen by the father).

### ***Asian Peoples***

It was common for Chinese families in this study to eat around the table and to place great value on this.

Asian participants experimented with cuisines other than their traditional cuisine. Two Indian families reported having friends over for barbeques, and cooking simple Chinese dishes such as stir-fry and Chinese rice. One Chinese mother enjoyed cooking roasts, pizzas and burritos, and baking.

(For dinner decision-making and rules – see Sections 6.2.3 and 6.3.3 respectively later in this report.

## 4.2 Attitudes and Practices – Special Occasions

### Highlights

- Special occasions involved more elaborate, often less healthy food.
- Any normal eating rules that applied were suspended on special occasions, with adults and children free to indulge.
- Special occasions often included fizzy drinks (and alcohol).

### Attitudes to Special Occasions

- There were two types of special occasions involving eating noted by families/whānau in this study: family-related special occasions, such as birthdays, and significant days associated with religious and cultural practices, such as Christmas, religious festivals, and tangi (funerals).
- Food was a significant part of special occasions to all cultural groups in this study. Special occasions often entailed rituals and traditions involving special foods and specially prepared meals. They also offered licence to suspend normal eating rules and indulge in less healthy food without guilt or restriction. If people needed any justification, the fact that these events were less frequent was sufficient.

### Special Occasion Practices

Specific cultural practices are outlined under Cultural Differences later in this section. As a general rule, special occasions were marked out from more routine meals in the following ways:

- More elaborate food – dishes that were difficult or time consuming to prepare and might include unusual or expensive ingredients, and decorative elements.
- Greater quantities of food – more variety and more helpings. For example, children could eat what they liked and as much as they liked, going back for additional helpings. When celebrating children's birthdays there was a particular focus on sweet foods, and children might have got to choose what kind of foods they had at their party.
- An emphasis on desserts and puddings (this applied across all cultures).
- More people involved in the celebration (and in preparation) – usually more than one household, and sometimes large gatherings.
- Suspension of normal eating rules for both adults and children. The focus was on sharing pleasure in food and the company of others.

- More time was invested – both in preparation, and in eating, with people lingering over their food and eating greater quantities than normal.
- For some families/whānau barbeques were a feature of special occasions in the summer months. On these occasions, males tended to wield the barbeque tongs.
- There was likely to be alcohol and fizzy drink on offer at special occasion meals.
- Children and parents usually ate the same foods (although some Pacific cultures had children eating before or after the adults – see Cultural Differences below).
- All courses may be served at once – buffet style (although it was not unusual for savoury foods to be laid out separately from desserts).

### **Special Occasion Context and Dynamics**

- Special occasions had an element of ceremony and tradition, whereby things were done a certain way. This might have involved people dressing up, decoration of the table and surroundings, and use of special crockery, tablecloths and other table decoration.
- It was usual for visitors to contribute food and/or alcohol.
- Special occasion eating was, by its nature, more relaxed and social than routine meals. Special occasions often took place at the weekend – and people lingered over their food, and often drank alcohol with it.
- On special occasions, the focus was on eating for pleasure. In this context, most people suspended normal eating rules. In some cases, not partaking of special foods might have been seen as potentially offensive to the hosts.

### **Cultural Differences**

#### ***Pakeha***

Special family occasions often included roasts with all the trimmings. Barbeques were popular in the summer months. Desserts were usually involved, sometimes more than one.

There was more emphasis on sweet foods than at other times, particularly in the case of children's birthdays, which usually involved lots of lollies and cake.

Children might have been allowed to choose the food for their birthday party, and in some cases also the venue. Parties at locales such as McDonalds were popular with some Pakeha children.

## **Māori**

Special occasions for Māori families/whānau almost always revolved around whānau. These were times of celebration – Christmas, birthdays, whānau reunions, weddings, christenings, anniversaries and the like. These occasions could also be sad times for whānau, for example, when someone had died.

The concept of manakitanga or sharing was especially important at these times – making sure that people were well looked after – and part of that was making sure that there was plenty of kai (food) for the occasion.

Foods served at special occasions were generally delicacies, more elaborate than daily meals, and often reflected the area or region of the whānau. For example, whānau who lived close to the sea might have crayfish, paua, kina and other kai moana (seafood) on their table.

Often, the scale of the occasion and the numbers attending determined:

- Whether it would be held at home or at a bigger venue, such as a marae or local venue.
- The best way to cater and provide food for the whānau so that they were well provided for.

If the occasion was held at the whānau home, in most cases, all members of the whānau would contribute to the meal. Some may have been known for their signature dishes, which had become a traditional part of whānau gatherings. For example, one participant in this study was known for her glazed ham, and another for his boil-up.

*“We usually take a boil-up. When he does something different people get upset. ‘Uncle, are we getting a boil-up?’ This time he [had] made a pie instead.”*

### **Māori Female – Gisborne**

The special occasion meal at home could take many forms. It may have been a barbeque, a buffet, a sit-down meal or a hangi. These tended to be organised in advance, and if whānau were contributing they would often be told what to bring. Putting down a hangi required co-ordination. Whānau may have been needed to help with its preparation (preparing the hangi pit and so on).

If whānau were to sit down, tables were prepared with the best that the whānau had to offer (tablecloths, dinnerware, and cutlery) and were often decorated with flowers and a range of treats. Kaumatua (elders) were looked after first and, generally, children would be fed before the adults, or they may have their own table and eat at the same time as the adults.

If the occasion was on a larger scale, such as a wedding, it may have been held on the whānau marae. Each marae had its own way of doing things for these occasions. If wedding guests had not been on a marae before, they would be taken on through a powhiri (welcoming ceremony).

Generally, as noted above, special food was likely to be served. Tables would be elaborately set, and often there would have been a top table for the wedding party, parents and kaumatua. There may have been a buffet for guests to help themselves, or food would have been placed on tables with the top table usually always served.

### ***Pacific Peoples***

Pacific peoples tended to all contribute food for special occasions, and generally took a pot-luck approach to who brought what, in favour of a co-ordinated approach. However, some family members could traditionally be relied on to bring certain foods or dishes.

Traditional Pacific celebration foods reported in this study included: cooked pig, corned beef prepared island-style, and taro. Dessert typically involved ice cream and fruit salad, followed by pie and cake with coffee.

Some younger Pacific adults purposely took healthier, western-style foods to family gatherings, to off-set what they regarded as the fatty, starchy focus of traditional Pacific foods. They specifically encouraged water rather than fizzy drink and brought salads and fruit.

At Cook Island and Niuean gatherings it was traditional for children to eat before adults. At Samoan and Tongan gatherings it was traditional for adults to eat before children.

The researchers comment that, from a cultural perspective, Pacific communities in general had brought with them to New Zealand their own affiliative traditions and collective values that revolved around food. These related not only to its preparation, but also to its consumption and distribution within the family and/or across their own community.

The researchers also comment that while there may have been some differences between Polynesian cultures, food in general continued to fulfil a very important role across Pacific communities. This function was not limited to simple consumption and individual sustenance. Some Pacific participants made the comment that food was an important form of social currency used to express generosity, hospitality and even status between individuals, as well as across groups. Acceptance of food provided – for immediate or future consumption – was expected, and was the guest's expressed recognition of the host's hospitality and goodwill.

Pacific participants commented that, on social occasions, food was used to express generosity, hospitality and status, as well as to assist in creating and maintaining relationships between individuals and groups, which were then often perpetuated through continuous reciprocity. The researchers note that social occasions and traditionally celebrated events were thus often an important source of food distribution for more traditionally oriented Pacific peoples in New Zealand.

Some Pacific participants in this study noted a trend whereby Pacific peoples would attend a celebration specifically to stock up on food for their own family, taking it home with them rather than consuming it at the venue, perhaps returning later to socialise. This trend was not approved of by less traditionally oriented second generation Pacific peoples, who regarded it as greedy, rather than interpreting it in the context of a collective approach to food distribution.

### ***Asian Peoples***

Chinese and Malaysian participants reported that the primary special occasions their families celebrated were Chinese New Year, Christmas, and children's birthdays. These occasions often involved a pot-luck meal with family or friends where everyone brought a traditional Asian dish. There was normally wine and desserts on such occasions. At Christmas time, some of these families cooked a roast with all the trimmings.

