

A young child with light brown hair is smiling broadly, looking slightly to the right of the camera. They are wearing a long-sleeved sweater with horizontal stripes in shades of orange, yellow, and blue. The child is holding several bright red apples in their hands, with one apple prominently in the center. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting with trees or bushes. The lighting is bright and natural, creating a warm and healthy atmosphere.

Are My Kids Eating Okay?

A guide for parents
of 1-5 year olds.

 Public Health

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Before you begin...

Before you begin, please go through this quiz. It may help you find some areas that can be worked on.

1. My child drinks juice each day. Yes No
2. My child drinks less than 2 cups (500 ml) of milk each day. Yes No
3. My child eats only a few or no vegetables or fruit daily. Yes No
4. My child needs to be promised dessert so he/she will eat their meal. Yes No
5. My child gets something else if they don't like what's for dinner. Yes No
6. My child snacks all the time. Yes No
7. My child eats the same foods everyday. Yes No

If you answered yes to any of the above, go to "Healthy Eating: A Discussion" on pages 6-12, for helpful tips for healthier, more balanced eating.

Areas to work on

Eat Well. Live Well.

Canada's Food Guide

Have plenty of
vegetables and fruits

Eat protein foods



Make water
your drink
of choice



Choose
whole grain
foods

Recommendations of the Food Guide are intended for children age two and older; however, one year olds will make a gradual shift to this pattern over the second year of life.

This is a guide only. The amount children eat can vary day to day. Steady growth is the best way to know if your child is eating the right amount of food. If you still have questions, talk to your doctor or healthcare professional about your child's growth.

Eat Well. Live Well.

Canada's Food Guide

The Food Guide provides a pattern of eating that should provide a growing body with everything it needs. It is the child's job to decide what, whether, and how much to eat.

**See sample menu on back cover.*

Food Guide Check Up:

Water is served between meals instead of sugary drinks and juice YES or NO.

We limit highly processed foods (those with high sugar, fat and/or salt) in our eating/meal planning. YES or NO

We eat vegetables and fruits at each meal and snack. YES or NO

We eat main meals together most days. YES or NO

We cook at home more often than eating out. YES or NO

We eat plant based protein a couple of times a week. YES or NO

Most of our grains are whole grain choices. YES or NO

If you answered YES to all or most of these questions, you are doing a great job.

Healthy Eating

A Discussion

1. *My child drinks juice everyday. YES or NO*

Children who drink juice on a regular basis have an increased risk for dental decay. Children who drink juice in larger amounts may also be at risk for iron deficiency since it can replace iron rich food in the diet. Children with an iron deficiency have more difficulty concentrating and have less energy. Water is the drink of choice.

If you answered yes:

Cut back slowly on the amount of juice each day. You can offer watered down juice, but keep it to once a day and move to offering water more frequently. The addition of ice cubes can sometimes get children more interested in drinking water. You could try freezing some juice into cubes and add those to water to add interest once in a while.

2. *My child drinks less than 2 cups (500 ml) of milk or milk alternative, like fortified soy beverage, each day. YES or NO*

Drinking 2 cups (500 ml) of milk or milk alternative, like soy, every day can help ensure they get the calcium and vitamin D they need for strong bones and teeth. When children drink more than 3 cups of milk they usually don't eat very well and may have problems with getting enough iron and other nutrients that milk does not offer. Almond, cashew, rice and other beverages tend to have very little protein and are not recommended for young children. These types of beverages may be offered in small amounts, but should not replace cow's milk and/or fortified soy beverage.

If you answered yes:

If your child doesn't drink enough milk or milk alternatives, make popsicles from milk and frozen fruit. Blend up and add skim milk powder if desired to help thicken and freeze for a treat. Make hot cereals and pancakes with milk. Use milk or soy alternative to reconstitute soups or make soups more filling.

Healthy Eating

A Discussion

If your child drinks over 2-3 cups per day:

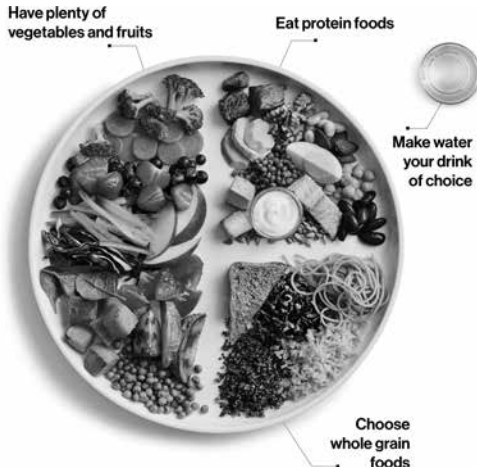
If your child drinks too much milk or milk alternative, start cutting back on the amount offered to 2-3 cups each day. Offer water in between meals and snacks for thirst. Children who drink more than 2-3 cups (500-750 ml) may be at risk for iron deficiency because they aren't hungry for other foods when filled up with milk or milk alternatives.

