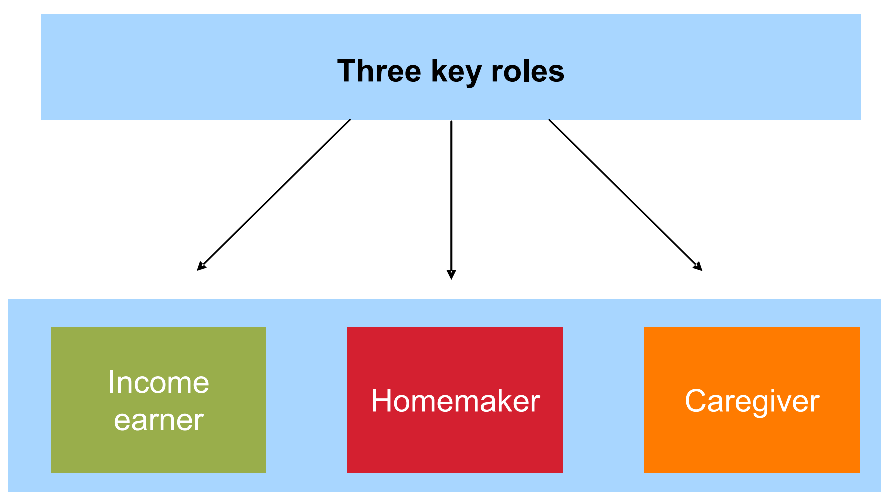
6.0 Eating in the Context of Family/Whānau Functioning

This section of the report explores key adult roles and responsibilities that existed within families/whānau in this study, particularly in relation to food planning and preparation. It also discusses household decision-making dynamics in relation to meals and snacks: who decided what would be eaten, when, and by whom. Finally, it examines the specific rules that existed in relation to breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks across families/whānau in this study.

6.1 Roles and Responsibilities Relating to Family/ Whānau Eating

6.1.1 Key Roles

Three key adult roles existed within families/whānau in this study – across all cultural groups – as shown in the diagram below.



The income earner, homemaker and caregiver roles were not mutually exclusive. Some income earners acted as a main caregiver, for example a mother working part-time to fit in with school and pre-school hours. Similarly, a homemaker almost always took on the role of primary caregiver for children in the household, with most homemakers (usually women) seeing caring for children as implicit in the homemaking role. There were few exceptions to this.

However, the homemaker role did not intersect with the income earner role. People who described themselves as homemakers in this study (usually women) were not in paid employment.

The income earner and caregiver roles could be jointly shared by the adults in a family/whānau, or could be the province of one adult. In the case of single parent households, the parent fulfilled all three roles, but may have derived support from adults outside the household, e.g. with grandparents providing caregiving.

In the context of family/whānau eating practices, decision-making and enforcing, in terms of what was and was not eaten by the children in the family/whānau, could be the preserve of any or all of the above roles. However, the adults who occupied the homemaker and caregiver roles (which may be one and the same role where there was a full-time homemaker) tended to have the most direct influence over what families/whānau, especially children, ate and drank and when. This was because these adults tended to take responsibility for grocery shopping and food preparation, and were 'on the spot' making moment-to-moment decisions when children were asking for food and drinks.

6.1.2 The Income Earner Role

Two-parent Households with a Single Income Earner

In two-parent households with a single income earner, there was usually a male in full-time employment, with the female partner in a full-time caregiver role for children (usually including pre-schoolers). By virtue of being absent from the home more of the time, sole income earners had a limited role (and limited influence) in relation to eating matters for their family/whānau. While they may have held ideas about what children should be eating, this was often left to the adults in the caregiving or homemaking roles because of their greater availability.

Full-time income earners in two-parent households may have shared food preparation and cooking at the weekends and, in a few cases, on weekdays as well. However, it was less common for them to be involved with food planning - although this did occur in some instances, either as a planned activity before doing the regular supermarket shop, or in an ad hoc way while doing the shopping.

Two-parent Households with Dual Income Earners

In households where both parents were working, responsibilities relating to eating were often shared, albeit with mothers typically taking responsibility for the majority of food planning, preparation and cooking (and enforcing eating rules). Lack of confidence – usually based on experience – in a partner's knowledge, experience and judgment in relation to food and eating was sometimes a motivator for taking on more eating-related responsibilities for the family/whānau. In short, mothers often perceived they could 'do better' for their family/whānau, in terms of eating, than fathers could.

