Chapter 4
How Convenience Is Shaping Australian Diets: The Disappearing Dessert

Image 4.1 Birthday party, Melbourne 1946 (Source: Museum of Victoria)

Convenient ways of eating include food that is pre-prepared and assembled or heated at home, food prepared outside of the home (such as takeaway), or catered food eaten outside the home. Its ubiquity signals the industrialisation of the pantry and of Australian domestic cooking. The range and types of foods served in Australian homes, cafés, hotels and restaurants have grown dramatically over the last 100 years, particularly beginning in the 1960s–1980s. Additionally, home-meal replacements are becoming increasingly prominent in contemporary supermarkets and delicatessens. In this chapter the replacement of home-prepared and – cooked puddings by pre-prepared sweets, together with the opportunity to consume sweet

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foods at any time (inside and outside the home) illustrates vividly the dietary impact of the rise of convenience foods. Another example of convenience is provided by the increasing consumption of takeaway and eating out.

4.1 The Case of the Disappearing Dessert

Desserts, sweets, or puddings are still the final flourish of the Australian family meal before tea or coffee arrives. Nevertheless, the role and significance of dessert has been transformed over the last 50 years, illustrating larger trends in family dining in Australia and elsewhere in the developed world. In the US it has been noted that desserts are becoming unpopular in restaurants due to "excessive size and inflated prices" (Siemering 2004, p. 56).

From a health perspective the disappearance of desserts is hardly a cause for concern. Surely they do nothing for people's weight, heart or blood sugar. However, we propose that the usually humble homemade pudding has largely been replaced by less nutritious and more energy-dense sweets that are no longer structurally embedded in a mealtime (Douglas 1982), and have become widely available and accessible day and night. In this regard, the replacement of dessert by ubiquitous processed sweet snack foods exemplifies the widespread growth of mass-produced convenience foods which may be more energy-dense than home-made offerings and have been implicated in the growing prevalence of overweight and obesity.

Desserts were a conspicuous feature of the Lucky Generations' accounts of family meals. The family dinner frequently finished with a pudding or dessert which consisted of sweet carbohydrate combinations such as baked and steamed puddings, rice puddings, or baked custards, with lighter desserts such as stewed fruit, jelly or junket offered in summer. Desserts were a comparatively inexpensive way for mothers to display their culinary skills and satisfy hungry husbands and children. Home-baked scones and biscuits served a similar purpose and were made for after-school snacks. Particularly during winter, English-style food patterns were maintained with puddings and desserts that were often described as heavy or stodgy. The most extreme and incongruous example of this could be seen on Christmas day, with families concluding eating the special holiday roast midday dinner with a Christmas pudding, made of flour, suet or other fat and filled with dried fruit. The inappropriateness of this dish for a hot summer's Christmas day appears to have been recognised but the tradition was nevertheless maintained to celebrate the connection with the UK (Walker and Roberts 1988) and the custom continues to this day in some Australian households. In the early part of the twentieth century Mary Gilmore recalled that people always kept golden syrup, treacle, jam, coconut, ginger and dried fruits on hand in their cupboards to make desserts and puddings (Gilmore 1934).

Factory-produced food products such as self-raising flour, custard powder and tinned fruits and vegetables were available before WWI, as was a range of biscuits, cakes and pies and over 100 varieties of confectionary (Farrer 2005; Santich 1995). The demand for short cuts in food preparation in the form of partly prepared food

items increased during WWII as women joined the war effort and took on paid work (Gollan 1978). Yet few from the Lucky Generation mentioned using commercially pre-prepared products in their kitchens even though they were available.

Although commercially prepared sweet foods were widely available, the Lucky Generation ate mainly home-made puddings and desserts while growing up and they often made similar dishes for their own children. The importance of these dishes in the national diet is evidenced by the number of pages in recipes books devoted to these dishes. A book of recipes from the 1920s and 1930s contained 11 pages of vegetable recipes, 20 pages of pudding and desserts, 21 of biscuits and slices, and 21 pages of cakes (Berry and Wearing-Smith 1993). Symons notes a similar allocation of many pages in the 1925 edition of the Commonsense Cook Book to "flour-based cooking" that included bread, pastry, cakes and puddings (Symons 1984). Later recipe books from the 1960s (Country Women's Association NSW 1965; Country Women's Association of Western Australia of the Air Kalgoorlie Branch 1965) were dominated by recipes for desserts and cakes that reflected the requirement for more exact measurements and cooking skills than those needed for most savoury dishes.

