

Providing Food for Your Homestay Guests

We get many questions about food from our hosts as well as the students who book a placement through the Australian Homestay Network (AHN). This document contains information about meal expectations as well as some tips to make it easier for you to have a happy, healthy and well-fed guest.

Please do not hesitate to [get in touch with your local AHN office](#) if you run into any issues about food or other aspects of a homestay placement.

Student Meal Expectations

Each guest will have chosen a meal package when applying for homestay. The placement report you receive will detail your guest's selected meal plan. Any specific dietary requirements will be discussed with you prior to accepting a placement. If you don't know what food you are required to provide, please contact your local office immediately.

AHN offers the following meal packages:

- **Complete Homestay:** Host provides 3 meals, 7 days / week
- **Traditional Homestay:** Host provides breakfast and dinner, Mon-Fri, 3 meals Sat-Sun
- **Dinner-Only Homestay:** Host provides dinner only 7 days / week
- **No-Meals Homestay:** No meals provided by the host

Please note that available packages will vary depending on your state.

A list of foods deemed adequate for each meal can be found below:

Breakfast: Cereal and milk, toast and spreads, fruit, juice, tea and coffee are a great start. Some Asian students may also request noodles or rice for breakfast.

Hosts can have a hot breakfast such as eggs / bacon etc. available for guests if they wish. It is not a requirement however.

Lunch: Guests will require a meal equivalent to a lunch size portion. This can be leftovers from the previous night's dinner and a piece of fruit. Sandwiches are also an option with fillings of meat, lettuce, cheese, tomato, salad etc. Please be aware though, most Asian students may not eat sandwiches as they are not used to them.

Dinner: A well balanced, dinner sized meal should be prepared for your guests. Meals need to include meat or other protein, some vegetables and pasta, rice or noodles. Dessert should be offered if others in the home are having dessert at the table.

Snacks: Offer guests a basic fruit bowl with options like oranges/apple/bananas. Hosts should allow for up to two pieces of fruit per day.

Confectionery, muesli bars, crackers, soft drinks and other snack foods are not included in homestay fees and it is up to you if you wish to provide these types of snacks. We advise guests they will need to purchase these at their expense.

Tip #1 After your guest has arrived and had time to settle in, sit down with your guest to go through your house rules and discuss the meal package they have chosen, what meals you will be providing them, and approximate mealtimes. Ask them what they usually like to eat for breakfast / lunch / dinner (depending on the package they're on) and if there is anything they don't like to eat.

*NOTE: Some hosts contact their guests before they are due to arrive so everyone can start getting to know each other. This is also an opportunity to ask about the foods they like to eat etc. and even prepare a sample meal plan to gauge what kind of dishes the guest would be comfortable eating.

Tip #2 Take your guests with you, or talk to them before you go shopping, to find out what foods they do or do not like. This will make meal planning easier.

Tip #3 Please ensure you keep adequate grocery items in the cupboard for meals such as breakfast and/or lunch, that guests are required to prepare by themselves. Hosts should prepare dinner for guests.

Tip #4 Take some time to show your guests what to do when preparing meals. Some guests will not be accustomed to making their own meals and many will not be familiar with typical Australian food.



Food – Common Issues and Answers

We don't expect you to make major dietary changes because you're hosting a student, but you will want to know something about your guest's food preferences. **Always find out what your guest likes and doesn't like.** There are several ways to find out what they are:

- Ask your guest to go to the grocery store with you and point out things he or she likes.
- Ask him or her, "What do you usually eat at home for breakfast?"



Consider their 'normal' behaviours as if they were at home. Toast and sandwiches aren't normal for some guests. Some prefer leftover rice and a salad for breakfast instead of cereal or an egg and toast.



Just as some of us are more adventurous than others in our eating habits, so are students. **Some are hesitant to try new foods.** One homestay guest refused to eat spinach noodles at first because she thought they were made of grass!



The **customs of other countries may make it difficult for a student to adjust** to getting food out of your cupboard or refrigerator, but it's important to let your guest know what's available. Except where a family member or guest has dietary restrictions, whatever food is available to the family should also be available for your guests.



It's very important to **respect dietary restrictions based on religious beliefs and practices.** These will have been mentioned to you before confirming the placement but it's a good idea to ask your guest if there are foods he or she cannot eat because of religious beliefs. For example, Muslims do not eat pork, most Seventh-day Adventists don't eat beef or pork or anything with alcohol in it, and some Buddhists are vegetarians. Usually the limitations are easy to work around in planning your menus. For example, if you are serving pork chops for dinner, you can easily prepare a mince patty for a guest who doesn't eat pork.



