Food and Nutrition: What You Need to Know

Important facts about nutrition and children

- Follow Canada’s Food Guide when planning meals and snacks, for children 2 years and older (see appendix, under Helpful Websites/Resources, for link to Canada’s Food Guide).
- Children need good role models to develop a taste for healthy foods and a healthy attitude about food.
- Children’s growing bodies need healthy fat found naturally in foods like higher-fat milk, cheese, nuts and vegetable oils.
- Children need healthy, nutritionally balanced breakfasts to give them the energy they need to learn and play.
- Children need variety, including:
  - choices from each food group
  - foods with a variety of colour, texture (ex: crunchy, soft, chewy) and temperature
- Limit foods high in added sugar, salt and fat, such as sweetened cereal, packaged baked goods, candy, sweetened drinks, deep-fried foods and processed deli meats. These foods will fill a child’s stomach, making them less hungry for nutrient rich food and drinks.

Portion sizes

In healthy children, portion size will increase with age.

A Canada’s Food Guide serving may be larger than a young child can eat at one time. Start with 1/3 to 1/2 of a Canada’s Food Guide serving. If a child is still hungry, allow them to have more.

For example:
Children between two and eight years of age need one Canada’s Food Guide serving from the meat and alternatives group per day.

This could mean:
- 1 egg OR 1 Tbsp nut butter, at lunch (1/2 Canada’s Food Guide serving)
- AND
- 40 grams (1 1/4 ounce) fish, poultry or meat, at supper (1/2 Canada’s Food Guide serving)

Keep in mind that a large portion of a child’s daily food intake is eaten at home.

DID YOU KNOW?

Canned light tuna contains types of tuna that are low in mercury, so no safety guidelines are necessary. Also, it is usually lower in cost.

Canned white tuna is not the same as canned light tuna.

Limit the amount of white tuna to:
- 75 grams a week (or one Canada’s Food Guide serving, about half a 170-gram can) for children ages one to four years.
- 150 grams a week (or two Canada’s Food Guide servings, about one 170-gram can) for children ages 5 to 11.
Infant feeding (ages 0 - 2)

Daily communication with families can help an infant’s overall health and well-being. Ask families about their feeding preferences; work with them to develop a feeding plan for their infants; and discuss which foods have been introduced at home.

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is the ideal way to feed a baby. Health Canada recommends breast milk as the only food babies should consume until they are six months old, with continued breastfeeding for two years, or longer.

Support breastfeeding mothers and their children by:

- welcoming breastfeeding mothers into your facility
- offering them a quiet and comfortable place to sit and feed their children
- encouraging them to send expressed breast milk from home, if possible

DID YOU KNOW?

You should NEVER give any type of honey to infants 12 months old and younger. Feeding babies honey before they are one year old has been linked to a rare, but serious, form of food poisoning called Infant Botulism.

Formula feeding

For mothers who are not breastfeeding, iron-fortified infant formula is the next best choice. Infants who are fed formula should continue to have formula until they are nine months to one-year old, at which time they may be ready for whole cow’s milk (3.25% MF).
Introducing solid foods

When infants are six months old, they are usually ready to start eating small amounts of solid foods containing iron. Solid foods provide nutrients and textures needed for healthy growth and development. At this time, breast milk and/or formula with iron should still be baby’s main food.

SIGNS AN INFANT IS READY FOR SOLID FOODS

They:
- sit up with very little help
- hold their head up
- open their mouth when food is offered
- turn their head to refuse food

Feeding tips

- Choose foods and textures that suit baby’s skills and age.
- It is important to try different textures. This helps baby to learn to chew, swallow and enjoy the same food other children are eating.
- Babies do not need to have teeth to eat solid foods.
- If using store-bought baby food, check the expiry date on the jar or package. Do not use past the expiry date.
- Use a small bowl or plate for feeding baby. Do not feed babies from the jar.
- Any food left over should be thrown out as germs can spoil the food.
- When warming baby food, stir and test it to make sure it is not too hot.
- Put a small amount of food in front of baby and see what happens. They may play with it, taste it or not eat it at all.
- Start with one or two teaspoons of food and gradually increase according to baby’s appetite. Let baby decide how much to eat.
- Start with one meal a day and gradually increase to three meals a day and snacks.
- Babies do not need sugar, sweeteners or salt added to food.
- Try only one new food at a time. Wait at least two days before trying another new food. This helps you find out if a food causes an allergic reaction. Talk to the family about what foods are being introduced at home.
- Work closely with families to create a plan for introducing new foods.