The eating-related tasks listed under 'the homemaker role' (see later) were those undertaken by most working mothers.

Note: In some dual income households, the father had taken on the bulk of responsibility for food planning, cooking and/or shopping. In one case this was motivated by a desire to improve the family's diet (a concern not shared by his wife to the same degree).

Working and running a family/whānau placed high demands on parents' time. The impact of time scarcity in relation to eating, especially preparing dinners, was that parents could find themselves reaching for less healthy options in the name of convenience.

Single-parent Households

In single parent households the income earner, by necessity, typically had near sole responsibility for all aspects of eating for his/her family/whānau. Some support may have been given by other family/whānau members, e.g. grandparents or adult siblings providing children with meals when acting as caregivers or helping out with supermarket shopping (to a pre-determined list rather than making purchasing decisions).

Like two-parent households with dual income earners, single parents who were working were pressured for time and sometimes opted for less healthy eating options for convenience.

6.1.3 The Homemaker Role

In this study, the homemaker role was usually occupied by the mother, although a couple of two-parent households had a father in this role, with the mother in paid employment.

The homemaker was responsible for the day-to-day running of the household. Preparing and cooking meals for the family/whānau were two of the key responsibilities and defining characteristics of the homemaker role. (In some households, the homemaker was responsible for providing virtually all meals consumed by the family/whānau. In others, the food preparation and cooking were shared with the father at weekends and, in a few cases, on weekdays as well).

Even where homemakers were sharing the food preparation and cooking roles, they were likely to be making key decisions around what types of foods to buy, which brands to choose, and how much to spend on different food items.

Tasks encompassed by the homemaker role included:

- Providing food for household members, whether cooking or assembling meals (there may have been a requirement to fill stomachs as cheaply as possible where money was tight).
- Shopping for groceries (often within a budget).
- Keeping a mental inventory of what was in the cupboards, and what needed to be stocked up on during the next supermarket shop.
- Planning ahead to ensure there was adequate food to provide meals and snacks for the family/whānau.
- Some homemakers saw it as part of their role to educate their family/whānau about healthy eating, and to model healthy eating behaviour to them.

Where there was no full-time homemaker, the above tasks were shared by the adults involved with paid work outside the home. Time scarcity could lead to healthy eating ideals becoming rapidly eroded in the name of convenience.

Because homemakers were physically present in the home more of the time, they tended to have their ‘finger on the pulse’ in terms of what the family/whānau was eating and when. Emotionally, homemakers tended to see the physical nourishment of their family as a key part of their role in the home. For these reasons, homemakers had the greatest direct influence over the household’s eating, and their own beliefs, practices and learned behaviour were likely to be most influential on the children’s eating.

It is important to note that while males sometimes occupied the homemaker role, they did so in a different way from females. Males in the homemaker role tended to be less detail-oriented than females, which meant that some homemaking responsibilities still fell back on to mothers, regardless of how many hours they were working in paid employment. As a by-product, mothers who were not in the homemaker role were often still making key decisions around what food got purchased and eaten by the family/whānau.

6.1.4 The Caregiver Role

The caregiver role could be occupied by one or more people within a family/whānau. Who occupied this role could be quite fluid, and could be shaped by who was available at the time of need. In most households in this study, one parent – usually the mother – occupied the caregiver role most of the time (when she was at home full-time this morphed into the homemaker role). However, grandparents (usually grandmothers) or adult siblings could also occupy the caregiver role some of the time - this was noted in a number of Māori whānau, and in some Pacific and Asian families.

When the main caregiver was the mother, the responsibilities that went with this role were the same as those for the homemaker role (see above). When a caregiver was a person other than a parent, e.g. a grandparent or adult sibling, they may have been charged with applying the parents' rules around eating. However, this study found that non-parent caregivers may have chosen to follow their own preferences and household norms regarding what to feed the children in their care. This could result in grandparents treating their grandchildren with sweet foods or treats, such as McDonalds, without the parents' knowledge or against their wishes.

While parents may have tried to stipulate what caregivers fed to their children when they were not around, it was an awkward arena, clouded by parental gratitude towards the caregiver, as well as some parental guilt at their own absence. Parents typically felt grateful to caregivers for their support – whether paid or otherwise – and may have been reluctant to dictate or enforce their household's rules around what the children ate.