Health Canada recommends to continue breastfeeding for 2 or more years. Depending on how often you are feeding your child, they may be consuming enough breastmilk to meet the required amounts. Let your child lead in this area. One way to do this is to offer milk to your child at mealtimes and let them decide how much they want. You can also try offering foods that are milk based.

3. *My child eats only a small amount of vegetables or fruit daily.* **YES or NO**

When we look at anyone's plate it should look a lot like the plate shown below. Vegetables and fruit should be offered at meals and snacks.

Frozen, canned or dried fruit or vegetables are options, especially when fresh is out of season, costly, unavailable or takes too long to prepare.



Healthy Eating

A Discussion

Children's tummies are still small. Offering children foods with a lot of vitamins and minerals will help them to get the nutrition they need each day. Healthy foods to encourage should have little to no added salt, saturated fat or sugar.

If you answered yes to Question 3, expose your children to a wide variety of vegetables and fruits. Offer vegetables and/or fruits at each meal and snack so it becomes what normal eating looks like in your house.

Try this: Coat vegetables like brussels sprouts, sweet potatoes, squash, asparagus or carrots in a small amount of oil and roast for a wonderful flavour that your kids will love.

Ideas for offering more vegetables and fruits daily:

- Put pumpkin puree, pureed squash or cooked pureed sweet potato in pancakes or muffins.
- Add finely grated zucchini or carrots to homemade muffins
- Broccoli cut up into very small pieces can be added to pizza or macaroni and cheese.
- Green peas can be added to soups or pot pies or eaten raw in salad.
- Add avocado or spinach to smoothies
- Put cantaloupe, mango or papaya into a salad for a bit of sweetness.

Healthy Eating

A Discussion

Ideas for offering more vegetables and fruits daily (cont'd):

- Asparagus can be cut into bite size pieces and added to a stir fry.
- Arugula can be added to salads.
- Use dark, leafy greens such as romaine, spinach, or arugula instead of iceberg lettuce.
- Try kale chips. Wash and tear kale into bite size pieces. Toss with a small amount of oil and roast for 10 min. @ 350°C turning once during cooking. Kale is done when it has light brown edges and crispy.



TIP: It is better to offer dried fruit as part of a meal or as a recipe ingredient in a meal or snack rather than on its own.

Areas to work on

Healthy Eating

A Discussion

4. *My child needs to have the promise of dessert so he/she will eat their meal. YES or NO*

This teaches kids that they need to overeat in order to get to the “yummy stuff”. If you make the “dessert” choice something nutritious and delicious it can be served with meals.

If you answered yes:

Use puddings you’ve made with milk (a lot of the commercially prepared puddings contain very little calcium and no vitamin D), fresh fruit salads, frozen fruit, or homemade popsicles made with unsweetened applesauce/fruit cups.



Healthy Eating, A Discussion

5. *My child gets offered something else to eat if they don't like what's for dinner. YES or NO*

As a parent we tend to worry when our kids don't eat and want to make sure they eat something. By preparing these "rescue" foods, kids learn that they can be picky eaters because they get what they want. This also sends the message that the first food served wasn't actually worth eating. This tends to promote even more picky eating behaviour which becomes a source of frustration for parents and tends to make the feeding relationship more stressful.

If you answered yes:

Sometimes foods need to be introduced approximately 20 times or more in a relaxed environment without pushing or forcing, before children will decide to taste or accept it. Be patient. For example, although it may seem like they will never eat broccoli, if you are only offering it once a week starting in January it may take until the end of May before they are ready to eat it.

6. *My child snacks all the time. YES or NO*

Snacks are an important way for children to get all the food they need each day to grow well.

If you answered yes:

Set daily meal and snack times. They don't have to be so rigid that it becomes stressful to plan around, but use it as a guide and develop a routine that children can get used to. This way children know when food will be offered again. By offering foods at specific times instead of all day long it helps children to meet their nutrient needs for the day. Space snacks at least 1 1/2 hours before the next meal. Children with tummies that are full from snacking too close to meals tend not to eat well at meals. This can make selective eating behaviours worse.

Healthy Eating, A Discussion

7. *My child eats the same foods everyday. YES or NO*

Being offered the same foods all the time may increase pickiness down the road. If there is no variety, children may not get what they need to grow and develop well.

If you answered yes:

Offer new foods with liked foods. If a child likes cheese and crackers for lunch offer other items with it to add variety. If you don't make a big deal about it they will likely decide to eat different things when they get tired of the same old thing.