Indian participants celebrated the auspicious days of the year according to their community or religion. For example, Diwali and Ganpati were popular Indian festivals celebrated amongst Hindus, along with Hindu New Year. On these occasions, people in this study tended to dress in traditional costumes (e.g. saris and salwar kameez) and prepared traditional, elaborate vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes (e.g. biryani, butter chicken, matar paneer, maa ki daal, and stuffed parathas) to be shared with close friends in a pot-luck meal. Some people also prepared traditional sweets at home (e.g. kheer, jalebis, burfi, and ladoos). Other people bought these delicacies from an Indian sweet shop.

Asian migrants commented that they tended to eat less healthily than normal at special occasions hosted by New Zealand friends, due to the nature of the foods served.

## 4.3 Attitudes and Practices – Snacks, Takeaways, Vegetables, Fruit, Fizzy Drinks, and Alcohol

### 4.3.1 Snacks

#### Highlights

- Parents' own snacking behaviour was often less healthy than that which they encouraged in their children.
- Packaged snacks such as muesli bars and chippies were a staple item in many children's lunchboxes. Some parents bought these products as a means of giving their children the things they never had in their childhood, and/or of ensuring that their children had what 'the other children had'.
- Lunchbox snacks' nutritional value went unquestioned by some parents. Their convenience to parents and appeal to children made them a popular lunchbox choice.
- Parents and caregivers sometimes granted treats (i.e. less healthy snacks) to 'keep the peace' and buy 'time-out' from their children.

#### Attitudes to and the Role of Snacks

Snacks fell into two broad categories:

- Snacks that comprised 'bits and pieces' from the fridge or cupboard, for example, some of last night's dinner, a sandwich, a piece of fruit, or cheese and crackers.
- Packaged snacks and treats such as muesli bars, lollies, chippies, and biscuits. Packaged lunchbox snacks fell into this category.

#### Children

Families/whānau in this study perceived that snacks had an important role in staving off children's hunger between meals. This was seen as particularly important for younger children, e.g. pre-schoolers, because of their smaller tummies and relatively high energy requirements.

Some parents allowed their children to snack throughout the day, and referred to this as "grazing". In some cases, access to any type of snack was unrestricted. Others tried to establish set snack times, such as mid-morning and immediately after school, in order to prevent their children coming to the dinner table already full.

Some parents gave their children unrestricted access to fruit as an ‘any-time’ snack, but restricted their consumption of sweet snacks such as biscuits and other packaged snacks such as muesli bars and chippies. In some households, packaged snacks such as these were reserved for lunchboxes only, and not allowed at other times.

Children would often badger their parents and caregivers for sweet snacks and packaged snacks when they knew that these were in the cupboard. In some cases, parents and caregivers would use a healthier snack such as fruit as a bargaining tool – if the child ate this they could then have a less healthy snack. In other cases, parents and caregivers may have granted the requested ‘treat’ in order to ‘buy peace’ and gain ‘time-out’, or out of the desire to please their children and show their love for them.

After-school snacks were of prime importance, and could be quite substantial, consisting of several items, such as a piece of fruit and a couple of biscuits or a sandwich.

It was common for parents and caregivers to attempt to restrict snacking in the hour or so leading up to the family/whānau evening meal. However, fruit (or raw vegetables) was sometimes allowed, and some parents and caregivers used the offer of fruit (or raw vegetables) as a way of determining how real the child’s hunger was. The thinking was that, if they were really hungry, they would take up the offer even if it was not the snack they were hoping for.

There was often a higher frequency of snacking at the weekend, when many families/whānau suspended their normal weekday routines around meal times.

### **Adults**

Adult snacking was often more about reward and ‘time-out’ than it was about hunger. The main time for adult snacking was in the evening, when the children were in bed. Snacks favoured by adults in this study were often indulgent in nature, e.g. chocolate, biscuits, lollies and chippies.

Sometimes parents’ reported that their snacking had an out-of-control element, with people consuming more than intended of ‘naughty’ foods.

*“Sometimes when I sit down and eat my snacks I tend to relax and once I’m sitting down and relaxed, that is when I get too full. I have a full stomach once I do have my snacks. It’s like getting a dinner for me. I’ll just eat and eat continuously and it makes me tired and lazy and not able to do any more chores in the house ... I don’t really like snacking because I know it makes me lazy.”*

**Tongan Female – Christchurch**

### Snack Practices

- Pre-schoolers snacked throughout the day. Parents were more likely to closely monitor younger children's snacking and to ensure that at least some of their snacks were healthy ones.
- After school was a key snack time for school-age children. It was accepted that children often needed quite a substantial snack when they returned from school to boost their energy levels.
- Both adults and children snacked to stave off hunger before the next meal. Outside morning and afternoon tea times, or within an hour or so of dinner, some parents and caregivers insisted that children snacked only on fruit (or, in fewer cases, raw vegetables).
- Adults often used snacks as a means of rewarding themselves or creating 'time-out' from their children or other pressures.
- Both adults and children snacked while watching television. This kind of snacking could escalate, with people going back for additional snacks, or eating more than they intended (e.g. half a packet of biscuits instead of a couple).
- When there were no children to cook for at meal time (i.e. because they were not at home) some parents said they snacked rather than cooking themselves a meal.
- Night-time snacking by adults often consisted of foods and drinks that were normally restricted or off-limits for children in the household, e.g. fizzy drink, chocolate, lollies, and sweet foods.

*"The kids don't have lollies. No, actually [my husband] and I – it's like a Saturday night thing, once the kids go to bed and we're watching a movie we might have some lollies, but we don't eat them ... I mean it's not like we sit there and eat them in front of the children."*

**Pakeha Female – Wairarapa**

### Snack Dynamics

- Adults who reported having a sweet tooth were more likely to ensure that there was a supply of sweet foods in the house. Even if these foods were not intended for children, they tended to sniff them out and pester their parents for them.
- Many adults and children reported snacking in front of television – and found this a pleasurable activity. Some parents encouraged their young children to snack in front of television because the distraction provided ensured that the children would eat their food happily and quietly (providing peace for the parents).
- Treat snacks (such as chippies, chocolate biscuits and lollies) could be used by parents and caregivers to express love and affection for children, or to buy household harmony or ‘time-out’ for parents and caregivers. Children often nagged for treat snacks if they knew they were in the house – persistent nagging could lead to the desired snacks being granted (something children seemed to understand).
- Grandparents were a major source of sweet treats. In some cases, treating by grandparents ran to trips to the dairy or McDonalds. Many grandparents (and some parents too) believed it was a grandparent’s prerogative to indulge their grandchildren. When such treating caused tensions with parents, treats may be kept secret.

### 4.3.2 Takeaways

#### Highlights

- Most people said takeaways had their place in the family/whānau diet. But there was little clarity on what exactly that place should be.
- Takeaways were popular with children, and represented ‘time-out’ for parents.
- Takeaway usage had extended far beyond *‘fish and chips on Fridays’*, to include a wide variety of ethnic, restaurant and ‘ready to eat’ supermarket food.

#### Attitudes to and the Role of Takeaways

When people spoke about takeaways, they tended to think first of traditional takeaways such as fish and chips, KFC and pizza. However, the takeaway meals eaten by families/whānau in this study extended beyond these examples, to include take-out meals from ethnic restaurants, as well as ready to eat food from supermarkets, such as cooked chickens and takeaway salads.

Takeaways figured in the eating repertoire of most families/whānau in this study. However, there was great variation in terms of the role they played in the family/whānau diet. Takeaway consumption could be seen as existing on a continuum with:

- Families/whānau who relied on them as a key source of both planned and ad hoc meals and snacks throughout the week at the high end of the consumption scale (in this study one father was eating takeaways every day) and;
- Families/whānau who reserved them for occasional treats for children (and ‘time-out’ from cooking for adults) at the low end of the consumption scale.

Most households lay somewhere between these two extremes, reporting that they typically ate takeaways every week or two, in place of a home-cooked evening meal, or sometimes a weekend lunch. However, some families/whānau were eating some kind of takeaways most days of the week.