6.1.5 Food Planning

Adult Roles

Where both parents were in paid work, food planning more often tended to fall to the mother. It was more common for mothers in this study to be the parent who kept a mental inventory of the fridge and cupboards, and to devise a shopping list (whether this existed on paper or merely in her head).

However, in some dual income households, the father or another male caregiver had taken on this role. One Pacific father reported taking responsibility for both food planning and cooking for his household because of his desire to improve his family's diet (a concern that his wife did not share to the same degree). In another household, a Māori grandfather took care of all the food planning and shopping.

In other households, the parents shared the food planning, whether this occurred in an ad hoc fashion as they cruised the supermarket aisles together, or as a planned activity that took place before the regular grocery shop was done.

Where there was a homemaker in the household, this person was more likely to make the key decisions around what types of foods were bought, and how much was spent on different food items. In households without a full-time homemaker, the mother tended to dominate decisions about which foods made their way into the grocery trolley. Some males deferred to their female partners on key decisions, such as which meat or bread to buy, but made sure that their preferred foods in categories such as snack foods were included in the shopping.

Where there was no full time homemaker, food planning and grocery shopping had to be shared somehow or other by the adults in paid work outside the home. Mothers re-entering the workforce could be a trigger to fathers getting more involved in both food planning and cooking, to relieve the pressure on their partner.

> *"Well, I wouldn't say nothing would get done. Things would get done, but it'll either get done with – not so much a screaming match – but done out of pure stress. It was like, 'oh God, why can't someone else do this?' type of thing."*
>
> **Pacific Other Male – Wellington**

As a generalisation, many 'homemaking' responsibilities fell back on to mothers, regardless of how many hours they worked in paid employment. Mothers who were not in the homemaker role were often still making key decisions around what food got purchased and eaten by the family/whānau.

Children and Young People's Roles

Children's involvement in food planning tended to be largely limited to asking their parents to buy certain kinds of products, typically cereals and snack foods they had seen advertised on television (or in other children's lunchboxes).

While children were not often directly involved in food planning, parents did know their food preferences, and took these into account when planning meals, writing shopping lists, or working out what to buy at the supermarket.

Children were often involved with food shopping – particularly preschoolers. While many parents preferred to do grocery shopping without their children present – because it is quicker and there are no spontaneous requests for treats to deal with – sometimes it was inevitable that children went along to the supermarket.

> *"They're always trying to shove stuff into my trolley. Then when I get to the checkout I just tell the checkout [staff] 'take that bar of chocolate [out], take that, take that."*
>
> **Pakeha Female – Christchurch**

Parents with more than a couple of children may have been particularly reluctant to do the supermarket shopping with the children in tow, in order to avoid conflicting requests, e.g. for different types of cereals or biscuits.

Children's requests for specific foods – whether or not they accompanied their parents to the supermarket – tended to revolve around *"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.

Parents often took children's requests into account when deciding what foods to buy – particularly in relation to lunchbox snacks – by giving them some say in terms of what brand, variety or flavour of a particular product was bought. In some families/whānau the children took turns to be the one whose preference dictated what kind of snacks got bought.

The mokopuna in one whānau carried out her own inventory of lunchbox snacks prior to the grandparents going shopping.

> *"She knows what she needs or what she wants to have in her lunches – she'll count how many [packs of] chippies are left. She likes to get snacky things for her lunchbox."*
>
> **Māori Female – Gisborne**

When confronted with children's requests to buy products the family/whānau had not bought before – i.e. that were new or unfamiliar – parents often attempted to work out whether the product was the kind of thing they normally allowed, for example, by checking for sugar or fat content on the packaging.

> *"We have the same view. I'll say, 'the kids want this', and she'll say, 'oh, that's really sugar coated' …. sometimes it has 'sugar-coated' [laughs]. That's a clue. 'Syrup coated' and all that .... If it's something we want to get and haven't tried before then we will definitely read the label. You don't need to read the labels on those coated ones because we all know they're full of sugar."*
>
> **Pacific Other Male – Wellington**

Some parents went by the product category, and the appearance of packaging as a guide to whether it was the kind of food they would normally allow, without going into the detail of exactly what its nutritional value was. Price was also influential.

Some parents had bought their children a new product they were asking for only to see it go uneaten because the children did not like it once they tried it. This tended to make such parents less likely to say 'yes' to similar future requests.

Some older children also asked for specific convenience foods, such as instant cake mixes or 'heat and eat' meals, which they prepared for themselves when they missed the family evening meal because of sporting or other activities.