Ask your guest to cook for you. Most students like to prepare a meal that would be typical in their country. The guest would enjoy shopping with you for the ingredients and teaching you how to prepare some dishes. Of course, the most fun comes from cooking together. Learn how your guest cuts onions, for example. **Always ask for recipes.** Most guests are delighted to have you ask for and try favourite family recipes from their country. They can translate them if necessary. Their mothers (and sometimes fathers) are pleased, too!



Be sure that your guest is getting enough to eat. **The most common food-related problem we hear about from guests is that they are still hungry at the end of a meal or between meals.** There are several possible reasons for this:

- Your guest may be used to more variety at each meal; one-dish meals are not an international custom.
- Your guest doesn't like the food.
- Your guest may be very active and burn a lot of calories, so a salad-and-sandwich dinner doesn't fill him or her up.
- Your guest doesn't take seconds when they are offered. In some cultures, it's impolite to accept food the first time it's offered or to ask for more. Whatever the reasons might be, it's really very important to be extra solicitous at mealtime to ensure that your guest isn't leaving the table hungry.



Ensure there is variety in the meals you provide to guests. Some dishes we might commonly eat – such as casseroles - are strange to many guests as they are used to several dishes of separate veggies, fruit, meat, starch, etc. **Rice is a staple in many diets around the world and is eaten at every meal.** Most guests prefer short-grain steamed rice.



Some extra points to note:

- Be clear with your guest regarding the family dinner hour.
- Ask your guest to call if they will be late or won't be coming home for dinner.
- You are not required to cook dinner for your guest if they arrive home late, but you do need to leave food for them to reheat.

Frequently Asked Questions

What will my guest like to eat?

Ultimately, international students are here to experience Australia, therefore should be eating the everyday foods you prepare in your home. Some guests will be very easy-going about food and others will have a harder time adapting or will just be pickier eaters. You'll need to figure this out through conversation and observation. In time, you'll find some go-to favourites and you can also invite your guest to cook with you. It will be fun, you'll learn new dishes, and you'll get used what your guest likes and doesn't.

Do I just buy the food or do I need to cook for my guest?

You can choose the level of homestay you provide from our list of packages (some meals or no meals). Breakfast and lunch are self-serve, so you will only need to have food available for your guest but you don't need to prepare it. We ask that dinner (if you've chosen to offer it) is served at least 5 days each week and includes interaction and conversation with your guest. AHN payments are reflective of each package offered; reimbursing our hosts for their costs and effort.

Meals may sound like a hassle at first but our hosts confirm what we know to be true – that mealtimes are the best and most rewarding times to connect and build friendships with your guests, especially if you are cooking for yourself or your family anyway. Including your guest in mealtimes will make a much richer experience for you and for your guest.

Be clear with your guest which food is theirs and which you would prefer they do not use. If you have chosen to host a guest who is on a no meals plan, you only need to make the kitchen available to your guest.



What if my guest does not like my cooking?

Some guests will eat anything and some are very picky. But don't worry, If your guest isn't connecting with the food in your house, offer to take them to the store with you so they can pick out things they like. You can also invite them to teach you to cook a dish they enjoy or help them find recipes and local ethnic markets if they are new to cooking, but just miss the taste of home. You may also want to create a dedicated shelf so they can keep their favourite foods separate from the household pantry. Sometimes something as simple as finding a sauce or condiment from home can allow your guest to easily turn some simple meat and vegetables into something they will love.



Can you provide recipes?

There are lots of great websites with recipes if you need some help with meal planning; taste.com.au is a great one to get started. You can also take a look at budget-friendly meal ideas from [Better Homes & Gardens](#).

What if my guest is vegetarian or only eats Halal or some special diet?

You will be able to specify in your profile whether you are willing to support special diets.

What is Halal and is it hard to incorporate it into our family meals?

Overall, cooking Halal is usually less trouble than it sounds, especially if you live in a city where Halal butchers are nearby.

Halal is a process through which meat is butchered and treated, like Kosher. It is the same to prepare Halal meals as meals with conventional meat. You must avoid pork and alcohol and you just need to keep the Halal dishes distinct from the other. However, when a guest identifies as a Halal eater, it is worth having a conversation about it. Some may be very strict in their Halal practices but others may be happy to simply avoid pork and alcohol.

Here are some [Halal recipes](#) made from ingredients that should be easy to find at major supermarkets.

If I spend more than my budget buying food requested by my guest, can I get reimbursed by AHN?

If your guest asks for special food, they need to buy that themselves (not ask you to buy it and reimburse you). Invite your guest to go to the store with you if you can, then give them the chance to buy the special things they want (within reason). It may be an interesting opportunity for you to learn about local international markets or foods you wouldn't normally buy. Ultimately though, they are here to experience Australia, therefore should be eating the everyday foods you prepare in your home.