Takeaways were not all equal nutritionally, despite people regarding them as a generally unhealthy category (i.e. high in fat). Some people in this study purposely chose takeaways they considered to be healthier (e.g. Chinese or Subway sandwiches) for some or all of their takeaway meals, in a bid to eat more healthily. Takeaways perceived as at the less healthy end of the takeaway spectrum included fish and chips, McDonalds, and KFC. Takeaways perceived as at the more healthy end of the spectrum included Subway, sushi, cooked supermarket chickens and takeaway salads, and many Chinese dishes.

The researchers note that some convenience meals, such as chicken nuggets, battered fish, and fries, resembled takeaway meals in terms of nutritional value and fat content, but may not have been recognised as such by virtue of being ‘cooked’ at home.

A household’s proximity to takeaway outlets was one of the influences on how often a family/whānau ate takeaways. Among those families/whānau eating a lot of takeaways, some reported that the plethora of takeaway outlets in their neighbourhood reinforced their takeaway habit. South Auckland was cited as a prime example of this.

*“My community is very low [income] ... so the places there are very – it’s like there’s not very good quality food and [lots of] junk food.”*

#### **Pacific Other Female – Auckland**

Likewise, among those families/whānau eating takeaways infrequently were rural households who lived a considerable distance from any takeaway outlets.

Takeaways appeared to have almost universal appeal to children, although not all children in a family/whānau liked the same kinds of takeaways. For parents, the strongest attraction of takeaways appeared to be their liberating effect: when takeaways were on the menu there was no cooking, no dishing up, no clearing away, and no mess in the kitchen to be dealt with.

Takeaways were an instant solution when parents could not face cooking. As such, they had strong appeal when parents were particularly busy, stressed or generally feeling time-poor. Having a takeaway meal at home often generated a relaxed atmosphere, with families who normally ate at the table eating their takeaways in front of the television.

*“One of the good things about takeaways is that we tend to sit down and laugh and joke ... we sit down here in the lounge here and we eat and we talk and we laugh . ... so I think that is part of the takeaways ... dinner-time when we have a cooked meal it’s fine, you know, but sometimes they rush, rush, rush and they go through their meal – but when we have takeaways ... we lie down, watch TV in there. It’s like a family night for our family when we get takeaways.”*

#### **Tongan Female – Christchurch**

Apart from being labour saving, some parents enjoyed eating takeaways. Some reported, however, that while they enjoyed them at the time, they disliked the feeling they got after eating some kinds of takeaways (i.e. a heavy or disturbed stomach was associated with the high fat content of takeaways such as fish and chips). Some adults also reported feeling lethargic after eating takeaways.

There was quite a bit of guilt attached to eating takeaways. In this study, it was common for parents to defend consumption of takeaways by their family/whānau with comments such as *“takeaways have their place”*. However, there was not much definition around what this *place* might be. Associated with this mantra was the idea that takeaways were *“fine”* as part of *“a balanced diet”*. When pressed on what this meant, families/whānau eating takeaways every week or two reported that their consumption was ‘probably about right’. However, families eating takeaways more often than this also thought that their takeaway consumption was okay, and was balanced out by other more healthy meals.

Some families/whānau who were frequent takeaway eaters simply did not think about health concerns. For example, the mother of a whānau which ate takeaways about eight times a week bought takeaways when she was tired, and saw fish and chips as a good, cheap way of filling up her whānau.

Some families/whānau in this study were trying to reduce their takeaway consumption. This was usually part of a wider effort aimed at increasing the health of family/whānau members. Such families/whānau reported that reducing their reliance on takeaways had necessitated putting greater time and effort into meal planning, grocery shopping, and cooking. It had also created family conflict at times (e.g. when one parent wanted to opt for takeaways and the other did not), which the individual most determined to cut down on takeaways had to be prepared to weather.

*“When [my wife] now asks me to get takeaways – I will say more than anything – eighty percent of the time – ‘no, we have still got the weekend’ – I will cook dinner, even when [my wife] says, ‘I don’t think I can be bothered waiting’ – I say, ‘I am still going to make it – you can go and get takeaways, but I will still make it’.”*

**Samoa Male – Wellington**

### **Takeaway Practices**

Takeaways were eaten by family/whānau in the following contexts:

- As a routine planned weekly or fortnightly purchase, taking the place of a home-cooked evening meal for the family/whānau. This may have been linked to pay-day, or to other routines such as picking up children from sports practice. In some households this routine was elevated to unquestioned ritual status, e.g. Friday would not be Friday without fish and chips.
- As an ad hoc mid-week purchase, when the adults in the household did not feel like cooking an evening meal or felt inclined to treat the children (this may have been triggered by pre-dinner television advertising of takeaways, e.g. McDonalds).
- With grandparents, as a treat, or as part of a routine (e.g. when the grandparent was the after-school caregiver). This may have happened after school, or at any time in the weekend.
- On special occasions, such as a child’s birthday – the researchers note that a number of takeaways outlets offered on-site children’s birthday parties.

- On Saturdays around lunch-time as part of a family/whānau outing (e.g. watching children's sports, or shopping).

*"... when they go to the rugby game to watch their brother play rugby, I'll get them a couple of scoops of chips, you know, to keep them warm because it's usually freezing down there. More to keep them warm."*

#### **Pakeha Female – Christchurch**

- Some parents bought takeaways for their own consumption as part of their working day. This did not involve other family/whānau members.
- Takeaways may have been bought for a weekend breakfast, prior to heading on to other activities, such as children's sport fixtures, or work (for parents who worked at weekends).

#### **Takeaway Dynamics**

- Takeaways may have been used as a treat or reward by parents or caregivers. This could have involved evening meals, or spontaneous snacks between meal times (e.g. dropping in to McDonalds).
- Decisions about what kind of takeaways the family/whānau bought were sometimes made according to the parents' preferences. However, sometimes children were allowed to choose what kind of takeaways the family/whānau bought, with each child having their turn to choose. In some instances two or more different types of takeaways were purchased to meet the preferences of different family/whānau members.
- Sometimes parents tried to ameliorate their guilt at buying takeaways by opting for takeaways they perceived to be healthier (i.e. compared with other takeaway options). Examples of takeaways commonly perceived to be healthier options were: Chinese, Japanese/sushi, some pizzas, and Subway sandwiches. So-called healthier takeaways generally earned this tag by virtue of having some vegetable content. Relative fat content may also be taken into account, although people's ways of determining this tended to be rather arbitrary – focusing on obvious rather than hidden fat.
- Eating takeaways was often linked to fizzy drink consumption, whereby children were allowed to buy a fizzy drink to eat with their takeaway meal. Some families/whānau strongly associated fizzy drink and takeaways – and may only ever have them together. Some takeaway outlets reportedly offered free fizzy drinks with takeaways.

*"Yeah [fizzy drink is consumed] mainly with dinner – wash it down with the food, and with takeouts too."*

#### **Tongan Male – Auckland**

## **Cultural Differences**

### ***Pacific Peoples***

Some Pacific families were trying to reduce their takeaway consumption, partly as a result of being exposed to ideas about healthy eating through the media. In such families, takeaways had formerly been relied on for evening meals and spontaneous snacks throughout the week.

### ***Asian Peoples***

Most Asian families' attitudes to takeaways reflected those attitudes found in the wider sample.

Some Chinese mothers in this study took the responsibility to feed their children healthy foods very seriously. In one such family, the mother prepared a salad to be eaten with takeaways such as fish and chips, to ensure that her children still got their daily serving of vegetables.

### **4.3.3 Vegetables**

#### **Highlights**

- Vegetables were largely confined to evening meals in many families/whānau.
- Most people believed vegetables were good for you and should be eaten, but many were not clear on exactly why this was so.
- Plenty of people were not eating vegetables daily. Some believed eating fruit would make up for this deficit.
- Comment was made by some parents that vegetable eating was a habit best learned while young. A taste for vegetables was reportedly harder to acquire in adulthood.