> *"You know those little square lasagne things? I sometimes have one for dinner because I'm so tired. I just warm it up and eat it before I go to bed … or they [parents] put away a pan [of dinner] for me and I have to warm it up. So sometimes I have the lasagne."*
>
> **Samoan/Niuean Female Teen – Wellington**

When having takeaways the children may have got to choose what type of takeaways they had. They could also influence the decision to get takeaways.

6.1.6 Food Preparation

Adult Roles

In some households in this study, the homemaker (who was in most instances a female) was responsible for virtually all meals consumed by the family. In others, the father shared in the cooking and food preparation at weekends and, in a few cases, on weekdays as well.

In households without a full time homemaker, cooking the evening meal was shared by the income earners, or fell to one or other of them. The person in the primary caregiver role – whether or not they lived in the household – prepared and dispensed snacks and meals when the children were in their care.

When a caregiver such as a grandparent or family friend cared for children in their own home, they may have followed their own food preferences and household norms regarding what was fed to the children. This sometimes resulted in grandparents regularly treating their grandchildren with sweet foods or treats such as McDonalds.

Children and Young People's Roles

Children's involvement with food preparation and cooking was age-related, and tended to start around the age of five years. At this age, many children started to get involved in baking and preparing very simple child-orientated foods such as jellies. They may have initiated or simply participated at this age. Children's motivation to get involved with baking in particular was linked to the *"yummy"* results, which they were keen to eat.

This study suggests that girls were particularly curious and interested in getting involved in baking and simple food preparation – they were often also keen to help their mother. The focus of these activities was on the children enjoying the activity and its results, with the skills involved in baking (measuring, reading the recipe) a welcome by-product rather than the purpose of the activity.

At this age some children were also involved in simple tasks such as preparing vegetables (i.e. peeling and chopping) for the evening meal. Some parents limited their children's involvement to tasks that avoided hot water, sharp knives and use of the stove. The focus of this activity was on learning to participate in routine household tasks and reducing the workload on the cook.

While children in this age group may have been keen to get into the kitchen and help, some parents limited their involvement because it was easier – quicker and less messy – to do it themselves. Particularly when younger siblings also wanted to get involved, parents may have discouraged baking, or saved it for an occasional activity as a treat.

> *[Mum] "We haven't got a very big kitchen …"*
>
> *[Dad] "… they'd drive you nuts …"*
>
> *[Mum] "And they get messy … nanny lets [the four year old] bake … she'll get out the flour and [there's] flour everywhere."*
>
> **Pakeha Family Focus Group – Gisborne**

From around the age of eight years children were often involved in other tasks associated with family/whānau meals, particularly weekday dinners. These included setting the table (if a table was used), clearing away plates at the end of a meal, and washing and drying dishes or loading and unloading the dishwasher. These tasks may have been assigned to children on a permanent basis. The focus of these activities was on sharing in routine household tasks and reducing the workload on parents.

While parents of children in this age group may have been keen to foster their children's growing interest in cooking, and saw it as ultimately desirable that they learnt to cook and participate in family cooking, it could be hard to integrate this into a busy week night routine.

> *"[The eight year old's] getting there slowly. But it depends – if I'm trying to cook a meal for the family, I really don't want any distractions and [to] try to teach her at that time of day isn't great. So sometimes, on the weekends, if it's good timing she can help make pancakes or will butter a sandwich … she's starting to take more of an interest but it's pressure for time."*
>
> **Pakeha Female – Gisborne**

Children of this age were often involved in making their own snacks, and school lunches, although they may have required guidance and supervision. Where there were younger siblings in the household, some children made simple snacks for them (e.g. sandwiches) or got their cereal in the weekends while their parents had a lie in.

By the teenage years, children in this study were often involved in preparing simple meals and snacks, particularly at the weekend, for themselves and their younger siblings or for the entire family/whānau. The focus of these activities may have been on the teenager acquiring cooking skills, or simply on reducing the workload on parents, either occasionally or regularly.

> *"If the kids cook for themselves it's spaghetti and baked beans. Sometimes I leave them to sort themselves out if older ones [teenagers] are here."*
>
> **Pakeha Male – Wairarapa**

Some teenagers also prepared meals for themselves when their after-school activities meant that they were not home for the evening meal with the family/whānau. In some cases, convenience foods such as 'heat and eat' meals were bought specifically for this purpose.

