

# 31 The adult and the family unit

## Summary

Growth is no longer a nutritional requirement in adult life, but the maintenance of optimal nutritional stores can be compromised in several ways. The nutritionally relevant factors in adult life include employment, level of physical activity, family structure, housing, and transportation.

## Nutrition and adult life

The nutritional needs of the adult have been discussed in detail in section three of this book. For the adult, growth has ceased and no longer complicates the assessment of nutrient requirements. However, in adulthood a number of life-style changes take place that have implications for nutrition.

### Finding or not finding a job

Not every young person easily finds a job and this can mean limited food-purchasing power and a need to choose foods carefully in order to maintain an adequate nutrient intake.

Employment brings with it a new eating routine, changed economic circumstances and new peer group pressures, each with possible effects on nutritional status.

### Physical activity

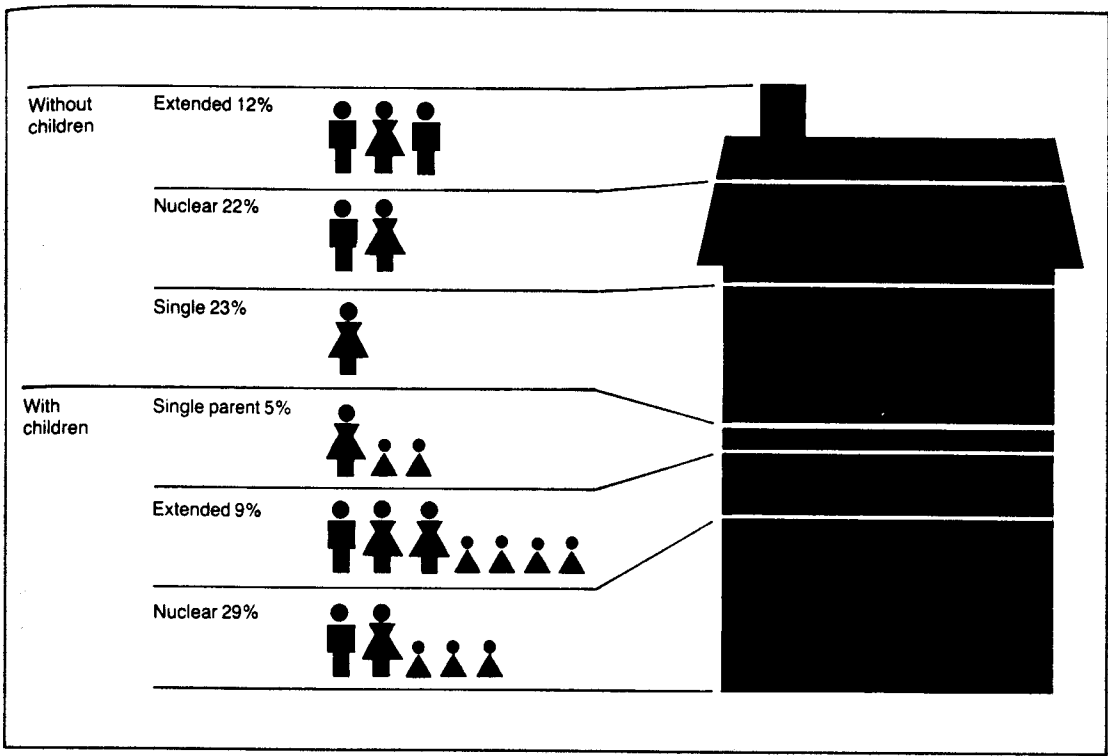
The sporting and recreational patterns are likely to change in adulthood, usually in the direction of reduced physical activity, with the risks of positive energy balance and overweight. For this reason, activities that can be continued into adult life, such as athletics and bush walking, may be preferred to team sports as preparation for adulthood.

### Family obligations

The advent of adulthood brings with it new responsibilities as a move away from the parental home is made and as a new family unit is created. Food purchase and preparation as well as eating patterns are likely to change.

The several variations of the Australian family unit, each with its own needs, are described below.

1. Nuclear family with mother, father and children. In 1979 the average expected family size was 2.9 children for married women aged 40 to 44 years.



2. Single-parent families in which the parent has never married, is divorced or widowed. In 1981, 31 per cent of the male population aged fifteen and over was single, 61 per cent married (excluding 2 per cent married but recorded as permanently separated), 3 per cent widowed, and 3 per cent divorced. For females the figure was 23 per cent single, 59 per cent married (excluding 3 per cent married but permanently separated), 11 per cent widowed, and 3 per cent divorced.

3. Childless couples.

4. Child and aged parent or parents.

5. Three-generation families where children, parents and grandparents live together.

It is likely that the eating patterns of each of these family units will be affected by different factors.

#### Housing conditions

Housing of the adult and family can influence food intake patterns in several ways, for example:

1. according to whether there is a designated eating place in the home;
2. the extent to which home production of fruits, vegetables, and herbs is possible;
3. proximity of neighbourhood shops, shopping centre, or food market (for fruit, vegetables, fish, and meat); and

*Figure 31.1* Proportions of different family unit types in Australia, each of which may influence differently food choice.

4. according to whether the dwelling is rural, rural town, provincial city, or major metropolitan.

#### Transportation

Access to public transport, ownership of car, motor cycle or bicycle can influence food choice and energy balance.

#### Further reading

ENGLISH, B. A. *Families in Australia: A profile*. University of New South Wales Family Research Unit, Kensington, 1978.

KRUPINSKI, J. and STOLLER, A. *The Family in Australia: social, demographic and psychological aspects*. Second edition. Pergamon Press, Sydney, 1978.

*Social Indicators, No. 4, 1984*. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, 1984.

#### Questions

1. Consider the effects of grandparents on the eating behaviour of the family with whom they live.
2. To what extent do the canteen facilities at place of employment influence food intake patterns?
3. A 23-year-old physically active man will shortly be married. To what extent could his forthcoming marriage affect his body weight?
4. Where is it possible to eat in the home and how could the place where food is eaten influence food intake?
5. What advice would you give a single father of 25 years with a three-year-old son about food selection?

# FOOD & NUTRITION IN AUSTRALIA

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Nelson

First published 1981  
Second edition 1982  
Reprinted 1983  
Reprinted 1984 twice  
Reprinted 1985  
Reprinted 1986  
Third edition 1988  
Reprinted 1989  
Reprinted 1992

Thomas Nelson Australia  
102 Dodds Street South Melbourne 3205

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© Methuen Australia Ltd 1982  
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Cover design by Green Poles Design  
Illustrated by Neville Todd  
Photographs on pages 20, 27, 28, 37, 46 and 66 by Peter Wilson  
Set in 10/11 Garamond by SRM Productions, Malaysia  
Printed in Singapore by  
Kyodo Printing Co. Pte Ltd

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National Library of Australia  
Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Food and nutrition in Australia.

3rd rev. ed.  
ISBN 0 17 007343 2.

1. Food. 2. Nutrition. 3. Food — Social aspects.  
— Australia. I. Wahlqvist, Mark L. II. Briggs,  
David R., 1944 — . III. Todd, Neville.

641'.0994

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