### Attitudes to and the Role of Vegetables

Overall, vegetables were seen by many families/whānau as one of the key planks in healthy eating (along with fruit). There was quite high awareness of the ‘five plus a day’ message, and a strong link between fruit and vegetables and healthy eating.

Most parents reported that they encouraged their children to eat vegetables, however not all parents insisted that this happened. The frequency of vegetable eating reported by participants often fell considerably short of the ideal represented by the ‘five plus a day’ mantra. Some parents were unsure exactly why vegetables were healthy.

*“I have no idea, no idea at all. All I know is that it’s good for you.”*

#### Pakeha Female – Auckland

Some people in this study distinguished between starchy vegetables (such as potatoes, kumara and yams), which they considered to be potentially fattening, and healthier (i.e. non-fattening) vegetables such as leafy and cruciferous vegetables. People who made this distinction sometimes limited or avoided the former category because of fears about weight gain, although they tended to be less concerned about these vegetables for their children on the basis that they provided ‘lots of energy’.

Some families/whānau in this study spoke positively about vegetables and reported that they had no problems getting their children to eat them. There were a range of reasons, and strategies, supporting vegetable eating in these families/whānau, as follows:

- The parents enjoyed eating vegetables and so did the children.
- The children planted their own vegetables in the family/whānau garden and looked after these. Picking the children’s vegetables was a highlight for one whānau in this study.
- Children had favourite vegetables that the parents served often. One mother continued to introduce new vegetables regularly. If the children did not like them, she simply tried again another time.
- Some parents emphasised the visual appeal of having lots of colour on the plate as a way of making vegetables interesting to children.

*“Colour is a feeling. You should see the children who haven’t had many veges before [when] they see the colours – some of them get excited.”*

#### Māori Female – Gisborne

However, some parents found vegetables to be something of a battleground. A parent's willingness to insist that his or her children ate their vegetables was a complex mix of: parenting style, willingness to be temporarily disliked by one's children, confidence in one's own judgement, and partner dynamics. Whether or not the parent themselves liked and regularly ate vegetables was also highly influential.

*"If they're not going to have the veges, they need to at least have some fruit. They've got to have one or the other. But my next mission is the veges. I don't know how I'm going to go about that because [if I say], 'if you don't eat your tea, you go to bed', then I'd feel guilty because I don't believe in the kids going hungry either. So that's my downfall, is sticking to things."*

#### **Pakeha Female – Christchurch**

Some parents in this study reported that their partner undermined their efforts to get their children to eat their vegetables. In some households, this happened because one parent did not eat all their vegetables, thereby undermining the other parent's case. In other households, this happened because one parent was emotionally unwilling to force children to do anything they did not want to do.

*"I will dish it up ... and I say to him [my husband], 'how am I meant to educate these kids when they say, 'dad doesn't have to'. So [my son] will leave his vegetables, which I find really bad."*

#### **Pakeha Female – Auckland**

Families/whānau that struggled to get their children to eat vegetables sometimes used cost as a justification for not buying more vegetables. When parents saw vegetables going uneaten, they may have felt there was little point buying them and that they were better off to spend their money on foods they knew the children would eat. Some of these parents also commented that buying sufficient quantities of vegetables to feed their family on a regular basis was expensive.

For some families/whānau, the mere presence of vegetables in a dish or meal signalled that the food was healthy, regardless of the other ingredients. For example, some Indian participants felt they were eating quite healthily because of the vegetable content of many of the traditional dishes they cooked. They tended to discount the impact of deep frying or using coconut cream in curry.

When it came to vegetables, families/whānau in this study could be grouped into three broad categories:

- Families/whānau that incorporated vegetables into the evening meal most nights, and ensured that children ate at least some of them.
- Families/whānau that incorporated vegetables into some of their evening meals, and recognised their value, but might not have insisted that children eat them.
- Families/whānau that ate a relatively high proportion of takeaway and convenience food meals, did not emphasise vegetables in the meals that they cooked, and did not insist that their children eat them. However, some of these families deliberately opted for Chinese takeaways (such as chow mein) at least some of the time as a way of ensuring that their children ate some vegetables as part of their evening meal.

*“For years we had Chinese once a week because that was the only way to get the vegetables into us.”*

**Pakeha Female – Auckland**

### ***Routine Part of Evening Meal – Must be Eaten***

Families/whānau that included vegetables in most evening meals tended to regard an evening meal without vegetables as unbalanced. The exception to this was when the family/whānau had takeaways, or a ‘scratch’ meal at the weekend, such as toasted sandwiches, eggs on toast or macaroni cheese.

In these households, evening meals typically included at least one vegetable (other than potato) and usually two or three (more if a salad or stir fry was on the menu). Some household cooks tried to include additional vegetables within other dishes, for example, adding grated vegetables to mince and other meat-based dishes. This behaviour was more typical of mothers than fathers.

Fathers who cooked in these households tended to be less inclined to cook and eat as many vegetables of their own accord, but incorporated them into family/whānau evening meals because the mother expected them to.

In these households children were expected to eat at least some, if not all, of the vegetables on their plate. Some parents allowed children to have one or two vegetables they did not eat, but meals were often planned to incorporate vegetables that were acceptable to the children. (One mother confessed that she herself does not eat vegetables, but ensured that her young sons did).

Households that routinely served and expected children to eat vegetables as part of the evening meal were more likely to offer children raw, cut-up vegetables as snacks.

Children in these households were most likely to be eating *'five plus'* servings of fruit and vegetables most days. Ironically, parents who were not habitual fruit eaters may not have been reaching this tally (except perhaps in the warmer months, when popular stone and berry fruits were cheap and plentiful).

### ***Semi-routine Part of Evening Meal – May Not be Eaten***

*“Two or three nights [a week] we’d have some veges in the plan.”*

#### **Samoan/Tokelauan Male – Wellington**

Families/whānau that included vegetables in some evening meals often intended to include them more often than they actually did. This was because takeaways and quick and easy meals (e.g. instant noodles and chicken nuggets) were often resorted to when parents were busy, tired, not feeling well, or short of motivation to cook a ‘proper’ meal.

In these households, evening meals typically included at least one vegetable (other than potato) but were often quite meat-focused, with vegetables a relatively small component of the overall meal. Some parents restricted the range of vegetables they served to those they knew their children would eat, eschewing unfamiliar or exotic (and possibly expensive) options in favour of the familiar (such as carrots and peas).

These parents typically wanted their children to eat their vegetables, and encouraged them to do so. However, some were reluctant to force the issue because they did not want to upset the children, nor did they want to deal with the emotional fall-out (e.g. complaining children and a protracted, bad-tempered meal-time).

Children in these households were less likely to be eating *'five plus'* servings of fruit and vegetables most days. However, some of them would be reaching this target by eating a lot of fruit. Parents were also less likely to be reaching this target, because they typically ate less fruit than their children (except perhaps in summer – see earlier).

### **Vegetable-free Evening Meals were Commonplace**

These families/whānau may have had vegetables only once or twice a week. Some of these parents were not brought up eating vegetables regularly themselves, and had limited understanding of how to prepare vegetables.

Children in these households were unlikely to be eating ‘five plus’ servings of fruit and vegetables most days, as were their parents. It was this group who was most likely to include tomato sauce or fruit juice in their fruit and vegetable serves.

*“I said, ‘what about veges?’, and she [our doctor] says, ‘does he like tomato sauce?’ I said, ‘yeah’, and she said, ‘well, two dessertspoons of tomato sauce equals one serving of vegetables, so there you go’. I said, ‘great’. So when I’m feeling really lazy we have fish and chips for dinner – I say ‘here, don’t forget your vegetables’, and then, ‘there’s the sauce bottle’.”*

#### **Pakeha Female – Auckland**

### **Vegetable Practices**

When vegetables were eaten by family/whānau in this study it was typically in one or more of the following contexts:

- As part of the evening meal when it was home-cooked (but some home-cooked meals also contained few or no vegetables).
- As part of takeaways that included a vegetable component (e.g. Chinese, Indian, some pizzas) – one of the reasons these options may have been chosen was to salve parents’ conscience that they were not giving children a proper meal by opting for takeaways. (Note: Indian participants did not consider Indian takeaways to be particularly healthy, perhaps because they were more familiar with the ingredients).
- As an ‘any-time’ snack for children, e.g. some families/whānau encouraged children to eat raw vegetables such as carrot sticks or cucumber (as with fruit, in a few families/whānau this was the only option for children claiming to be hungry shortly before or after meals).
- As a component of some lunchbox food (e.g. carrot sticks or lettuce, tomato, sprouts or grated carrot in a sandwich or roll – this was more common in the summer months).
- As part of family/whānau weekend lunches – more typically in summer when salad vegetables were in season.