6.2 Decision-making Dynamics Relating to Meals and Snacks

6.2.1 Breakfast Decision-making

Cereal was a breakfast staple in many households. Decisions about what kinds of cereals the family/whānau ate were typically made by the main shopper(s), with input from the children in terms of their likes and dislikes. Children often pestered their parents to buy particular kinds of cereals, and were influenced by television advertising for new cereals.

Parents tended to categorise breakfast cereals according to their perceived healthiness (related primarily to sugar content, and use of colourings) as outlined below:

- Healthy (and usually cheapest): traditional cereals, e.g. Ricies, Cornflakes, Weetbix, porridge, muesli (not cheap, may be bought for adults in household).
- Okay (not particularly unhealthy): more fancy (i.e. sweet and expensive) cereals e.g. Honey Puffs, Nutrigrain (for some);
- Unhealthy (and usually most expensive): the fanciest, often newer types of cereal, e.g. Nutrigrain (for some), Coco Pops, Fruit Loops and other highly sugared and coloured cereals.

> *"… they want those particular breakfast things like Fruit Loop' or whatever they are called. They want those and they're all sugar-coated, and that's what we're fighting – the TV adverts."*
>
> **Pacific Other Male – Wellington**

Children in this study often started to get their own breakfast from the age of seven or eight years. However, they were usually choosing from an agreed range of breakfast foods which parents had deemed acceptable – typically cereals and/or toast and spreads. Most food eaten at breakfast-time was part of a habitual routine, with children sticking to a fairly narrow range of cereals, and toast spreads.

The kind of bread eaten as toast was influenced by the children's tastes as well as the parents' preferences. In some families/whānau the mother's preference dictated what kind of bread the family/whānau ate.

> *"… generally the whole house runs on what I want to eat, and I don't like wholegrain bread. I like white bread – so we stick with the white bread."*
>
> **Pakeha Female – Gisborne**

In other families/whānau, the preferences of the children and/or father were more influential.

> *"[My wife] tries to encourage as much brown bread as possible, but they're [the brown loaves] always the last ones left in the freezer aren't they?"*
>
> **Pakeha Male – Wairarapa**

Some older children in this study were given money to buy breakfast on their way to school. In these cases, the children were ultimately determining where and how they spent their money.

6.2.2 Lunch Decision-making

The mother (or other primary caregiver) was usually the key decision-maker in terms of what went into younger children's lunchboxes (e.g. up to around ten or eleven years of age). Even where young children were making their own lunches, they did so from a range of pre-determined foods (e.g. sandwiches, a piece of fruit, a lunchbox snack, a yoghurt).

Children were often allowed to choose among the range of lunchbox snacks that the family/whānau purchased on a regular basis – once the main shopper had deemed these acceptable (e.g. in terms of sugar and fat content, and price).

Weekend lunches tended to be determined by what was in the fridge, with the food preparer the key decision-maker. However, when the family/whānau was away from home around lunchtime, children often influenced what types of foods were consumed for lunch, e.g. choosing what kinds of takeaways were bought.

6.2.3 Dinner Decision-making

Decisions about what was eaten at dinner-time took place on two levels:

- When the grocery shopping was done, and purchase decisions were made regarding foods and ingredients that constituted main meals (e.g. meat, potatoes, rice, pasta, convenience foods, and frozen or fresh vegetables).
- When whoever was responsibility for cooking dinner considered what they would cook for the evening meal. Their decisions could be influenced by mood, available time and energy levels.

In some households, evening meals were planned some days in advance, so that the supermarket shopping incorporated the required food items. In other households, supermarket shopping regularly included dinner staples, such as potatoes, vegetables and meat, as well as convenience foods such as tinned food, and packaged meals and sauces, so that some kind of meal could be assembled, whether this was planned in advance or decided by the cook on the day.

Dinner decisions were often influenced by what else was going on in the household. When work or after-school commitments ate into potential cooking time, families/whānau may have resorted to convenience foods or takeaways, despite knowing these options were less healthy.

The parents' energy levels also significantly influenced what kinds of meals got cooked, with parents opting for easier (typically less healthy) options when they were tired or unwell.

> *"I've got to make sure I've got something planned and I remember to take something out of the freezer. It might end up being quarter past five and I think, 'there's no way I've got time to cook anything'."*
>
> **Pakeha Female – Gisborne**

6.2.4 Snack Decision-making

In some families/whānau, children were allowed to help themselves to snacks between meals, with few rules around what was consumed. However, when parents observed children snacking, they may have put a limit on what was eaten, or how much was eaten, particularly if it was close to the evening meal.