Commenting on the continued importance of home-baked sweet dishes, Symons (1984) proposed that an emphasis on "daintiness" which encapsulated values such as "lightness, prettiness and gentility" in cooking and baking was valued as a feminine antidote to the gross male eating habits of the 1920s and 1930s. Significant socio-cultural emphasis continued to be placed on desserts, sweets and puddings through the 1940s to the 1960s (Duruz 1999; Symons 1984), with Duruz arguing that baking and making desserts were the "public face" of feminine identity-making in the 1950s. Failure at these could provoke a serious crisis of feminine identity (Duruz 1999). Even though these skills were so important to women's sense of being a good homemaker, research shows that men of this generation ate more sweets than women (Horwath 1988).

Around the time that Boomer children were in their teens widespread social change was underway. In 1972 in Australia, during the first wave of feminism, women won the right to equal pay for equal work. Many Lucky Generation women had worked as volunteers when their children were young and they sometimes returned to volunteer work later. A few, however, joined the paid labour force once their children left primary school. It appears that there was a period during which women juggled the competing values of paid work and those of femininity and mothering by continuing to prepare meals and desserts. Mary, from the Lucky Generation, who had taken up paid employment part-time while her children were at school, still shouldered the burden of family cooking and provisioning as was typical for women of the time (Santich 1995). Even though she was employed, her account hints at her anxiety to be a proper mother by preparing good meals and undertaking complex scheduling to be available for her daughter after school finished.

> *Well they were still getting good meals. I would prepare it perhaps before I went to work. At that point I was only working part-time and [my daughter] … her school was at the back where we lived, so I would always take her to school and then I'd get the bus and get into, go to where I was working….And then I'd catch a bus and that would get to the school when it was time for her to get out.*

She still prepared desserts but noted that they ate lots of tinned fruit. Mary's story suggests that entering paid work put pressure on women's time for meal preparation. Some women tried to save time by no longer making desserts or making less elaborate ones, although noting that their children enjoyed them. Frieda, (aged 82) who was teaching while her children were at school, explains:

> *Yes, I had to cut out quite a bit of dessert making and relied on, sometimes, buying something. But also during the school holidays I used to make up a great big batch of desserts, puddings, and have them in the freezer.*

Rose, a 70 year-old, observed that meals at this time were similar to those she had as a child except that she made fewer desserts. At first she first attributed her willingness to give up making desserts to her laziness but as the interview continued she acknowledged that she was juggling a number of activities. She said:

> *[We] probably had ice cream or something like that. Stewed fruit maybe. I was going to work all that time and had the three kids, and during that time I did a couple of uni courses.*

She recounted that one child had questioned her mothering.

> *One of the [children] said, "Why aren't you a real mummy?" I've never forgotten this, and I said, "What do you mean?" and she said, "You know, making biscuits and hot drinks when you come home from school".*

Rose's vivid memory of this exchange illustrates the potent nexus between mothering, love and food, and the difficulties mothers had in disrupting it by asking children to eat food they didn't like or by not preparing the food they enjoyed.

These stories illustrate yet another trend: the encroachment of industrially prepared food products into family dining, sometimes replacing things made at home from scratch. A number of factors came together at this time to facilitate these changes. The decades from the 1940s–1960s were a watershed for development in Australian food science as production techniques devised to feed troops during WWII were adapted for commercial production post-war. American processing techniques (which emphasised nutrition and quality control) were introduced into Australian factories preparing food for American troops (Farrer 2005). The quality of food manufactured for general consumption improved as industrial food production capacity grew post-WWII. Food canning began on a larger scale after WWII as factories switched back to commercial food production (Symons 2007), aided by the increasing mechanisation of food harvesting during the late 1940s (Farrer 2005). Canning, and eventually freezing technology, made fruit and vegetables available in the shops all year round. Home bottling, pickling, preserving, and baking were no longer essential activities and began disappearing from the home kitchen in the 1950s (Farrer 2005). Some Lucky and Baby Boomer women joined the workforce by the 1960s and 1970s (providing additional financial resources to the family) and discretionary purchasing power (Dingle 1998) rose because of high levels of employment and growing incomes.

Refrigerators began to appear in some Australian homes as mass production brought their prices down, the effects of WWII subsided and families could afford

this major purchase. Even in the early 1950s, ice was still being delivered to Canberra homes (Gollan 1978). In 1955 the ownership of refrigerators differed by state, with only 67% of Melbourne homes owning an electric refrigerator, while 83% of Sydney homes did (Dingle 1998). However, by 1960 the McNair survey found that 94% of households nationwide owed a refrigerator. Initially the refrigerator was about the same size as an ice chest but larger fridges were sold as people realised that they could buy more in one shopping trip, shop less often and use the refrigerator to store supplies (Gollan 1978). The 1960s saw the introduction of refrigerated dairy cases in supermarkets and the development of new products to fill them (Farrer 2005). These developments permitted the purchase and storage of large amounts of food, and in particular a shift to dairy-based foods that previously could not be stored for long. Freezers have become items of convenience helping people "cope with the compression and fragmentation of time" (Shove and Southerton 2000, p. 315).