## Vegetable Dynamics

- Some children would happily eat a relatively wide range of vegetables – others would not. A parent’s willingness to insist – and ‘wear’ the emotional fall-out – was often pivotal to children developing the vegetable eating habit.

*“I’ve only just started doing their vegetable things ... since I started cooking – to me that’s not long enough. I’d rather they get taught when they are babies. The sad thing is I should have been a lot stronger when they were babies ... I was aware of it, I just didn’t do anything. If I did say something then I would get put in my place from the boss [my wife].”*

### **Samoa Male – Wellington**

- Parents generally agreed that eating vegetables was a habit best got into when children were young. There was a role modelling issue with vegetable consumption. It was hard for parents to get their children to eat vegetables if the parents themselves did not eat them willingly. In this study, the issue was usually one of fathers not liking vegetables, however, at least one mother was a very reluctant vegetable eater.
- Women in this study tended to emphasise the importance of vegetables more than men, and often reported eating more vegetables than their male partners.
- Perhaps partly as a result of this, some men were not keen or confident vegetable cooks. They reported cooking fewer vegetables, in more traditional ways (e.g. boiled) than women – and some ‘weekend cooks’ did not cook vegetables at all if the children’s mother was not at home.

*“I’m a meat and potatoes sort of person, but that’s only in the weekends – it’s not like I’m missing out because we’re eating veges all during the week.”*

### **Pakeha Male – Wairarapa**

- Families/whānau with a vegetable garden had a plentiful, cheap supply of seasonal vegetables. In these households, adults and children typically ate more vegetables, and children were often involved in planting and harvesting. Households with vegetable gardens were often carrying on a family/whānau tradition, whereby vegetable consumption was a given.

- Parents who grew up in gardening households were also more likely to continue an emphasis on vegetable consumption in their own family/whānau, whether or not they had their own vegetable garden (and those who did not may have still harboured the ambition to have a garden one day).

## **Cultural Differences**

### ***Māori***

Māori whānau living in small communities were generally related to the next door neighbour or whānau down the road. In these situations, food would be intentionally shared among whānau. For example, whānau may have grown a particular range of vegetables to share. Others may have had an orchard and would have shared fruit within their community. This reflected a collective rather than individual approach, which for these whānau was about being Māori.

### ***Pacific Peoples***

Some Pacific families commented that they had grown up with a more western-style of cooking, which included more vegetables than a traditional Pacific diet.

Other Pacific families who had been brought up with traditional Pacific foods felt that this was reflected in the relative lack of vegetables in their own family's diet. Some Pacific families were working hard to increase their vegetable consumption, partly as a result of being exposed to ideas about healthy eating through the media.

### ***Asian Peoples***

Asian participants generally tended to be using a wider variety of vegetables than many other participants reported, and tended to do most of their cooking 'from scratch'. Meals also tended to include a higher proportion of vegetables to meat.

*"I think for the Chinese meal, it's always plenty of vegetables. Like stir fry – you cut meat in very little pieces with lots of vegetables stir fried together. I think that's a good thing about stir fry Chinese – a lot more vegetables than meat. Yeah. Compared to the Kiwi meal – like a big piece of steak, or a roast is a lot of meat too."*

### **Chinese Female – Christchurch**

Vegetables were a feature of most Indian participants' evening meals, and some Indian families were vegetarian. Some Indian mothers added vegetables to many dishes, and sometimes attempted to disguise them in dishes such as curries (this practice was also noted among Pakeha participants). Indian participants did not give their children raw vegetables as snacks or in their lunchboxes.

Chinese mothers in this study typically placed more emphasis on fresh vegetables as an integral part of meals, not just dinners, and encouraged raw vegetables as snacks.

#### 4.3.4 Fruit

##### Highlights

- Most people believed fruit was good for you and encouraged their children to eat it.
- Fruit was popular with children – few parents had to enforce fruit eating.
- Some families were limiting children's consumption of fruit on cost grounds.
- Parents often ate a lot less fruit than their children. Children were often daily fruit eaters – their parents often were not.

*"Oh, we eat quite a bit of fruit – at least the kids do, I don't ... I don't really enjoy it ... I'll eat a bit – not like the kids do where they'll eat two or three apples in a day. I won't. I'll eat one once in a while, but that's it."*

**Pakeha Male – Wairarapa**

##### Attitudes to and the Role of Fruit

Overall, fruit was regarded by many, if not all, families/whānau as one of the key planks in healthy eating (along with vegetables). There was high awareness of the 'five plus a day' message and, even if people were not achieving this tally on a daily basis, they were aware that fruit was an important part of a healthy diet.

Families/whānau in this study could be broadly grouped into those that encouraged their children to eat fruit and placed no limits on their fruit consumption, and those that placed limits on fruit consumption on cost grounds. (A minority said they restricted fruit consumption on health grounds as well as cost because of a belief that fruit was high in sugar).

### ***Unrestricted Access to Fruit – Seen as the Best Snack***

Some families/whānau gave their children unrestricted access to fruit, encouraging it as the first-choice snack (i.e. the first snack option parents provided when asked for snacks), and ensured it was included in their lunchbox every day. In these families/whānau, parents reported that children typically ate at least a couple of pieces of fruit a day. Parents reported that keeping their children supplied with this volume of fruit could be an expensive business, particularly in larger families/whānau.

Cost sometimes limited the types of fruit bought, with families sticking to seasonal fruit and the relatively inexpensive core fruits such as apples, bananas, oranges and pears. Some families/whānau bought tinned fruit to supplement fresh fruit because it worked out cheaper. Some families made a point of buying fruit in bulk from markets, roadside stalls, or orchards in order to keep costs down, while still encouraging unlimited fruit consumption. This was more likely to apply to families/whānau in provincial and rural areas.

### ***Restricted Access to Fruit – On the Basis of Cost***

Other families/whānau recognised the importance of fruit, but restricted their children's consumption on the grounds of cost. Some, but not all, of these families/whānau were lower income. In such families/whānau, children might have taken a piece of fruit in their lunchbox, but be restricted in how much fruit they were allowed to eat at other times (e.g. no more than two pieces of fruit a day per child).

### ***Restricted Access to Fruit – Concerns over Sugar Content***

A few families/whānau in this study reported restricting their children's consumption of fruit out of a belief that eating too much fruit equated with eating too much sugar. In one case, this idea had been gleaned from a television current affairs programme. There was also evidence in this study of some confusion arising from the 'made with real fruit' or 'natural fruit sugar' claims of the food industry.

## Fruit Practices

Fruit was typically eaten by family/whānau in the following contexts:

- At kindergarten and pre-school.
- In children's lunchboxes – usually one or two pieces (many schools reportedly encouraged fruit consumption and some lower decile schools provided free fruit to pupils).
- As part of a packed lunch for working parents.
- As an after-school snack for children – the first-choice snack in some families/whānau.
- As an 'any-time' snack for children – some families/whānau made fruit the only option for children claiming to be hungry shortly before or after meals (some adults would also snack on fruit).
- As dessert for the family/whānau – e.g. fruit salad, cut-up fruit, or pieces of fruit. (Note: The practice of cutting-up fruit generally encouraged consumption by both adults and children, but people had to be sufficiently motivated to take the time to do this).

