National Institute of Construction Skills

SUPPORTING YOUR APPRENTICE

Healthy Eating, Physical Strength and Stress Management Parent Pack

About this Pack

This pack gives parents and carers practical tools to help an apprentice under 18 eat well, build strength safely for trade work, and manage stress.

Apprentices are still growing while doing physical work, often outdoors and from very early in the morning. Good food, safe strength and a way to handle pressure help them stay safe on site, learn well on NICS Training Days, and enjoy the job.

How to Use this Pack

- **Do it together.** Let your apprentice choose which tools to try and fill them in themselves.
- **Focus on energy and strength, not weight or looks.** Talk about food as fuel for the job, not as good or bad.
- **Start small.** One change that sticks is better than five that don't.
- **Check in, don't check up.** A relaxed chat every week or two works better than daily reminders.

This pack offers general information only. For health concerns, speak to a GP, dietitian or physiotherapist.

Tools in this Pack

Part	Tools
Part 1: Healthy Eating	1. Fuel for the workday 2. Lunchbox builder 3. Drinks, hydration and energy drinks 4. Eating well on an apprentice wage
Part 2: Physical Strength for the Trades	5. Safe lifting basics 6. Pre-work warm-up 7. Building strength safely 8. Recovery, aches and injuries
Part 3: Managing Stress	9. Spotting signs of stress 10. The stress bucket 11. Quick calm-down techniques 12. Conversation starters 13. When to get help

Part 1: Healthy Eating

Tool 1: Fuel for the Workday

Eating regularly through the day keeps energy, concentration and mood steady on site. Skipping breakfast before an early start is one of the most common reasons apprentices feel flat by mid-morning.

When	Why it matters	Easy ideas
Before leaving home	Fuels the first few hours of physical work	Toast with peanut butter, cereal with milk, a smoothie, leftovers
Smoko (morning break)	Tops up energy before it drops	Fruit, yoghurt, a sandwich, cheese and crackers
Lunch	Gets them through the afternoon safely	Wraps or rolls with protein, leftovers, rice or pasta salad
Arvo snack	Helps avoid a slump on the drive home	Fruit, nuts, a muesli bar, a boiled egg
Dinner	Helps the body recover and grow	A balanced family meal

Talk about it: When during the day do you feel most flat? What could you eat before then?

Tool 2: Lunchbox Builder

A good work lunch has something from each of these groups. Mix and match to keep it interesting.

Group	Examples
Energy (wholegrains)	Wholemeal bread, wraps, rolls, rice, pasta, crackers
Protein (strength and repair)	Chicken, tuna, eggs, cheese, beans, leftover meat
Fruit and veg	Apples, bananas, carrot sticks, cherry tomatoes, salad
Dairy or alternatives	Yoghurt, cheese, milk
Water	A large bottle, frozen overnight in hot weather

Food safety on site: use an insulated bag with an ice brick, especially when lunch sits in a ute or site shed all morning.

Our Lunch Plan for the Week

Day	Lunch	Snacks
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		

Tool 3: Drinks, Hydration and Energy Drinks

Water is the best drink on site. Even mild dehydration can cause headaches, tiredness and poor concentration, which raises the risk of mistakes and injuries.

Hydration Tips

- Start the day with a drink of water, not just coffee or an energy drink.
- Sip regularly through the day rather than drinking a lot at once, especially in hot weather.
- Pale yellow urine is a good sign. Dark yellow urine means drink more water.
- In the heat, watch for headache, dizziness, cramps or nausea. Stop, rest in the shade and drink water, and tell a supervisor.

About Energy Drinks

Energy drinks are common on worksites, but they are not recommended for young people. They are high in caffeine and often sugar. They can cause a racing heart, anxiety and poor sleep, which leads to more tiredness and more energy drinks the next day.

Talk about it: How many energy drinks or soft drinks are you having a day? What could you swap one for?