Ice cream was initially a high status 'special treat' taking considerable human energy to make at home and was not often bought from shops. Peter, a Baby Boomer, remembered:

> *Back in those days ice cream was significant and you didn't buy ice cream out of buckets in the shops. You made your own ice cream, so that was a bit of a treat when mum decided we were making ice cream. And me being the eldest I helped with the hand beater to make it. Makes me feel so old talking about these sort of things.*

In Baby Boomers' descriptions of feeding their children and more recently, ice cream and other pre-prepared desserts appear frequently, replacing accounts of home-made puddings and desserts. Lindsey explains:

> *I used to use the self saucing pudding occasionally. Often stewed fruit because I used to freeze it from when there was a glut, so there was always stewed fruit and ice cream. And in winter I did plum puddings and the chocolate sauce puddings.*
> Is that similar to what your mum used to make?
> *Probably. Now I think of it. She wouldn't have used the instant stuff but I did.*

4.2 Convenient Foods

In the past the concept of convenience has referred to ideas of ease, utility and comfort according to the Oxford Dictionary, but more recently has become associated with saving and juggling time (Shove 2003), particularly with regard to food purchasing and meal preparation. Warde (1999) argues that it is not only about saving time but about the scheduling of time, or time shifting so that more activities can be undertaken. With the advent of the freezer, ice cream has become an archetypal convenience food. It has the advantage of being easily stored (reducing the necessity of frequent shopping trips), it needs no preparation, it can be eaten on its own (replacing a pudding or dessert), or it can be served as an accompaniment and is readily available for between meal snacks. Consequently, it has ceased to be special. Through the 1960s and 1970s, home-cooked puddings, desserts or sweets became an infrequent feature of the family meal. Ice cream, on its own or with stewed fruit had acquired a

somewhat different significance, and was somewhat less consequential or marked as a formal dessert than something home-made. Moreover, making desserts became less important to women. As they entered the workforce and feminism became influential, other identities and status became available to them, perhaps as a bread-winner rather than a cake maker (Duruz 1999). The convenience of home-stored ice cream also constitutes a weight control risk, with several members of the Lucky Generation and Boomers mentioning ice cream as the food that they found most tempting but they knew should be avoided to manage weight and health risks.

The popularity of ice cream also illustrates the shift from an English-influenced home-made diet to the American-led 'Industrial Kitchen'. In Australia, the rise of the frozen food market (mainly fruit and vegetables) was initiated by American companies, particularly Unilever's Birds Eye. Unilever bought out other ice cream companies in the early 1960s. Slightly later, the American company Sarah Lee also began producing a range of frozen desserts and cakes (Symons 1984), and in the 1970s Peters began to develop new "adult" ice creams (Symons 1984, p. 210). Supermarkets began to sell ice cream in large quantities in supermarket freezers and in containers that were large enough to last the average family a week. Yet again the rise of ice cream goes hand-in-hand with the growth of supermarkets, and the move to the weekly shop enabled by the family car. At the same time, small local suburban family-owned shops declined and home deliveries gradually disappeared.

In Australia in the 1990s, ice cream, among all the frozen foods, was sold in the highest quantities, surpassing vegetables, poultry, frozen desserts and convenience meals (Farrer 2005). As John, a Baby Boomer, observed, *I might have an ice cream a night three nights a week*.

The change from a special treat to routine consumption is described by Valerie, a Lucky Generation informant, who observed about current times:

> *But then what do you give the kids for treats if you're having all these things you know what's a treat, an ice-cream was a treat for us well now there's ice-cream in the fridge and you can have it every night of the week if you wanted to and chocolates.*

However, while domestic ice cream in 1 or 2 litre tubs has become a less significant treat, there has been an increase in the sophistication of individually wrapped ice creams that are now routinely covered in chocolate and other toppings, and are marketed to adults through advertisements evoking allure, temptation, excess, pleasure, desire, sin and sexuality. For some years Sarah Lee, the manufacturer of frozen desserts, has advertised its products as "The Nice Vice".

Biscuits, scones and cakes went the way of home-made desserts. Mainly used as between meals snacks or served with tea to visitors by the Lucky Generation, they are now rarely made at home by Baby Boomers or their Gen Y children. Instead, people eat commercially made biscuits which have a long history in Australia. Arnotts, whose products have dominated the Australian market, opened its first biscuit factory in 1865. In the 1920s and 1930s Iced VoVos were the most popular sweet biscuit made by Arnotts. Since the 1960s and 1970s they have been replaced in the popularity stakes by the chocolate covered, cream-filled Tim Tam biscuit, which has sales that increased by 19% between 2006 and 2007 and are now

worth $100 million (Sydney Morning Herald 2008). Illustrating a gradual increase in serving size and energy density, VoVos are 227 kJ per serve and 1,730 kJ per 100 g while Tim Tams are 400 kJ per serve and 2,160 per 100 g. Arnotts is now owned by the major multinational food company, Campbells. In the 2008–2009 financial year the company increased its sales figures by $15 million (Sydney Morning Herald 2008).

