

## Cooking for Blokes – Men’s Cooking Class.

Cooking is an art and while this may come easily to some of us, others may not have had the need or opportunity to learn such skills and culinary prowess. It was for these reasons that during November and December last year, Dhelkaya Health’s Living Well team, Dietitian- Ingrid Phyland and Community Health Nurse- Jenny Miko, together with Mahira Sobral from Castlemaine Community House, developed a program to promote healthy eating and improve cooking skills for men who wanted to learn how to cook.



The classes were held at Castlemaine Community House commercial kitchen and led by the charismatic founder and head chef of Bar Midland, Alex Perry, who has a wealth of culinary knowledge and a great sense of humour-a perfect facilitator.

“Alex was a very relaxed and patient teacher, taking time to show and explain the order things needed to be done with a particular dish and explaining reasons behind each step of the process. The participants found this extremely helpful and had many questions that flowed into terrific discussions.” Said Jenny.

When the group were asked why they signed up for the course, one comment was; “I burn water so I thought I’d better learn how to cook.”

Dhelkaya Health’s Dietitian, Ingrid, worked with Alex to create a 4-week menu. While the main focus was on teaching culinary skills, Ingrid also discussed the nutritional value of the food that was to be prepared and healthy substitution options. She dispelled myths and created a safe space for the participants to share past experiences. Alex carried this theme along in his demonstrations, always putting forward other potential food substitution possibilities.

Each week during the two-and-a-half hour sessions, the men worked on particular themes. In week 1, the participants learned about preparation of eggs by scrambling, poaching, and frying. Alex taught the group how to prepare tasty egg and lettuce sandwiches with home-made mayonnaise. Delicious!

The following week’s theme was ‘Fake-Away’ instead of the easier ‘Take-Away’ option. Participants learned how to make and cook hamburgers patties and assemble a cheaper and nutritionally balanced meal compared to a bought choice. The men were given plenty of individual attention from

Alex. The atmosphere was relaxed and pleasant, with everyone chatting and laughing while working with great concentration on perfecting culinary creations.



During the third week, Alex took everyone through a journey where braising flavour sensations such as stews, were explored. It was hands-on and engaging. Comments included how amazing and simple yet rewarding it was to create something so delicious from just a few basic ingredients.

What was particularly valuable and conveyed so well by Alex was learning about the importance of using fresh, high-quality ingredients. The group learned about simple cooking techniques and timing, understanding how these can transform a dish. It wasn't just about following a recipe, but about understanding the principles of cooking.



Deserts wrapped up the last week with Alex teaching the men how to prepare a delicious fruit crumble. Alex gave the group the confidence and encouragement to experiment with new ingredients and techniques.

Moreover, there was a keen interest in the provenance of ingredients, often discussing and opting for locally-sourced, seasonal produce to recreate the authenticity of the class situation.

The shared experience of preparing and enjoying a meal creates a sense of connection with the other people in the group. It's a form of social exchange that engages all your senses and leaves you with practical skills and memories that last long after the class is over.

We're hoping to run more classes and these will be advertised through Men's Sheds, Dhelkaya Health's social media platforms and Mount Alexander Shire-What's on? For more information, contact Jenny Miko through Dhelkaya Health on 5479 1000.