Make sure your kids are hungry for dinner. Children tend to be less picky when they are hungry. If they have had snacks too close to meal time or fill up on juice or milk they are more likely to play with their food and not try new things.

Make sure snacks are offered between 1 1/2 - 2 hours before your next meal.



Competent Eaters

Supporting your Child

Ellyn Satters' Division of Responsibility in Feeding

The Division of Responsibility For Toddlers through Adolescence.

- The parent is responsible for *what, when, and where* of feeding
- The child is responsible for *how much* and *whether they eat at all*

Parents' Feeding Jobs:

- Choose and prepare food (see page 23 for a sample menu)
- Provide regular meals and snacks
- Make eating times pleasant
- Show children what they have to learn about food and mealtime behavior
- Not let children graze for food or beverages (other than water) between meal and snack times
- Let children grow up to get bodies that are right for them
- Create an environment where kids are not distracted (i.e. by screens) and can focus on eating.

“Fundamental to parents’ jobs is trusting children to decide how much and whether to eat. If parents do their jobs with feeding, children will do their jobs with eating.” ~ Ellyn Satter

Take some time to plan out meals so they can include a variety of foods from Canada’s Food Guide. Make eating times routine so children know when to expect their next meal or snack. As the parent you need to provide a place where children can eat meals and snacks.

Parents need to trust that their children will eat what they need to grow and develop. Pushing children to eat everything on their plate or to eat specific foods can lead to very stressful mealtimes for everyone. This does not usually encourage a positive eating environment and may make eating problems worse.

Competent Eaters

Supporting your Child

Remember the importance of role modeling. Parents who eat well can provide a great example for their children. Don't be discouraged if your children don't follow in your foot steps right away.

If you are eating veggies, grabbing fruit as a snack, and trying new foods, or if you are skipping meals and eating chips and candy then your children will do the same, healthy or not.

Food is an important part of our cultural background. Part of the enjoyment of eating is choosing foods that reflect your culture as well as trying foods from other cultures.

Food is more than what we eat. How we eat is important too. Mealtime is a great time to bring the family together, to share stories, the events of the day and connect with one another without other distractions.



Allergies & Intolerances

What's the difference?

An *allergic reaction* is an abnormal response of the immune system to protein from foods, pollen, etc.

An *intolerance* is a negative reaction to something without the immune system getting involved. Lactose intolerance is an example of an intolerance.

Some signs of food allergy:

- Swelling of face, lips, or tongue
- Hives
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Breathing problems
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Sneezing

The most common causes of food allergy are milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts (such as walnuts and cashews), fish, shellfish (such as shrimp), soy, and wheat. (Avoiding or waiting to introduce these foods is not a recommended way to prevent food allergies.)

Many children can outgrow food allergies by the time they are three years old. However, allergies to peanuts, nuts, or shellfish can last a lifetime and tend to be more serious.

Allergy/Intolerance concerns:

The Importance of Iron in the Diet

Growth slowdown

Children grow very quickly during the first year. Once they turn a year old growth slows down quite a bit.

Importance of iron in the diet:

Research shows that iron is one of the key nutrients that can help your children reach their full potential in learning. When children don't have enough iron they can't learn as well. Look for signs that your child may be low in iron like:

- Pale skin color (pallor)
- Irritability
- Shortness of breath
- Brittle nails
- Unusual food cravings (called pica)
- Decreased appetite (especially in children)
- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Sore tongue
- Headache

Ways to increase iron in the diet:

There are two types of iron you can get from food: heme iron and non-heme iron. Meat, fish, and poultry (chicken, turkey) sources of iron are called "heme" iron. Plant sources (whole grain breads, cereals, pastas, nuts and seeds and dark, leafy vegetables) are called "non-heme" iron. Your body can't use non-heme iron as easily.

Eat foods rich in Vitamin C (eg. strawberries) with non-heme iron sources (eg. cereal) to help absorb more iron into your body.

Vitamin C rich foods include:

Red, yellow, orange, or green peppers, broccoli, oranges, orange juice, brussels sprouts, kiwi, strawberries, cantaloupe, cauliflower, tomato or tomato sauce, cereals, breads, pastas, beans, lentils, dried fruit, and dark green leafy vegetables.

Healthy Weights

There are many things parents can do to encourage healthy weights:

- Role model healthy eating behaviours.
- Have family meals together, away from television and electronics.
- Have children help prepare foods.
- Make healthy foods available and easy to eat (eg. have cut up veggies or fruit).
- Play with your children without using the computer, game systems, or television.
- Set limits on television viewing or screen use to less than 2 hours per day.
- Offer water for thirst more often. Sugar sweetened drinks like pop, iced tea and fruit drinks/cocktails are not necessary.
- Don't use food as a reward.