(adapted from Feeding your Baby: 6 Months to 1 Year, Healthy Child Manitoba www.gov.mb.ca/healthyliving/hlp/docs/nutrition/feeding.pdf)
Beverages

Milk

- Whole cow’s milk (3.25% MF) can be introduced after nine months of age.
- Reduced-fat milk (2%, 1% or skim) and fortified soy beverages can be introduced after two years of age (discuss with family before changing the type of milk served).
- Children who drink more than 3 cups of milk a day may not be hungry for food and therefore may not be getting other nutrients their bodies need.

Water

- Once an infant is six months of age, water may be introduced as a beverage.
- Water given to infants (for drinking and/or preparing food and other beverages) must be clean and safe from contamination.
- Offer water to satisfy thirst.

DID YOU KNOW?

Infants over one year of age do not need to use a bottle or “sippy cup” (cup with a lid). A regular (open) cup is the best choice to encourage development of mature drinking skills, a healthy diet and good dental health.

Fruit juice

- Fruit juice is not recommended for infants under six months of age.
- Vegetables and fruit should be offered more often than juice.
- If juice is served to children or infants after six months of age:
  - offer only a small serving (about 60 - 125 ml or ¼ - ½ cup)
  - the daily amount should not exceed 125 - 175 ml (or ¼ - ¾ cup); keep in mind that they may be drinking juice at home, too
  - offer in a cup, not a bottle
  - only offer as part of a meal, or snack
  - offer only 100% fruit juice
  - never serve un-pasteurized juice
- Do not serve beverages called “fruit cocktail,” “fruit punch” or “fruit drink.” They are not a food-group choice and are high in added sugar.
- Too much fruit juice will fill a child’s stomach, making them less hungry for nutrient-rich breast milk, infant formula, milk and healthy foods.

Sweetened drinks

- Sugar-sweetened beverages like pop/soft drinks, fruit punch, flavoured water, iced tea, lemonade, sports drinks, and drinks sweetened with artificial sweetener, are not recommended for children.
- When children fill up on these beverages, there is little room left for nutritious food and drinks.
Choking hazards

As infants and young children learn to eat, they should always be supervised and seated in appropriate, child-sized chairs to reduce the risk of choking. Remember that children move through stages at their own rate. By watching children closely, you will be able to judge when they are ready for certain foods.

The foods below cause the greatest risk of choking for children under four years old. Therefore, these foods should either be altered to a safer shape or texture, or avoided altogether.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choking hazard</th>
<th>How to make it safer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole or large pieces of raw vegetables, fruit and bread</td>
<td>Grate raw vegetables or fruit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabobs (on a skewer or toothpick)</td>
<td>Cook to soften.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remove pits and large seeds.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cut into very small pieces – about 1 cm (½ in) diameter.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cut up vegetables and fruit and serve them on a plate, rather than on a skewer or toothpick.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grapes</td>
<td>Cut into quarters, lengthwise, and remove seeds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foods with fibrous or stringy textures such as celery or pineapple</td>
<td>Finely chop these foods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raisins and other dried fruit</td>
<td>Do not give to children under four years old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popcorn</td>
<td>Do not give to children under four years old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seed and nut butter spread thickly or served on a spoon</td>
<td>Spread thinly on a cracker or bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole nuts and seeds</td>
<td>Do not give to children under four years old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish with bones</td>
<td>Carefully remove all bones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiener or sausages</td>
<td>Cut into quarters, lengthwise, then into bite-size pieces (or do not serve).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gum, marshmallows, hard candy and cough drops</td>
<td>Do not give to children under four years old.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Provide first aid and call 911 if a child is choking.
Protecting children with food allergies

How will caring for children with food allergies affect the way I do things?

Caring for a child with a food allergy requires extra attention.