## Fruit Dynamics

- Many parents stated that their children enjoyed fruit, and that encouraging them to eat it was not a problem.
- In some families/whānau eating fruit was seen as a way of excusing or ameliorating the effects of eating other less healthy foods. For example, a parent or caregiver might grant a child's request for a biscuit, provided they had a piece of fruit as well.
- Fruit was also seen as a vegetable substitute, whereby eating lots of fruit made up for not eating enough vegetables – on any given day, or on a regular basis. (Although fruit and vegetables were linked in many people's minds, there was little evidence of people substituting vegetables for fruit in the same way. The researchers note that this may be because fruit's inherent sweetness makes it more universally appealing to children than vegetables).
- Parents tended to stick to seasonal and the least expensive fruits in an attempt to keep costs down, meaning that families/whānau could get stuck in a fruit rut consisting of apples and bananas. This appeared to be more of a problem for adults (than it was for children), some of whom found these fruits relatively unappealing compared to more expensive, exotic fruits.

- Many parents in this study reported eating considerably less fruit than their children, despite knowing it was an important part of a healthy diet (this also applied to vegetables). It was not uncommon for parents to report that they ate only a couple of pieces of fruit a week, if that. Some fathers had very little regular fruit in their diets. This did not appear to influence their children's liking for fruit, and non-fruit eating parents still encouraged their children to eat fruit. However, the researchers note that parents who were not big fruit eaters themselves may have been inclined to devote less of the grocery budget to fruit, and to buy smaller quantities (thereby indirectly restricting their children's fruit consumption).
- Younger children were reportedly easily influenced by what others around them were doing. There was evidence that the ritual of shared fruit at pre-schools had turned some young children on to fruit, even when it was not frequently eaten at home.

*"[My daughter] is at kindy and she is four, and they have morning sit-around with the fruit bowl. And I find she actually eats it because the other kids are, whereas at home if I put out a bowl of fruit she wouldn't eat it. No definitely not interested in fruit at all, but at kindy she'll eat it."*

**Pakeha Female – Christchurch**

## **Cultural Differences**

### ***Māori***

As discussed earlier, Māori whānau living in small communities often shared fruit and vegetables they grew within the community. This reflected a collective rather than individual approach, which for these whānau was about being Māori.

### ***Pacific Peoples***

As discussed already, some Pacific families were working hard to increase both their fruit and vegetable consumption. These families often found it easier to increase fruit consumption than vegetable consumption, by offering fruit as snacks and ensuring fruit was included in children's lunchboxes.

### ***Asian Peoples***

Many Asian participants regularly served a platter of cut-up fruit for the family dessert. Some Indian participants offered fruits to the gods during their "puja" religious prayer gatherings, or when they visited the temple. On these occasions, once the fruit had been blessed, it was cut-up and offered to everyone present.

### 4.3.5 Fizzy Drink

#### Highlights

- There was relatively high awareness of fizzy drink's high sugar content, and this was a key reason for families/whānau limiting or avoiding it.
- If parents consumed fizzy drink at home, their children were more likely to drink it too (or to want to).
- Consuming fizzy drink was often linked to eating takeaways.
- For fizzy drinking families/whānau, the relatively low cost of fizzy drink, especially compared to milk, reinforced its consumption.

#### Attitudes to and the Role of Fizzy Drink

Fizzy drink consumption varied widely in this study, from families/whānau consuming eight litres a day, to families/whānau who would not keep it in the house. Attitudes to fizzy drink differed from household to household, but family/whānau in this study could be grouped into three broad categories in terms of fizzy drink consumption:

- Families/whānau in which fizzy drink was the primary type of cold drink consumed at home by children and young people (and was also popular with some adults).
- Families/whānau in which fizzy drink was an occasional or infrequent treat and was more likely to be consumed on special occasions or away from home.
- Families/whānau who had been regular consumers of fizzy drink at home but who were actively trying to reduce their consumption, for health reasons.

#### *Fizzy Drink as Primary Cold Drink*

In these families/whānau, fizzy drink was regarded as a household staple because it was popular with the children. Parents in these households had often grown up in homes where consuming fizzy drink was usual, and enjoyed its taste and sweetness. These parents tended to prioritise fizzy drinks as a grocery purchase, and may have been quite proactive in seeking out specials on fizzy drink.

In fizzy drinking families/whānau, children often had a fizzy drink with their evening meal, as did some adults.

*“They [the children] all have their glass of fizzy with their tea.”*

#### **Pakeha Male – Wellington**

Children also helped themselves to fizzy drink from the fridge during the day, and there was usually fizzy drink in the house. Some of these parents were aware that fizzy drink was not healthy, but used its relatively cheap cost as an excuse to continue buying it.

#### ***Fizzy Drink as Occasional Treat***

In these families, the parents limited their children’s consumption of fizzy drink because of concerns about its high sugar content. Parents’ awareness of the link between consumption of sugary drinks and tooth decay reinforced their decision to limit it, and made it easier to justify to children (tooth decay and the resulting fillings were tangible evidence of a problem).

In these families, parents were more likely to allow fizzy drinks when they were away from home, e.g. on holiday or on a special outing, as a treat rather than a regular occurrence.

In these households, large bottles of fizzy drink may have been bought for special occasions or social gatherings, for example, as mixers for alcoholic drinks for adults. Children were then allowed to drink whatever fizzy drink remained in already opened bottles.

Some parents in these households quite enjoyed drinking fizzy drink themselves, but tended to do their fizzy drinking away from home (e.g. at work) in a bid to set a good example for children.

#### ***Cutting Down On Fizzy Drink***

Families/whānau in this category had been regular consumers of fizzy drink at home, with both children and adults drinking it regularly. The parents had become aware of fizzy drink’s high sugar content, and were trying to change the habits of their family/whānau so that fizzy drink became an occasional treat rather than a regular fixture in the daily diet.

Growing awareness of the high sugar content in fizzy drink appeared to have been hastened by schools – many of which have reportedly banned fizzy drinks. As a result of this, drinking water at school had become a norm that appeared to have flowed into many homes where water was the drink of choice.

However, parents in these households tended to have a taste for fizzy drink themselves. As a result, double standards around fizzy drink abounded. For example, in one family the parents purchased a soda stream to cut down the cost of the adults' daily fizzy drink fix, and restricted their children to a glass at the weekend.

*“The children are not allowed fizzy drinks ... oh, they have water, but [my husband] and I are really bad ... ah! I love my fizzy drinks ... actually, a couple of weeks ago I went out and bought a Soda Stream ... and it actually worked wonders for restricting fizzy intake too because they make up a one litre bottle, so [my husband] will make up his one litre bottle and I'll make up my one litre bottle and that will be it until the next day ... and the children are allowed them on the weekends.”*

#### **Pakeha Female – Wairarapa**

In another household, the parents had drastically reduced the number of bottles of fizzy drink they bought a week, but continued to keep a supply of fizzy drink in their bedroom that was effectively off-limits to the children.

#### **Fizzy Drink versus Other Drinks**

In regular fizzy drinking families/whānau, some parents reported that they and their children did not enjoy drinking water as an alternative. Such families/whānau may have developed a sweet tooth as a result of their drinking and eating habits, and their palates were not accustomed to the relatively bland taste of water. The researchers note that fizzy drink's packaging may have also served to make it more attractive than plain tap water.

*“Probably we get fizzy drinks twice a week but not as much as we used to ... we don't like drinking water.”*

#### **Tongan Female – Christchurch**

In households where fizzy drink was limited, raro, cordial or juice may have been substituted for fizzy drink, in the belief that these drinks were healthier and less sugary. In one family, the parents noted that their daughter had become addicted to her daily cordial drinks, and they had had some trouble “weaning” her off them.

For many families/whānau who restricted fizzy drink consumption, water (and milk) had considerable currency as healthy drinks for children to consume (aided by some schools promoting water consumption).

## **Cultural Differences**

### ***Pacific Peoples***

Some Pacific peoples in this study were particularly heavy consumers of fizzy drinkers. A number of Pacific families were making efforts to reduce their fizzy drink consumption, in part because of new-found awareness of its high sugar content and link to child (and adult) obesity.

### **4.3.6 Alcohol**

#### **Highlights**

- Many families/whānau reported that they drank alcohol sparingly or not at all in their home.
- Parents may have hidden their alcohol consumption (and its effects) from their children in a bid to be good role models.
- Coming to grips with alcohol was seen as a rite of passage for teenagers.
- Many families/whānau were uncertain about how to prepare their children to handle alcohol, and about the risks associated with alcohol consumption.