In other families/whānau, children had to ask before they helped themselves to snacks. This may have been because of the children's ages (e.g. in the pre-school and early primary school years), or down to the family/whānau parenting style (e.g. more hands-on in terms of eating).

Children asked for specific snack foods (often treats such as lollies or packaged snacks) when they knew these were in the house. Parents tended to have rules (firm or loose) around when such snacks may be consumed, and generally adhered to these. Parents' decisions whether or not to grant children's requests were influenced by what else had already been consumed by the child (e.g. in the last hour or that day) and how close it was to a meal-time. Their decisions were also influenced by their mood, e.g. how harassed or tired they were feeling, and whether they felt able to withstand the child's pestering. Some decisions to grant treat snacks were made to 'buy peace' and 'time-out' from children's demands.

> *"I don't give them as much snacks as [my wife] does. Because [she] is there 24/7 and she needs a bit more of a break, so she's more tolerant to give snacks so they will go away and just be quiet and leave her alone."*
>
> **Samoan/Tokelauan Male – Wellington**

6.3 Eating Rules and Guidelines (and Enforcement)

This study found a large number of rules in relation to healthy and unhealthy eating. However, these rules were far from universal, and were sometimes randomly enforced.

> *"No. No rules at all. As far as food goes, no. If it tastes good and they are going to eat it, eat it."*
>
> **Pakeha Female – Auckland**

Specific rules applied in relation to each meal-time and in relation to snacking. These meal and snack-specific rules are outlined below.

6.3.1 Breakfast Rules

There were relatively few explicit breakfast rules in families/whānau. This was because the foods consumed at breakfast tended to fall into habitual patterns, with little variance day-to-day beyond a small range of foods. The following breakfast rules were identified in this study:

- Many families/whānau had a general rule that children ate breakfast, however, there was less routine supervision of older children (e.g. ten years plus).
- Most families/whānau also had an understanding that children may not eat packaged snack foods such as chippies for breakfast.

Enforcement of breakfast rules depended to a large extent on what else parents were trying to get done while children were eating breakfast. However, some rules were not negotiable and appeared to be adhered to by children regardless of whether parents were watching them (e.g. not eating packaged snack foods for breakfast).

6.3.2 Lunch Rules

There were several lunch rules in families/whānau as outlined below. These were linked to the fact that during the week, many children were eating lunch at school.

- In some families/whānau, children were encouraged to eat any uneaten food in their lunchbox before they were allowed to eat other after-school snacks. However, while some parents instigated this rule, it was not always enforced because they recognised that uneaten lunch was often distinctly unappetising by the time it reached home.

- Some families/whānau also stipulated that children had to bring home any lunch not eaten at school, so that the parent or caregiver knew what was and was not being consumed (and this gave a guide as to what not to buy or make in future, or what to leave out of that child's lunchbox).
- Some families/whānau, who included packaged lunchbox snacks in their children's lunches, had rules about the number of packaged snacks allowed as part of school lunch. This number could range from one to as many as five or six, depending on the individual family/whānau. (The researchers note that children who were allowed a greater number of packaged lunchbox snacks tended to be in lower socio-economic families/whānau).
- Some families/whānau only allowed water as a lunch-time drink for children, e.g. taken from home in a sipper bottle.
- Many families/whānau had rules relating to how often their children could buy their lunch on school days. This was not always motivated by health concerns, but was often budget-driven. When lunch was bought infrequently, it was seen as a treat for the child (and in some cases, also for the parent whose task it was to make the lunches).
- Where children were routinely given money to buy their lunch, some families/whānau had rules around what they may buy with that money. However, parents were unlikely to check whether this rule was being adhered to. Primary schools may get around this problem by providing a lunch order sheet for bought lunches (organised through the school) that the child can fill in with parental supervision.

> *"It's not so bad for [the six year old] – because I can fill out a lunch order and I know what he's getting – but with the older two, they take the money and they go to the canteen and goodness knows what they buy. They could spend it all on – I don't even know what."*
>
> **Pakeha Female – Wairarapa**

Enforcement of lunch rules got harder as children got older. Some families/whānau gave older children lunch money on a regular basis and assumed it was actually spent on lunch, but did not ask.