Yet another aspect of the disappearing dessert is the widespread availability of other sweet products that can be purchased and eaten almost anywhere and at any time, completing the decoupling of dessert from the main meal. In this regard, sweet biscuits, cakes, lollies, ice creams and sweet drinks are now sold individually at supermarkets, sometimes in fridges located at the checkout and virtually any other food retail outlet, including convenience stores, in motel or other vending machines and at petrol stations. A survey of Australian supermarkets showed that many had soft drink vending machines located close to the entrance and that all supermarkets displayed confectionary, soft drinks and other snacks within easy reach of check-out counters in ways that were likely to draw upon children's 'pester power' (Dixon et al. 2006). Similar tactics are used in other retail formats.

In participants' accounts of meals, convenience is usually associated with either eating out or eating takeaway. However, Baby Boomers and their children have adopted many convenient food solutions that are barely noticed in their repertoire of provisioning and preparation. For example, the purchase of commercially prepared jams, chutneys and bottled, tinned and other preserved products increased around the time the Baby Boomers were growing up. Carol, a Baby Boomer, noted that food is now more convenient to prepare and cuts of meat are leaner due to the rise in pre-packaged, pre-cut meat products. Yet it is difficult to argue that all food purchasing and preparation is more convenient now than in the past, when products were often delivered to the home, obviating the need to go to the shops. Carol remembered:

> *And also the baker would come up the street—so it was all home delivered sort of thing. And the milkman would deliver. But I very clearly remember the grocer coming with a box of groceries on his shoulder. It was cute—to the back door and call out. It was such a different lifestyle. And then perhaps we'd go on weekends and of course the shops would shut at 12 on a Saturday, so there wasn't that convenience. [You] had to be sure to have your shopping done by midday on Saturday. And Dad used to go and get the meat, I remember, on a Saturday morning—that was when we had the car.*

A number of the Lucky Generation remembered that they had milk, bread, green-groceries, ice and sometimes meat delivered by horse-drawn cart. They enjoyed chatting to the vendors, meeting neighbours around the cart, and competing to see who could pick up the horse manure first to put on the garden. One person pointed out that there was no need to own a car because food was home delivered.

Meat was less likely to be delivered but at the shop the butcher would prepare slice, dice and trim meat to order while the customer waited. Even the cook-from-scratch Lucky Generation usually bought rather than made their bread. Modern food retailers now discourage shoppers from remembering these earlier forms of convenience by placing a high emphasis on 'choice' in their advertisements.

These earlier forms of retail convenience did not offer the same range of products that are available now but the reduction in time and labour was real.

The growth of pre-prepared, labour-saving food products accelerated during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. It contributed to increasing diversity in the styles of cuisine prepared by Baby Boomers and Gen Ys, so that the curries, stir-fries and other Asian and Middle Eastern dishes they describe cooking at home are easy to prepare through the use of commercially produced curry mixes, marinades and tinned coconut milk (Schubert 2009). Spaghetti Bolognese, lasagne and other Italian-influenced dishes, now a staple of many standard family meals, can be made with dried or refrigerated pasta and widely available commercial tomato paste, supporting Symons' (1993) argument that the growth in multicultural cuisines in Australia was as much about the industrialisation and internationalisation of the food system as it was about immigration.

Our participants did not discuss these sorts of convenience foods perhaps because they are now so taken for granted that they do not warrant mentioning. However, they did comment on the more high-profile convenient meal replacements (rather than specific convenient ingredients). Their accounts of family dining reported in the previous chapter show the encroachment of convenience food, takeaway meals and eating out over time and especially over the three generations. Subsequent generations have shown an increasing appreciation of convenience foods. A survey of Brisbane residents in the late 1990s found that eating food prepared by the food service industry was highest among the Gen Ys, half as likely to occur among Baby Boomers and only a third as likely among the Luckies. Within each age group, the likelihood of consuming food prepared by the food service industry was lower for women than men. Surprisingly, the likelihood was lower for those without a tertiary education. Furthermore, those who ate more food prepared outside the home ate significantly less fruit, vegetables or dairy food (Hughes et al. 1997).