#### **Attitudes to and the Role of Alcohol**

Families/whānau in this study believed that alcohol was something that their children would be confronted with and would need to make decisions about simply as part of growing up. Alcohol was seen as something that teenagers may want to experiment with, and as something that children would need strategies for dealing with as they entered the teenage years.

Many parents were unsure whether and at what age to allow teenagers to drink alcohol at home (if the parents were drinkers), and at what age it should become an acceptable part of young people's socialising away from home.

It was common for participants in this study to report keeping little or no alcohol kept at home. Alcohol was bought as needed for specific occasions, such as a party or barbeque with friends.

A number of alcohol-dependent parents were aware that alcohol was a problem for them, and that their children may be susceptible to alcohol dependency. There were a number of recovering alcoholics, and people who had previously been heavy drinkers, in the study. Recovering alcoholics were often very sensitive to the prevalence of alcohol in their community, with one complaining to her local supermarket because she and her children had to negotiate aisles of alcohol every time they did their grocery shopping.

People who had previously been heavy drinkers reported that they had become more moderate drinkers with age. In some cases, this influenced their attitude toward their teenage children drinking alcohol. They were more likely to see experimentation with alcohol as part of growing up, and excessive drinking as something that their children were likely to grow out of.

Families/whānau in this study who had teenagers in the household recognised that alcohol was something their children must inevitably confront and learn to deal with. Some assumed that their teenagers were already drinking, but were not always sure how to prepare their children to handle alcohol and the risks associated with its consumption. Others were confident that their teenagers were not yet drinking regularly, but were still uncertain as to the best way to safely and responsibly introduce them to alcohol.

Some parents of younger children (i.e. under ten years) who drank little themselves, assumed that their children would eventually follow their example in drinking lightly or not at all. The researchers believe their position is a mix of optimism, complacency and naivety (and has not yet been tested).

### **Alcohol Practices**

- Drinking toward the end of the week – linked to pay-day, the weekend, and work routines – in the company of friends and colleagues. Usually away from home.
- Sharing a drink when friends come over to the house – more likely to be at the weekend.
- At home in the evening – before, with or after the evening meal. Some middle to high income Pakeha and Māori participants reported regularly drinking wine with dinner or an evening snack. Some males also reported drinking beer with the evening meal.
- When going out socially (rather than at home) – this included socialising at venues that served alcohol (e.g. pubs, bars and cafes) and in other people's homes.
- At home on special occasions, such as birthdays or family/whānau 'get togethers' – this may have involved buying in alcohol specifically for the occasion.
- Some recovering alcoholics banned all alcohol from the house.
- Teenagers drinking with their mates at home (this was more likely to be encouraged or tacitly accepted by parents as preferable to teenagers drinking away from home) or at parties and gatherings.

### Alcohol Dynamics

- Alcohol-dependent parents were aware that their children may be susceptible to alcohol dependency – as a result they may have been more vigilant and initiated discussion about alcohol with their children.
- Some regular social drinkers did all their drinking away from the house, i.e. not in front of the children (and also avoided the children seeing them drunk or worse for wear after drinking).
- Some parents of teenagers allowed their children to sample the alcoholic drinks that adults were drinking on special occasions, as a way of introducing their teenager to alcohol in a safe setting. However, parents may not have agreed on the age at which teenagers should be introduced to alcohol, which could result in mild parental conflict and a lack of clear rules for teenagers.

*“There is a little wine that their mother will let them have, not me ... she will give them a little sip. I’m looking at her, like a stare ... like, ‘are you serious?’ She will be like, ‘it’s alright, it’s just a little sip’. I reply, ‘I hope so.’”*

### Samoan Male – Wellington

- Some parents of teenagers had agreements in place to minimise the risks associated with alcohol, e.g. that the child would call the parent at any time for a ride home from occasions involving alcohol.
- Some parents of teenagers provided their children with an agreed amount of alcohol so that the parents could control how much and what type of alcohol their teenagers were drinking. Some parents offered to host gatherings and parties for their teenager and their friends for the same reason. The general feeling was that they preferred to know their children were safe while they were drinking.
- Parents of teenagers were concerned about the risks associated with drinking (sexual safety and drink driving) as much as the risks associated with alcohol consumption itself.

## **Cultural Differences**

### ***Pacific Peoples***

Some Pacific churches (in this study, churches with Samoan and Tongan congregations) proscribed drinking – church members generally adhered to this within the Pacific community, but may have drunk occasionally in palagi settings such as work social occasions.

One Pacific father commented that it was socially inappropriate for young girls to be intoxicated in public (as well as unsafe). This view was shared by some Asian participants. (It may also be shared by other cultures, but this was not noted in this study).

*“I don’t like them going out at all ... because I’ve seen it myself when I go out. I see women, girls who are highly intoxicated. I see what they do and even though I’m drunk, I’m thinking, ‘I don’t want my daughter doing that’.”*

### **Samoan Male – Wellington**

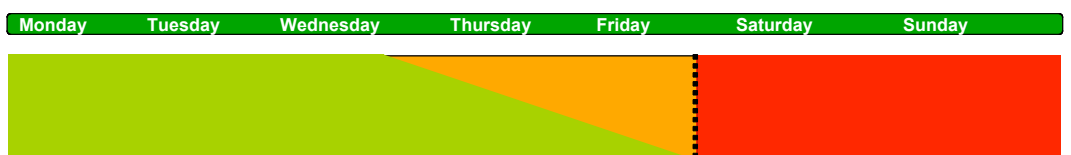
### ***Asian Peoples***

Some Chinese women reported that they were easily affected by alcohol, and were very careful to limit their consumption. There was some feeling that it was inappropriate – shameful and embarrassing – for a woman to be intoxicated in a social setting. From this point of view, alcohol was men’s business.

## 4.4 Weekday Versus Weekend Eating Practices

### 4.4.1 Overview

The diagram below illustrates the overall differences noted in this study between what, and how, people were eating during the week, and at weekends.



Week end eating is different from week day eating – week day tends to be more routine

Gradual slide mid-week towards weekend eating which is typified by less healthy eating - fewer vegetables, less fruit and more quick, convenient options, e.g. takeaways, convenience foods (such as pizzas), McDonalds, Dad cooking

Less routine

Pressure of family/whanau commitments, e.g. sport

Time of relaxation = less scheduled escape from weekday routines – more spontaneous

More special occasion type eating

Family/whanau time

Visitors

Overall, this study found that weekday eating tended to be healthier than weekend eating, which has an element of relaxation, reward and enjoyment attached to it. Weekdays were associated with routines, and time pressure. Weekends for many family/whānau offered a chance to relax weekday routines – this often extended to eating routines and rules.

### 4.4.2 Weekday Eating Overall

- The weekday routine included simpler breakfasts (continental in style) rather than cooked.
- It was common for children to have fruit as part of a packed school lunch.
- Weekday evening meals were more likely (than weekend evening meals) to be home-cooked, and to include at least some vegetable component.
- As the weekend approached, weekday eating tended to slide in terms of healthy eating – with families/whānau eating fewer vegetables, less fruit, and more quick, convenient meals. Families/whānau were more likely to buy takeaways as the weekend approached.

#### 4.4.3 Weekend Eating Overall

- Weekends tended to be less scheduled than weekdays for many families/whānau. Reflecting this, weekend eating was also more spontaneous, arising out of whatever weekend activities family/whānau members were involved in.
- Weekends often involved socialising with friends and family/whānau, as well as celebration of special occasions. Special foods and treats were typically associated with family/whānau get-togethers.
- Weekends also often involved family/whānau outings, e.g. for sports events, shopping, or just spending time together. Outings often involved meals and snacks bought and consumed away from home – the foods involved were often less healthy than meals and snacks consumed at home during the week.
- Weekends often involved large and high energy breakfasts and brunches, and less formal midday and evening meals than during the week. Vegetables may have been missing from the latter, particularly when fathers were cooking.