Tool 4: Eating Well on an Apprentice Wage

Buying breakfast, lunch and drinks from the servo or food van every day adds up quickly and is usually less filling than food from home.

Money-Saving Tips

- Cook extra at dinner and pack leftovers for lunch.
- Make lunches in bulk on Sunday, such as a batch of wraps or a pasta salad.
- Buy a large water bottle and refill it instead of buying drinks.
- Keep easy snacks at home that can be grabbed on the way out.
- Treat takeaway as a once-a-week choice, not a daily habit.

Food Spending Check

	Bought food this week ($)	**Food from home this week ($)**
Breakfast		
Lunch		
Snacks		
Drinks		
Total		

Teaching your apprentice to cook a few simple meals is one of the most useful life skills you can pass on.

Part 2: Physical Strength for the Trades

Tool 5: Safe Lifting Basics

Back, shoulder and knee injuries are common in the trades, and young workers are at higher risk because they are new to the work and keen to prove themselves. Safe habits learned now protect them for their whole career.

As part of their apprenticeship, apprentices complete nationally accredited training, including practical training in work health and safety (WHS). On most work sites there will also be site-specific safety instructions, such as inductions, safe work method statements and toolbox talks, that your apprentice must follow. You can support this by reminding them to follow site safety rules and to raise any safety concerns with their supervisor.

Before Lifting, Ask:

1. Do I need to lift this at all, or is there a trolley, hoist or other equipment?
2. Is it too heavy or awkward for one person? If so, get help.
3. Is the path clear and is there somewhere to put it down?

When Lifting:

- Stand close to the load with feet apart.
- Bend at the knees and hips, not the back.
- Keep the load close to the body.
- Avoid twisting. Turn by moving the feet.
- Lift smoothly, without jerking.

Tell your apprentice: it is always OK to say “I need a hand with this” or “I haven’t been shown how to do this safely.” Their employer has a legal duty to provide safe work and proper training.

Tool 6: Pre-Work Warm-Up

A five-minute warm-up before starting physical work helps loosen muscles and reduce the risk of strains, especially on cold early mornings.

Movement	How	Time
March on the spot	Lift knees, swing arms	1 minute
Shoulder rolls	Roll shoulders forwards, then backwards	30 seconds
Arm circles	Small circles, getting bigger	30 seconds
Trunk turns	Hands on hips, gently turn side to side	30 seconds
Hip circles	Hands on hips, slow circles each way	30 seconds
Calf raises	Rise up onto toes and lower slowly	30 seconds
Gentle squats	Bend knees, keep chest up, stand again	1 minute

Movements should feel easy and never painful. Many sites run a group warm-up. If theirs doesn't, your apprentice can do this at home before leaving or on arrival.

Tool 7: Building Strength Safely

Strength training can help apprentices handle the physical side of the job and reduce injury risk. Teenagers can train safely when they focus on good technique rather than heavy weights.

Safe Strength Habits

- **Technique first.** Learn correct form with light weight or body weight before adding load.
- **Get guidance.** A qualified trainer, physiotherapist or school PE teacher can set up a safe program.
- **Balance the body.** Trade work often overloads one side or the same muscles. Include core, back and both sides of the body.
- **Count the workday.** A heavy physical day is already training. Rest days matter.
- **Stop if it hurts.** Sharp pain or pain that lasts is a signal to stop and get it checked.

Simple At-Home Routine (2 to 3 Times a Week)

Exercise	Builds	Example
Squats	Legs, for lifting from the ground	2 sets of 10
Push-ups (or knee push-ups)	Chest, shoulders, arms	2 sets of 8
Plank	Core, to protect the back	2 holds of 20 to 30 seconds
Glute bridge	Hips and lower back	2 sets of 10
Bird dog	Back and core balance	2 sets of 8 each side

A Warning About Supplements

Pre-workout products, fat burners, "muscle builders" and steroids are sometimes passed around on worksites and gyms. Many are not suitable for under-18s, some contain undeclared or banned ingredients, and steroids carry serious health risks. Talk to a GP before your apprentice takes any supplement. Regular meals with enough protein are all most young people need.