4.3 Takeaway and Eating Out

In the previous chapter, we noted that the shift by middle-aged Baby Boomers to eating out at restaurants and cafés as a pleasurable social event marked a transition from their Lucky Generation parents, who at the same age and lifestage tended to hold dinner parties at home when socialising. Dining out for pleasure and sociability is different from dining out or eating takeaway to replace an everyday family meal, although both save the cook time and effort. In the latter, eating out and takeaway were seen as solutions to a time-poor and complex family life. These options were usually chosen on busy nights or at the end of the week to give 'mum' a break from cooking. Gen Y Rebecca explained:

> *Maybe I think when I was…. Year 11 we had probably takeaway once a week. And that was mainly because we were all over the place. Like [my brother] was at a sport, my dad and mum were… taking us to sport and …. mum didn't have time to cook that night so we'd have probably takeaway once a week.*

This increase in multiple and individualised activities for family members has been noted elsewhere particularly in relation to sporting activities and recreation for children (see Chaps. 3, 5, 6, 8). Middle-class families in the UK reportedly were prepared to sacrifice what they saw as the importance of a shared family meal to accommodate multiple teenage sporting and other cultural activities because these activities were seen as "contributing to social and physical health" (Backett-Milburn et al. 2010, p. 1322).

The Gen Ys appeared to have adopted both tendencies from their parents; eating out and takeaway as both a lifestyle solution and as a way of socializing with little effort. As they became teenagers they started to eat out by themselves, and this increased as they moved into adulthood. Melissa (aged 24) described eating out frequently during a couple of very busy years during her early 1920s. *I was probably eating out a lot or just, you know, grabbing something on the way to work.*

Many Baby Boomers and Gen Y participants eat out perhaps two to three times a week, especially if they do not have young children. Some had a catered meal daily, for example, with the purchase of their lunch or by grabbing a quick meal on the way home from work. Cheap, quick takeaway and eating out is facilitated by the availability of a food court in every major shopping centre, where the number and style of food outlets representing major food retail chains is dictated by the requirements of food court managers.

Baby Boomers and Gen Y participants thought of takeaway food as an easy option when they were *behind time and I was tired and lazy* (Leanne, aged 47). For Carol (aged 60) eating out is *convenient if I'm tired or something from work, we'll eat out at the hotel and have a counter tea or go out to dinner to a restaurant.*

Andrew (aged 26) believed that busyness:

> *…kills any chance of sort of eating at home… like cooking at home… I come in late at 8 o'clock or something like… there's no way I'm going to start cooking then*

The usual explanation for the growth in convenient food options such as takeaway or eating out is time shortage associated with women's 'double shift' in the workplace and at home (Schubert 2009). However, in a number of our accounts, two other reasons were also offered. One was that family members were engaging in a number of different activities that made it difficult to co-ordinate the preparation of a meal for everyone at the same time. Thus family members, particularly young people who were often juggling study, part-time work and social engagements (Wyn and Woodman 2006) would eat individualised takeaway meals at times that suited their schedule. The other explanation is that of fatigue, which is an equally compelling motive. Indeed, participants used time scarcity and fatigue almost interchangeably in their accounts.

Social dining at take-away and fast food restaurants was popular among Gen Ys who started to eat in this way when they were teenagers because it was fun and affordable. As young adults many now eat out regularly (at least once a fortnight). By the time Gen Y were growing up, the variety of takeaway and other forms of restaurants and cafés in cities like Melbourne had proliferated substantially. As Melissa said *there are so many places [restaurants and cafés] but, you know, it's a bit of a shame not to have tried all the new things there are around here.*

Although some types of dining out are still reserved for special occasions, eating out and takeaway has expanded to become part of everyday life for most Australians. In 1992, the market research group, Bis-Shrapnel (1992) cited in Hughes et al. (1997, p. 539) found that "on average, 25% of all the meals and snacks consumed in Australia were prepared by food-service establishments". Between 1985 and 1986 and 2005–2006, per capita real household expenditure on catered food rose by 30% or 1.3% per year on average (from $1,297 to $1,679). This rate of growth exceeded growth in expenditure on food overall which was 0.4% per year (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007). Furthermore, more than half of the money spent on food eaten outside the home goes on fast food (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000). Surveys show that the proportion of household expenditure on meals out and takeaway food has increased from 15% in 1975–1976 to 24% in 2003–2004 (Espinel and Innes-Hughes 2010).

Additionally, there has been a substantial differentiation and diversification of food outlets which are now part of (or next door to) almost every type of leisure activity venue such as cinemas, shopping malls, art galleries, bowling alleys and swimming pools. Australians can either go out specifically to eat or just grab something to eat 'on the run'. Meals no longer have to be planned since the 'when and where' of a meal is not limited.

The increase in eating out in public places has been connected to a rise of conspicuous consumption (Finkelstein 1989), with it becoming a means for individuals to satisfy personal desires and pleasures. Gen Y shared their parents' ready acceptance of eating out and eating takeaway as a solution to busy and complex life and as a pleasure, but because they are young with a relatively low earning capacity, they were limited in how often they could do so. However, compared to their Lucky Generation predecessors, both the Boomers and the Gen Ys placed much more emphasis on pleasure in food.