The differences between weekday and weekend eating did not apply in all families/whānau. This study found that the common distinctions between weekday and weekend eating were less marked, or non-existent for some family/whānau, because of one or more of the following factors:

- One or more parents did paid work at the weekend, e.g. shift workers and casual workers. For such families/whānau weekday and weekend routines tended to be less differentiated.
- Where there was a homemaker and very small children in the household. For these families, weekend eating routines often closely resembled weekday routines.
- The most committed healthy eaters tended to adhere to established eating routines and rules during weekends as well as during the week.
- The least healthy eaters also made little distinction between weekdays and weekends when it came to their eating practices. Generally, their weekday eating resembled weekend eating (fewer vegetables, more takeaways, more treats, and more use of packaged and convenience foods).

## 4.5 Food and Drink Preferences

### 4.5.1 Favourite Foods and Drinks

Within this study, a wide range of favourite foods was nominated by individuals. Providing a list of foods popular with all the people in this study would provide little insight into food tastes, because it would be very long and feature a diverse range of foods.

Instead, we have provided a list of food categories that were commonly nominated as favourite foods. As such, it is indicative of people's tastes, but does not capture the full variety of people's nominated favourite foods.

#### Children's Favourite Foods and Drinks

- Bakery items such as pies, muffins and croissants
- Biscuits
- Cereals both plainer (e.g. Ricies and Weetbix) and sweeter varieties (e.g. Nutrigrain and Coco Pops)
- Cheese
- Fizzy drink and juice
- Fruit
- Home-cooked meals, such as spaghetti bolognaise, roast chicken, and lasagne
- Instant noodles
- Lollies
- Packaged snacks such as chippies and muesli bars
- Popcorn (microwave packets and air popped with a machine)
- Sandwiches, crackers and rice crackers
- Takeaways such as McDonalds, KFC, fish and chips, pizza, butter chicken
- Water
- Yoghurt.

Children's requests for their parents to buy specific foods included "fancy" breakfast cereals and snack foods, such as chippies, chocolate, biscuits, muesli bars and lollies. Usually, children would have seen these products advertised on television. (Sometimes they had seen them in other children's lunchboxes). Children reportedly liked the sweetness of many of the above foods. Some packaged lunchbox snacks also had considerable social cachet.

Despite their focus on sweet foods and packaged snacks, children in this study showed evidence of diverse (and sometimes sophisticated) tastes in terms of the foods they enjoyed eating; and some of them liked their vegetables.

*"My son loves the 'trees' – the broccoli and the cauli, he calls them 'trees'. He loves peas, I don't think he likes beans. I don't think any of my kids like beans, but everything else. That's why I like Chinese [food] – chow mein, how they have got the vegetables. I think he got hooked on it through the chow mein."*

#### **Pacific Other Female – Auckland**

##### **Adults' Favourite Foods and Drinks**

- Bakery items such as pies, muffins and croissants
- Barbequed and roast meats
- Egg dishes
- Fizzy drinks and energy drinks – for some adults
- Fruit – for some adults
- Home-cooked meals – a wide variety
- Lollies
- Packaged snacks such as chippies
- Seafood
- Takeaways such as McDonalds, fish and chips, pizza, butter chicken and other ethnic dishes
- Vegetables – for some adults (more so for women).

As is evident from the list above, some parents had a taste for sweet and high fat foods, although some tried to keep this in check, or to hide it (because they were aware that they were eating role models for their children). Parents may also have hidden or downplayed their liking for fizzy drink for the same reason.

#### 4.5.2 Less Popular Foods

##### Children's Unpopular Foods

- Vegetables – for some but not all children. Some children disliked some vegetables but liked others – there was no clear pattern to this (although parents reported that children often rejected ‘new’ vegetables on first tasting them). However, these foods may have become an acquired taste if parents had kept offering them (some made a point of doing so, others stuck to vegetables they knew their children would accept). Potatoes did not count as vegetables in this context
- Spicy or hot food.

##### Adults' Unpopular Foods

- Vegetables – some parents emphasised the importance of vegetables while eating relatively few vegetables themselves. Fathers in particular may have avoided or refused to eat certain vegetables, despite the children being expected to eat them. Parents often commented that a taste for vegetables was best acquired in childhood. Some adults who disliked vegetables grew up in families that did not cook many vegetables, or did not insist on children eating them. Again, potatoes did not count as vegetables in this context, with few adults rejecting them on taste grounds.

#### 4.5.3 Foods and Drinks that were Encouraged

Parents and caregivers routinely encouraged children to eat certain foods or food groups by telling them that these foods were “*good for them*”. Chief among foods that were promoted to children as healthy were:

- Fruit and vegetables – some people emphasised the vitamins and minerals found in fruit and vegetables. Other people simply knew they were healthy foods, but were not sure exactly why, beyond that they were not fattening (with some exceptions, such as bananas and potatoes, which some people perceived as potentially fattening).
- Water, particularly in favour of sweetened drinks such as fizzy drink and cordial. Some people included juice in this sweet drinks category.
- Meat and dairy products, particularly milk. These were regarded as healthy for their protein content, and for the calcium found in milk.

However, despite many families/whānau considering these as healthy foods, some parents regarded dairy products as foods that could be potentially unhealthy if too much was eaten (because of their fat content). A few parents also considered fruit potentially unhealthy on account of their belief that it had a high sugar content. Fatty meats were also considered potentially unhealthy, but reactions were generally to visible rather than hidden fat.

Many parents and caregivers also encouraged foods that they perceive to be nutritious by virtue of having fibre (e.g. whole grain breads).

#### 4.5.4 Foods and Drinks that were Limited

Many parents and caregivers limited certain foods because they perceived that eating them too often, or eating too much of them at a time, could be unhealthy. Chief among foods that were limited for these reasons were:

- Fatty foods, such as pies, fatty meat, hot chips, chippies, cakes and biscuits – because they were high in fat content and considered fattening. Note: Indian participants limited deep fried Indian foods, such as samosas, puris (small deep fried chappatis), tikkis (deep fried potato patties) and bhajjyas (onions or potatoes that were mixed in garam flour).
- Sweet fatty foods may have also been limited because of their sugar content.
- Fizzy drinks – because of their high sugar content.
- Lollies – because of their high sugar content.
- Sweet foods, such as biscuits, sweet cereals, sweet lunchbox snacks such as ‘strings’ because they had a high sugar content.
- Takeaways – which were widely regarded as being high in fat content and fattening.

Fat was linked to being overweight, and to a lesser extent with future health problems (such as heart disease). Sugar was linked to tooth decay, weight gain, and to children getting “*hyper*”.

*“My eldest mokopuna has tooth decay and my second one has tooth decay already – that comes from all the sugary food and junk.”*

#### **Māori Female – Gisborne**

However, some parents and caregivers considered sweet lunchbox snacks such as muesli bars and ‘strings’ to be healthy alternatives to other sweet foods (such as chocolate biscuits and lollies).

Some parents and caregivers also believed that, provided their children were not clearly overweight, there was little or no need to limit their consumption of high fat foods.

#### **4.5.5 Cultural Differences**

##### **Māori**

Many Māori parents and grandparents included boil-up among their favourite foods. Boil-up was usually boiled meat such as pork bones, brisket, meat flaps with puha, watercress or cabbage and potatoes.

However, consumption of boil-up was also often limited because of its fat content, with whānau reserving it for special occasions. Many Māori adults in this study said they enjoyed boil-up. For many it was food they had grown up with, and it was regarded as an economical way to feed a lot of people.

Some of the younger Māori parents were not so keen on boil-up, and did not prepare it for their own whānau.

Māori whānau were also likely to nominate seafood, e.g. shellfish, crayfish, pua, mussels and kina as among their favourite foods.

##### **Pacific Peoples**

Pacific peoples in this study also talked frequently about boil-up. As with Māori, there was something of a generational split among Pacific peoples regarding the popularity of boil-up. Many younger Pacific parents reported that they and their children did not particularly like boil-up, and that they did not cook it at home.

However, older Pacific peoples often included boil-up as a favourite dish. Many Pacific parents noted that their own parents enjoyed boil-up and it was therefore often on the menu for special occasions, as well as for regular shared Sunday lunches with grandparents, uncles, aunties and cousins.