Tool 8: Recovery, Aches and Injuries

Some muscle soreness is normal in the first months of a physical job. Pain that is sharp, gets worse, or doesn't settle is not normal and needs attention.

Normal soreness	Get it checked
Dull ache after a hard day	Sharp or shooting pain
Eases within a day or two	Lasts more than a few days or keeps coming back
Feels better with gentle movement	Swelling, numbness, tingling or weakness
Doesn't stop them working normally	Pain that wakes them at night or changes how they move

Helping the Body Recover

- Good sleep is when muscles repair. See the Fatigue and Time Management Parent Pack.
- Eat a proper meal with protein after work.
- Gentle stretching or a walk on rest days can ease stiffness.

If they are hurt at work: they must report it to their supervisor straight away, even if it seems minor. This protects their health and any workers' compensation claim. Encourage them to see a GP and keep a record of what happened.

National Institute of Construction Skills

Part 3: Managing Stress

Tool 9: Spotting Signs of Stress

Some stress is normal when starting an apprenticeship. It becomes a problem when it lasts for weeks or starts affecting sleep, eating, mood or safety at work.

Common Pressures for Apprentices

- A new environment with older workers and a different culture
- Fear of making mistakes or being yelled at
- Long days, early starts and NICS Training Days assessments
- Money pressures, such as car costs, tools and board
- "Pranks", teasing or initiation behaviour that goes too far

Signs to Watch For

Body	Mood	Behaviour
Headaches or stomach aches	Irritable or short-tempered	Not wanting to go to work
Trouble sleeping	Worried or on edge	Withdrawing from family and friends
Changes in appetite	Low, flat or teary	More alcohol, vaping or energy drinks
Constant tiredness	Losing interest in things they enjoy	Secretive about work

NICS apprentices also have free access to the support of an Accredited Mental Health Social Worker. They can help support wellbeing and help tackle obstacles that might get in the way of work and training. We can support apprentices not only with things related to training and work, but also other areas like relationship stressors, money matters, concerns with mood, or if they're just wanting to check in and talk with someone.

You or you apprentice can ask their trainer to speak with the mental health social worker, or if they'd feel more comfortable to contact them directly email support@nics.com.au. The response is usually within a few days.

If you or your apprentice need to speak with someone sooner contact:

- 000 for any immediate safety concerns
- [https://tel:1800551800/]1800 551 800 - Kids Helpline 24/7 support service (for ages 5 to 25 years)1300 642 111 – MATES in Construction, 24/7 support service for people in construction
- 13 11 14 - Lifeline 24/7 all ages support service

If you notice several of these for more than two weeks, it's time for a conversation and possibly a GP visit.

Tool 10: The Stress Bucket

Imagine stress as water filling a bucket. Pressures pour in from the top. Helpful habits are the taps that let stress drain out. If the bucket fills faster than it drains, it overflows.

Use this activity together to see what is filling the bucket and what helps empty it.

What's filling my bucket (pressures)	What helps empty it (my taps)

Ideas for taps: sleep, sport or the gym, time with mates, music, being outdoors, gaming in moderation, talking to someone, a hobby.

Talk about it: Which pressure could be made smaller? Which tap could you use more often?

Tool 11: Quick Calm-Down Techniques

These techniques take a minute or two and can be used on a smoko break, in the car or before bed. Practising them when calm makes them easier to use when stressed.

Technique	How to do it
Box breathing	Breathe in for 4, hold for 4, breathe out for 4, hold for 4. Repeat four times.
5-4-3-2-1 grounding	Notice 5 things you can see, 4 you can hear, 3 you can touch, 2 you can smell and 1 you can taste.
Step away	Take a short walk, get a drink of water, or get some fresh air before reacting.
Name it	Say to yourself what you're feeling, such as "I'm frustrated because...". Naming it helps it settle.
Brain dump	Before bed, write down what's on your mind and one thing to do about it tomorrow.