4.4 Food Advertising Over the Twentieth Century

Aggressive food marketing is not new but has been an important factor in the growth of all forms of convenience and industrial foods from the nineteenth century onwards. An online commentary on advertising illustrated with 20 visual images by the National Library of Australia (NLA) shows advertising to be prominent from the 1870s (National Library of Australia). It points out that following WWII "advertisements used glamour and romance to appeal to consumers affected by loss, fear and rationing". Before the advent of television, advertisements appeared in print, theatre, catalogues and on posters (National Library of Australia). The NLA's collection of images includes several advertisements for Peters ice cream dating from the 1920s which show young women in bathing suits. Later in the 1930s Peters advertised its ice cream as the "health food of a nation", employing in one example the endorsement of the famous Australian cyclist Hubert Opperman (National Library of Australia). Providing a dramatic contrast is a Peters ice cream advertisement from the 1940s. It is a sophisticated black and white photograph by Wolfgang

Sievers, of a man's hand passing an ice cream to a delicate woman's hand adorned with jewellery, implying elegance, pleasure and sex. In contrast, another 1940s advertisement for eggs returns to the theme of health (National Library of Australia). The emphasis on the health-giving properties of foods has clearly been a dominant message from the early part of this century followed closely by those of glamour and pleasure. The discovery of vitamins occurred early in the 1920s, so that by the 1930s vitamin-rich 'protective foods', including milk, eggs, cheese, meat and vegetables, had been identified and promoted to the Australian population. The population was advised to consume a pint (560 ml) of milk, 1 egg and 30 g of butter a day as part of a basic diet required for good health (Santich 2005). While the Peters ice cream advertisements do not specify why ice cream is supposed to be healthy, such advertisements presumably draw upon these ideas.

Kraft Foods' current website associated with the spread Vegemite demonstrates advertising trends over the twentieth century. It describes the product's invention in Australia in the 1920s and its long Australian history through examples of the advertisements that have been used over this time. Until the 1970s, Vegemite advertisements focused strongly on its health-giving properties, especially for children, based on its vitamin B content. As an up-to-date form of advertising, the website also enhances the notion of the product's authenticity as an iconic Australian product even though it is produced by Kraft, an international food company.

Another major theme in advertisements across the twentieth century was convenience. Even in the first half of the twentieth century magazines such as the *Australian Women's Weekly* provided advertisements and information about new and convenient industrial food possibilities. Often food advertising and recipes were co-located to promote the same foods. For example, a 1942 edition of the Australian Women's Weekly (1942) showed a full-page advertisement on the back cover for Kraft cheese with a recipe for Kraft pineapple salad. Although many advertisements drew on the theme of convenience, this was rarely mentioned explicitly. Instead, advertisements described how food products could save the busy cook time and effort (Warde 1999). For example, in the early 1920s and 1930s Bushells advertisements explained that their cocoa powder does away with "troublesome grating of chocolate" and provides a better cooking result. Bushells provided recipes for desserts such as cocoa cake, chocolate mould, and cocoa blancmange that were described as "easy" (Bushells Pty. Ltd, nd).

With the arrival and rapid uptake of television in the 1950s and 1960s a whole new medium opened up to food product advertisers who were quick to take advantage. So much so, that in the last decade or so televised food advertising, particularly if aimed at children, has come under increasing criticism because of growing levels of obesity. Compared to other developed countries, Australia has among the highest number of food advertisements shown during children's viewing times. Most of these advertisements promote industrial and convenience foods that are high in fat, sugar and/or salt (Chapman et al. 2006). The authors argue that the relative lack of "effective regulation… fails to protect Australian children from the large volumes of carefully targeted food advertising on television" (Chapman et al. 2006, p. 179). Moves in 2009 by the Australian Food and Grocery Council to "self-regulate" their advertising has done little to improve children's

level of protection from this marketing (King et al. 2010). Despite promotion of products with poor nutritional content, linking food to health continues to be an important component of food advertising. In 2009 it was found that 55% of non-core foods advertised on Australian television during a set period of time contained nutritional claims sometimes ignoring other nutritionally unsound components of the food (Kelly et al. 2009).

4.5 A Rise in Health Consciousness

Once the Lucky Generation gave up making home-made puddings around the 1970s many did not return to them, even when they had more time. Among this generation, views varied about whether their consumption of puddings and sweets was good or bad for their health. Some focused on their high consumption of fruit in various desserts as positive for health. Judith argued that even the heavy puddings of their youth were healthier than modern commercially produced sweets. *I can't believe that they would do so much more damage than the rubbish that people have these days.*

And she went on to explain:

> *The fast food things. The jam tarts and chocolate desserts—it was nothing in the way of all the chocolate desserts that you have these days. Chocolate was very much … well you couldn't get chocolate during the war, and even after the war, many years there were very limited supplies until the factories got back into it again. So, that was definitely a treat—ice-cream was definitely a treat.*

On the other hand some looked on their consumption of these traditional desserts as unhealthy. Betty recalled:

> *They had all these fattening awful things. I mean I didn't know they were awful then when I look back. Like jam roly poly and oh dear I can't remember now.*

This question of whether the replacement of home-made puddings and desserts with commercially prepared items has contributed to increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity remains unclear. Sugar, a major component of sweet desserts, has been blamed in part for the rise of obesity over the 1980s and 1990s particularly in beverages (O'Dea and Mann 2001). Sugar consumption in Australia is a complex story. Despite the increase in the last few decades of the availability of sweet foods and snacks, the consumption of cane sugar has declined from a high point of about 56 kg per capita in the early 1940s to about 43 kg in 1998–1999 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000). However, Australians' sugar consumption started from an extraordinarily high base, with almost the highest per capita sugar consumption in the world in the early part of the twentieth century. This probably stemmed from the colonial practice of giving settlers a sugar ration. Vast quantities of sugar were consumed in tea, where it was considered normal to have four lumps per cup in the 1930s, in beer and spirits, and in the domestic production of sweets, cakes, jams and other preserves (Griggs 2006). A strong Queensland sugar industry and the Colonial Sugar Refinery made sugar readily available. Griggs attributes the decline in sugar consumption mainly to a groundswell of concerns in the 1960s about the health

effects of sugar among medicos and dentists which spread to the general population, some of whom adopted artificial sugar replacements. Another factor is important. In the 1930s and 1940s most sugar was purchased in refined form and added to home-prepared food with only 30% consumed in processed foods. This pattern was gradually reversed so that by the 1970s, 60% of sugar was consumed in processed foods. Much of the sugar that Australians consume now is invisible unless people closely study nutrition labels on food. A major form of sugar consumption occurs in carbonated drinks, which have increased in popularity from the late 1980s (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000). While apparent national consumption data shows a decrease over most of the twentieth century, nutrition surveys based on self-reported data indicate that sugar consumption rose slightly from the 1980s–1990s (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000). Thus the story of the disappearing dessert together with the decline in national apparent sugar consumption displays the limitations of simple explanations for obesity prevalence.

The growing health awareness of the Lucky Generation is shown in their accounts which provide a retrospective examination of their childhood diets from a health perspective. When they were growing up, the emphasis was on food's ability to keep the family feeling satiated, satisfied and healthy or able to perform hard work (Banwell et al. 2010). But as many of the Lucky Generation observed, views about what is healthy food have changed dramatically under the influence of the rise of health consciousness with moral overtones.

> *We used to eat meat with fat on it, we thought that was pretty good. What meat we had. I cut all the fat off the bacon. I am very good. I used to like the rind on the bacon. I don't do that anymore. I am very good.*

While talking about their recent health and weight problems, the Lucky Generation often volunteered that they now monitored their diets due to concerns about health problems such as high cholesterol or blood pressure.

This increasing focus on health among the study's participants is reflected more widely. A discourse analysis of food advertisements and articles in the *Australian Women's Weekly* sampled between 1951 and 2006 shows that emphasis on healthy food choices for the family grew from 1951–1971 (Schneider and Davis 2010). By 1981 the focus on family health had been replaced by what was described as "the emergence of the healthy food consumer", in which the focus shifts from the family to an individual (often female) located within an unhealthy Australian population that is likely to suffer from chronic diet-related diseases. In general, in *Australian Women's Weekly* articles, individuals are instructed to take "responsibility" for their own health by actively engaging in dietary change, guided by self-examination (Schneider and Davis 2010). The changes noted in the content of the magazine are reflected in the increasingly individualised and detailed concern with diet, evident later in the life of the Luckies, and to a greater extent in the Baby Boomers and the Gen Ys at increasingly early ages.

The use of diet to manage health was often triggered when an individual faced a health crisis either directly or via identification of increased risk of potential future ill-health. This was particularly evident in the life narratives of the Lucky Generation as many of them began to experience age-related health problems. As Minnie from

the Lucky Generation commented: …*I watch more what we eat now rather than back a few years because we weren't as health conscious I don't think.*

However, even some of the younger Baby Boomers, particularly men, had been forced to change their diet when they were found to have high cholesterol or had experienced a heart attack. Although Gen Y did not undertake dietary changes for current health issues, a few did so because of the perceived future risk they faced given their family health histories. For example, Andrew's partner has *got quite a lot of diabetes in her family… So she's trying to cut down on sugar*. Nicole (aged 45) believed she needed to reverse years of poor eating habits as her health was now suffering. Participants of all ages related the prevention and management of chronic diseases to more than nutritional issues, also changing their eating to manage food intolerance and mental stresses.