Enforcement of rules around lunch was often aided by schools, many of which had their own rule ensuring that children took uneaten food home in their lunchboxes. Some schools also prohibited chocolate and lollies being taken as part of lunches, and drinks other than water.

6.3.3 Dinner Rules

Many families/whānau had some rules around dinner. At least one, if not both, parents were also likely to be eating dinner with their children (compared to breakfast and lunch, which were often eaten separately), and thus able to monitor what their children were eating. The following dinner rules were identified in this study:

- Some families/whānau emphasised the importance of vegetables and had a rule that children must eat some or all of their vegetables.
- Some families/whānau encouraged their children to eat everything on their plates. Parents often commented that they were brought up this way.
- Other families/whānau allowed some leeway in terms of what got eaten. Their rules may have allowed the child to leave some of a disliked food, provided they had eaten at least some of it.
- Some families/whānau emphasised the nutritional importance of protein and dairy foods, and would allow children to leave their vegetables provided the former were eaten.
- In other families/whānau, the protein and vegetable components of the meal had to be eaten, but children may have been able to leave some of the starch component (e.g. potatoes or rice).
- It was quite common for families/whānau to encourage their children to broaden their tastes by stipulating that the children must try a little bit of unfamiliar foods. In this way, parents hoped that their children would acquire a taste for foods the parents were keen for them to eat (because they were deemed healthy and/or because the parents enjoyed eating them).
- Some parents allowed their children to not eat certain, agreed upon foods that the child did not like. The child may have been able to either leave the food on their plate, or the parent did not dish up the offending food to the child who did not like it.
- It was fairly common practice for parents to use pudding or some sweet food as a bargaining tool in encouraging children to finish their dinner.
- In some families/whānau, children who did not finish their dinner were not allowed post-dinner snacks. In other families/whānau, in this situation any post-dinner snacks were limited to acceptable food groups (e.g. fruit).
- Some families/whānau had a rule that there was one evening meal that everyone must eat at the same time.

Parents described trying to find a balance between enforcing family/whānau dinner rules and accommodating the preferences, and sometimes fluctuating appetites, of individual children. They may have done this by not giving one child a food they knew they did not like, and by adjusting portion sizes according to what they expected that child to eat.

> *"I'll put more on his plate than what I think he needs to eat and I'll say, 'you can eat half of that'. I have to do that because he thinks he's getting a deal that way!"*
>
> **Pakeha Female – Wairarapa**

Enforcing dinner rules could be complicated by the parents' own eating habits. When children observed one or other parent not eating things that the children were supposed to eat, it became difficult to enforce that particular rule. Some mothers reported that the father in the family/whānau was a poor role model in terms of eating vegetables, making it hard to encourage the children to eat theirs.

6.3.4 Snack Rules

Snacks were an accepted part of family/whānau eating routines. Rules around snacks tended to focus on limiting snacks deemed to be less healthy, and ensuring that children did not fill up on snacks at the expense of proper meals. The following snack rules were identified in this study:

- Many families/whānau limited snacks given before meals, for example not allowing any snacks in the hour (or two) leading up to dinner-time.
- Some families/whānau allowed snacking closer to dinner-time, but limited this snacking to pieces of fruit (or, less commonly, raw veges).
- Some families/whānau encouraged fruit as the household snack of choice, and would offer this before any other options. In these households, children were typically allowed to eat as much fruit as was available.
- However, some families/whānau limited the number of pieces of fruit their children ate in a day, for cost reasons.
- A common rule was for treat snacks (such as lollies and chippies) to be banned before a certain time of day – typically mid-morning.

- Parents also typically limited the quantities of treat snacks their children may consume, in a sitting. For example, in one family the parents had a ‘one for each hand’ rule for the number of biscuits a child could take at any one time. In a couple of families/whānau, the parents encouraged portion control, for example, by instructing children to put a handful of chippies in a bowl, rather than eating them straight out of the family-size bag.

> *“I say to them, ‘you don’t have to eat the whole packet of chips in one time or one day, leave enough for the next day or another time’.”*
>
> **Tongan Female – Christchurch**

Enforcement of snack rules required vigilance and motivation on the part of parents and caregivers. Snack rules tended to be less defined than other eating rules, and were more open to fluctuation according to the mood and stress levels of the parent or caregiver who was being asked for snacks. Sometimes parents and caregivers granted treat snacks to ‘buy peace’ and ‘time-out’ from children’s demands, or to create household harmony.