If your facility provides food:

- be sure all staff are aware of the food allergy, and what is being done to avoid exposure to the allergen (substances that can cause allergies in some children)
- pay very close attention to food labels when shopping (see appendix for more information on reading food labels)
- focus your menu on whole, fresh foods and homemade sauces, seasonings and dips, to help avoid allergens
- communicate with all families about food allergies present in the facility

If families are providing food for their children:

- make sure all families are aware of the food allergies at your facility
- inform families about how to avoid bringing food allergens into the child care facility, and what the possible risks are if the allergic child is exposed

Also keep food allergies in mind when:

- planning activities (ex: avoid using food for art)
- organizing special events and field trips

What steps can I take to protect a child who has food allergies?

If a child in your care has a known food allergy, there are many important steps you can take to help protect them:

1. Read food labels very carefully.
   - Make sure you **check the label every time** you buy a product!
     - Manufacturers sometimes change the ingredients in products.
     - Different varieties and sizes of the same brand may contain different ingredients, so check the label on every product you buy.
• Most packaged food products must identify major food allergens on the label. Read ingredient lists and look for the following cautionary statements/warnings:
  - “contains...”
  - “may contain...”
  - “manufactured in a facility which also processes...”

Note: Less common food allergens do not have to be identified in a cautionary statement. Look for them in the ingredient list.

• Avoid buying food from bulk bins, as ingredient lists may not be available and there is a risk of cross-contamination between bins.

See appendix for more information on reading food labels.

2. Avoid cross-contamination

Cross-contamination happens when an allergen accidentally comes into contact with a food product that doesn’t normally contain that allergen.

• Cautionary statements on food labels warn that foods could have accidentally been exposed to an allergen some time during the manufacturing process, and are not safe for those with food allergies.

• Even if a food does not contain the food allergen, it still might have been in contact with the allergen through things like utensils (ex: forks, knives) and cooking pans.

• To avoid cross-contamination in your facility, you could consider eliminating all foods containing the known allergen.

3. DO NOT take chances

When in doubt, don’t serve it!

- Avoid serving food products that contain, or may contain, an allergen a child in your care is allergic to.

- Avoid serving food products that contain a warning statement naming an allergen of concern.

- Avoid serving food products that don’t list their ingredients.

Where can I find more information about food allergies?

See the list of helpful websites on page 4.

DID YOU KNOW?

Substitutes for peanut butter include: soy butter (ex: WowButter™), pea butter, sunflower seed butter (ex: SunButter™) and nut butters (ex: almond, hazelnut). These products provide similar amounts of protein and fat as peanut butter, and have a similar taste and texture.

Before allowing these foods into your facility, check with families for allergies to the ingredients in them (ex: soy, nuts). Also, some of these foods may have come in contact with peanuts during processing. Be sure to read the food labels every time!
“Picky” eater at the table

Try not to label a child as a “picky” eater; they are simply learning to eat. Many children go through stages where they refuse to eat some, or all, of the food offered to them. Learning to be an adventurous eater takes time and patience.

Remember that if children are growing and sleeping well, and are happy and healthy, they are probably getting the food they need. If you have concerns, try some of these ideas:

1. Work closely with families.
   - Communicate regularly about successes and challenges concerning food and eating.
   - Work with families to apply the same strategies at home and at child care, to provide a consistent and reliable message.
   - Try to have discussions about food and eating challenges when children are not present.

2. Create a positive eating environment.
   - Be role models and encourage healthy eating habits. Children learn by imitation.
   - Give children about 10 to 15 minutes notice before the meal or snack is going to start.
   - Allow children as much time as they need to eat.
   - Sit at the table with the children, and eat the same food (when possible).
   - Allow children to serve themselves, when they can. Give them the opportunity to choose how much, or how little, of each food they would like. Allow them to have another helping if they are still hungry.
   - Keep mealtimes as pleasant and relaxed as possible (ex: start up conversations).
   - Limit distractions at the table. Children will focus better on eating without other things going on like the television, telephone, computer and toys.
   - Avoid entertaining children during mealtime (ex: singing songs, reading books).

DID YOU KNOW?

It can take at least eight to ten exposures before children try a new food. Continue to offer a food even if it’s not accepted the first time.
3. Try to make sure children come to the table feeling hungry.
   - Offer only small snacks halfway between meals or, if possible, two hours before meals.
   - Offer only water in between meals and snacks (ex: don’t leave out a bowl of cut-up fruit, dry cereal or crackers for the children to munch on).
   - Include physical activity throughout the day.