While the Lucky Generation's functional approach to food revolved around providing fuel for work, subsequent generations took a more scientific approach to nutrition to enhance sporting performance. As a keen golfer Julie (aged 55) believed that *if you eat shoddily, you get shoddy output*. Gen Y David, who has competed in sports at a state level, has a particularly functional view of food in which it broken down into nutritional components such as proteins to provide the physical outcome that he was seeking. *When I was weight-training protein would support my diet as well and give me that extra bit.*

Participants from all three generations reported that they had reduced their consumption of red meat due to health concerns, mainly related to weight and cholesterol. Their diets are reflected in long-term trends in apparent consumption of foodstuffs showing a fall in meat consumption from over 100 kilograms (kg) per person in 1938–1939 to below 73 kg per person in 1998–1999 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007). However, poultry consumption has more that trebled since the 1960s. Fruit and vegetable intake has also increased dramatically over the same period (although this is unlikely to include domestic or backyard produce). Egg consumption has dropped, as has fat intake, particularly of butter (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007).

Thus, growing concern for health by our three generations is apparent in their accounts of their own eating habits as well as in national consumption figures. As we have observed already, messages about health have been an important selling point for food advertisers for most of the twentieth century. As convenience has become a more dominant concern for the younger time-pressured generations, it is not surprising that health and convenience would be brought together in newly processed and packaged food.

4.6 A Modern Yearning for Convenience and Health

Convenience food, particularly in the form of takeaway, fast or junk food, is strongly associated with high fat, highly processed ingredients, and is considered by most study participants (including those who eat it) to be both unhealthy and fattening.

Yet there has been a clear shift to solving the problems of time scarcity, family flexibility, and the family cook's fatigue through the use of industrialised and convenience foods. Individuals and families undertake considerable negotiation to reconcile these two contradictory forces: the need to maintain family eating rituals and standards in a time-pressured environment. One result is that all generations, but particularly Baby Boomers and Gen Ys, have become skilled in distinguishing between convenience foods on the basis of their apparent healthiness. Most fast foods are seen to be unhealthy, although some convenience foods are viewed quite positively. Restaurant-produced Asian meals are considered to be reasonably healthy in contrast to a standard meal from a chain takeaway restaurant. Indeed, many convenient food products enable the production of a speedy and reasonably healthy meal through the use of items such as tinned chickpeas, lentils, tuna or mass-produced curry pastes and pasta. Much of the production of these foods is driven by the retailers' search for market and consumers' desire for longevity, increased performance and avoiding disease (Dixon et al. 2006). The move from red meat to chicken meat is an example. Dixon argues that through technological innovation supermarkets have used existing consumer perceptions to buttress their own self-promotion as experts on, and purveyors of, healthy convenience. The cool chain is used to produce conveniently chilled (rather than inconveniently frozen) chicken. They have also promoted chicken meat as healthy and acceptable to the whole family including children and even sometimes vegetarians, and convenient because its pre-prepared forms are quick to cook (Dixon and Banwell 2004). A more extreme example is the production of functional "phoods" which has become a growth industry, marrying the modern requirement for health with convenience by adding "nutraceuticals or a bioactive ingredient to deliver health benefits" (Dixon et al. 2006, p. 639). This market has produced convenient take-home products that address a range of health problems, from the restoration of healthy gut flora, the perceived need for vitamins, minerals and other supplements, along with salt – and fat-reduced foods. The desire to manage weight is one of the dominant drivers of convenient functional foods. Some people purchase 'slimming' products from supermarkets while others sign up to slimming programs providing pre-prepared meals. For example, one Baby Boomer participant bought herself several week's worth of calorie-controlled catered meals (three per day) when she found herself putting on weight, arguing that this saved her time while she lost weight. She considered it well worth the additional cost compared to cooking at home.

4.7 Conclusion

We have argued elsewhere (Banwell et al. 2010) that the Lucky Generation's taste for the necessary (Bourdieu 1984) developed during the food restrictions of their youth has been maintained to some extent into their later years in the form of health-related diets and a limited uptake of convenience foods.

Over the course of the Lucky Generations' lives and those of their children and grandchildren, a discourse of healthy citizenship has developed (Davis 2011), encouraging individuals to show responsibility by monitoring and managing their food consumption and undertaking health-promoting physical activities. Our two younger generations certainly recognise these exhortations, and strive to adopt them to a greater or lesser extent. Yet increasing Australian obesity (Walls et al. 2009) suggests that a generalised concern with health and diet does not necessarily lead to slimmer bodies. Indeed, the more influential drivers of Australians' dietary patterns and ultimately people's weight may be the widespread availability, accessibility and adoption of commercially prepared, convenience foods which are often energy-dense. These drivers have arisen as women and men have moved into a flexibilised and deregulated workforce. The Australian population has sought a range of convenient and (sometimes) healthy foods as a solution to their busy, fragmented lives. The story of the disappearing dessert exemplifies these changes over three generations.

Image 4.2 The dessert aisle at the supermarket, Melbourne 2012 (Photo: J. Dixon)

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