My go-to technique: _____

When I'll practise it: _____

Tool 12: Conversation Starters

Car trips, meals and side-by-side jobs are often easier moments to talk than a formal sit-down. Listen more than you advise.

- "What's been the best and worst part of your week?"
- "How are the people at work treating you?"
- "Is anything happening at work that you're not sure is OK?"
- "What are you eating during the day? Is it enough to get you through?"
- "Is your body coping with the work? Any aches that aren't going away?"
- "What's filling up your stress bucket at the moment?"
- "Is there anything I could do that would make things easier?"

If they open up: thank them for telling you, stay calm, and ask what would help before offering solutions. If they talk about bullying, harassment or unsafe work, take it seriously and help them get support.

National Institute of Construction Skills

Tool 13: When to Get Help

Use these tables to find the right support. **In an emergency, call 000.**

National Services (All States)

If you notice…	Contact
General health, nutrition or injury questions	Your GP, or healthdirect – 1800 022 222 (24/7) – healthdirect.gov.au
Questions about healthy eating	Eat for Health (Australian Guide to Healthy Eating) – eatforhealth.gov.au, or ask a GP to refer to a dietitian
Worries about eating, weight or body image	Butterfly Foundation – 1800 33 4673 – butterfly.org.au
Stress, anxiety or feeling down	Kids Helpline – 1800 55 1800 (ages 5–25, 24/7) – kidshelpline.com.au headspace (ages 12–25) – headspace.org.au Beyond Blue – 1300 22 4636 – beyondblue.org.au
Mental health support in construction	MATES in Construction – 1300 642 111 – mates.org.au
Bullying at work	The apprentice's Apprenticeship Support Network provider, or the Fair Work Commission – fwc.gov.au
Sexual harassment or assault	1800RESPECT – 1800 737 732 (24/7) – 1800respect.org.au
Your apprentice is in crisis	Lifeline – 13 11 14 (24/7) – lifeline.org.au

State Services

If you notice…	Queensland	South Australia
Unsafe work, manual handling or heat risks	WorkSafe Queensland – 1300 362 128 – worksafe.qld.gov.au	SafeWork SA – 1300 365 255 – safework.sa.gov.au
A work injury and workers' compensation	WorkCover Queensland	ReturnToWorkSA – 13 18 55 – rtwsa.com
You want parenting advice or support	Parentline Queensland and NT – 1300 30 1300 – parentline.com.au	Parent Helpline – 1300 364 100 Parenting SA guides – parenting.sa.gov.au

Young people can contact services like Kids Helpline, headspace and Butterfly confidentially. You can encourage and support your apprentice to make contact themselves.

National Institute of Construction Skills

Document Version Control

Department / Organisation Title	National Institute of Construction Skills
Document Name	NICS_06_017 Supporting your apprentice_ Healthy Eating, Physical Strength and Stress Management Parent Pack V1
Version No.	One (1)
Effective Date	27.10.2026

Relevant Qualification (If applicable)
Not applicable – resource for parents and carers of apprentices under 18

Authorship and Approval

Name	Position	Role	Action Date
Lauree Skene	RTO Compliance Coordinator	Co Author	27.10.2026
Dayna Price	Accredited Mental Health Social Worker	Co Author	27.10.2026

Version History

Version No.	Action Date / Person	Summary of Revisions
One (1)	27.10.2026 L. Skene	• Original version. Healthy eating, physical strength and stress management parent pack created for parents and carers of apprentices under 18.

Distribution List

Position	Name	Notes / Area
President	Chris Munday	All relevant Trainers & Assessors and student support staff. This document is intended for distribution to parents and carers of apprentices under 18.
General Manager (GM)	Todd Aitken	
RTO Compliance Coordinator	Lauree Skene	
Head Trainer	Ruby Harrison	
Administration Coordinator / Student support	Paige Reynolds	