



Heckenberg, DJ and Cody, D 2006 , *Food Matters - Issues surrounding food in prison. Occasional Paper 3*



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## Abstract

The issue of prison food has made headlines several times over the last few years in Tasmania. It is a problem not unique to this State. As demonstrated in this report the quality, quantity and social context of food preparation and consumption really does matter for prisoners - whether they reside at Risdon prison, a mainland institution or overseas. What you eat and how you eat is enormously important to all of us. In situations of enforced confinement and loss of ordinary freedoms, food becomes even more significant and the issues more pronounced (Preface - White 2006)

The report sets out the findings of semi-structured interviews with six ex-inmates about the place of food in their prison experience. The research shows that despite varying backgrounds, the men shared certain common experiences, opinions and perceptions of prison food.

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Prison food is the term for meals served to prisoners while incarcerated in correctional institutions. While some prisons prepare their own food, many use staff from on-site catering companies. Some prisons support the dietary requirements of specific religions, as well as vegetarianism. Prisoners will typically receive a series of standard meals per day from the prison, but in many prisons they can supplement their diets by purchasing additional foods, including snacks and desserts, at the prison. Prison food is notoriously bad—so much so that ramen is now the most valued black-market commodity in jails, more so than cigarettes. Because federal laws only require that inmates' diets meet the basic nutritional requirements, mealtime is another layer of punishment on top of confined living for inmates. However, food in confinement has gotten even worse with the rise of for-profit prison contractors and outsourced food services. Last week, the Deputy Attorney General's Office issued a memorandum, announcing the beginning of the end for privatized prisons. According to the statement, federal