4. Other tips
   - The amount of food eaten at each meal and snack will vary day to day, depending on the child’s appetite, activity level, growth, and whether they are excited or tired. Trust children to know when they are hungry and when they are full.
   - Try to serve food in a variety of different ways. For example:
     - Add vegetables to soups, casseroles and sauces; or try them raw, shredded, baked, mashed or with a dip.
     - Try adding meat (ex: beef, pork) or poultry (ex: chicken, turkey) – chopped into small, bite-size pieces – to a casserole, soup or sandwich. Also try ground meat or poultry in a sauce.
   - Offer new foods with familiar foods.
   - Be open about the ingredients in mixed food dishes (ex: spaghetti sauce, meatloaf). Don’t try to hide or disguise vegetables or other ingredients. This can cause the child not to trust you.
   - Involve children in meal planning and preparation, according to their abilities. When they have been involved in preparing the food, they are more likely to taste it. See pages 22 - 23 for information about involving children in food preparation.
   - Make only one meal but try to include at least one food you know all the children will eat.
   - Sit children together in small groups. They may be more likely to try new foods if their friends are eating them.

DID YOU KNOW?
Eighty (80) per cent of five-year-old children are thought to be “picky” eaters, but by seven years of age, only 23 per cent remain “picky”. Be patient!
Culture, religion and food

Children in your care may come from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds. Trying to understand and include children’s cultural and religious food traditions or restrictions (foods they don’t eat) will help them feel accepted and valued.

The role of food in cultural and religious practices is not simple – it varies among individuals and communities. It’s not possible to know every cultural or religious tradition or celebration that involves food. The most important thing you can do is learn from the families of the children in your care. Here are some steps you can take to learn about, and support, all children in your care:

- Do not assume that all children from a particular culture or religion follow the same traditions. Ask children and their families to tell you about any cultural or religious food traditions or restrictions that they follow.

- Ask families to share a couple of their children’s favourite cultural recipes with you. Learn how to cook them and include the ones made with whole, fresh food in your regular menus.

- Accept that some children may not want to try traditional Canadian foods, and others may not want to try foods from different cultures.

- Participate in some of the children’s cultural celebrations by buying or preparing a special dish or snack.

- Always make sure there are suitable choices for all children.

- See the section called Helpful Websites/Resources in appendix for recipe ideas from a variety of different cultures.
Vegetarian diets

The term “vegetarian” means different things to different people. Typically, vegetarians don’t eat animal foods, including meat, fish, seafood and poultry; however, they may eat dairy and eggs. Children and families follow vegetarian diets for a number of reasons – they include environmental, cultural, religious, ethical or personal choice. It is important to support children and families in their choices. Find out from families which foods can be included in their children’s diet.

Like all children, children following a vegetarian diet need to eat a variety of foods for growth and development. The nutritional needs of these children are the same as those of non-vegetarian children. Follow the recommendations in Canada’s Food Guide, using meat alternatives instead of meat.

Meat alternatives include:
- peanut butter and other nut butters
- nuts and seeds
- pulses (ex: dried or canned beans, peas, chickpeas or lentils)
- tofu
- soy-based meat substitutes (ex: meatless burgers, meatless ground round)
- fish *
- eggs *

*A Some vegetarians do not eat fish or eggs. Check with the family before serving these foods to children who are vegetarian.

If possible, avoid making separate meals for vegetarian children. Instead, replace meat with alternatives or find vegetarian choices the whole group can enjoy.

What about vegan diets?

A vegan diet is the same as a vegetarian diet but does not include foods of animal origin (ex: meat, poultry, fish, eggs, milk, cheese, dairy products). A vegan diet can be healthy if foods are chosen wisely to support a child’s growth and development.

In addition to replacing meat with meat alternatives (listed here), for vegan diets you will also need to replace milk and milk products with alternatives such as fortified soy beverages. Talk to the family to find out what is served in the home.

Also, consult with families to determine which ingredients to be aware of when reading food labels and choosing acceptable packaged food products. See appendix for more information on reading food labels.