Don't put children on a diet or try to limit the amount of food your child eats. Both of these behaviours have been shown to cause overeating which can make the problem worse. Remember it is your job to prepare and offer foods at regularly scheduled meals and snacks. It's your child's job to decide how much to eat.

Healthy bodies come in many different shapes and sizes. It is not healthy for your child to try to be a different size than they are meant to be. If you have concerns about your child's weight, always talk to a doctor or registered dietitian.



A Note on Choking

The best prevention for choking is staying with children when they are eating and knowing what to do if your child starts to choke. Look for community programs that offer CPR and the Heimlich maneuver classes, so you are prepared.

Foods to watch out for are usually round, hard, or sticky. Some examples are nuts and seeds, popcorn, raw carrots and celery, fruits like cherries or grapes, hard candies, and any large hard pieces of food.

Tips: There are ways you can make foods safer for children to eat.

- Cut foods like grapes into halves or quarters, cut foods like sausages or hot dogs in half.
- Offer fruits that are ripe or softer in texture.
- Offer small pieces of fruit instead of large ones or offering them whole.
- Cook vegetables enough to make it easier to chew.
- Peanut butter should be spread thinly and on something hard like a cracker.
- Remove the “strings” on foods like celery or chop small.
- Grate or thinly cut hard vegetables and fruits.

Remember that any food can be a choking hazard if children are walking around or running around when eating. It is important to have children sit for all meals and snacks.



Let's do a Check up

Think about the meals and snacks you prepared today.

1. Did your child's plate look like the plate from Canada's Food Guide? Yes No
2. Was there a whole grain choice? Yes No
3. Did you include vegetables and/or fruits at each meal/snack? Yes No
4. If you are not breastfeeding, did you offer 2 cups of milk, or milk alternative, to drink today? Yes No
5. Did you limit 100% pure juice to a 1/2 cup or none today? Yes No
6. Did you include protein choices at each meal? Yes No
7. Did you offer water regularly throughout the day? Yes No
8. Did you offer 3 meals and 2 to 3 snack times today? Yes No
9. Did you let your child decide how much to eat today? Yes No
10. Did you get through the day without using food as a reward or bribe? Yes No

If you have answered “no” to most of these questions, we may be able to help. Please contact Chatham-Kent Public Health Unit to speak to a Registered Dietitian at 519-352-7270 or Telehealth at 1-866-797-0000 / TTY 1-866-797-0007

Healthy Snack Ideas by Food Group

Vegetables and Fruits

- Fruit and lower sugar vanilla yogurt
- Veggies and dip made from pureed cottage cheese plus your favourite salad dressing to taste
- Unsweetened apple sauce with or without other fruit flavours (eaten as is or frozen for a nutritious popsicle)

Healthy Snack Ideas by Food Group

Whole Grains

- Mini whole grain muffins with fruit or finely grated vegetables (eg. carrot or zucchini)
- Cereals (hot or cold) look for whole grain as a first ingredient with more than 2g of fibre and less than 8g of sugar per serving
- Fish type snack crackers (plain or regular cheddar)
- Mini whole grain pita bread
- Toast with cinnamon and applesauce or cottage cheese

Protein Foods

- Breastmilk
- Smoothies, cottage cheese with fruit, cheese cubes, pudding from mix or pre-made with at least 10% DV for calcium. (DV stands for Daily Value. This tells you whether a product has a little or a lot of a particular nutrient. If you are looking for something that is higher in calcium, then look for a product with 15% DV or higher).
- Yogurt (for children over 2 years of age, use less than 2% milk fat, for those under 2, use 3.25% milk fat)
- Cheese cubes or strings
- Bean spreads (eg. hummus)
- Peanut butter
- Edamame
(type of soy bean you find in the freezer section)
- Nuts for older children
(Canadian Pediatric Society suggests 4 years and older due to risk for choking) or chop finely or use as a nut butter



Healthy Recipes

Salmon Burger

2 large potatoes
3 green onions, chopped
1/2 cup of fresh cilantro or parsley
1 tbsp Dijon mustard
1/2 tsp grated lemon rind, pepper
and hot pepper sauce
1 egg beaten
2 cans of salmon, drained and flaked

Peel and cut potatoes into 2 inch pieces and microwave with 1 cup of water on high for 8 minutes or until tender. Mash potatoes until smooth and stir in all other ingredients except salmon. Fold in salmon and let cool so you can handle it and shape into hamburger sized patties. In a large skillet heat 1 tbsp of oil over medium heat and cook 1/2 the salmon burgers for about 5 minutes per side or until golden brown.

Falafel

1 can chickpeas drained and rinsed
1 onion chopped very small
1 clove of garlic minced
1 tbsp cilantro or
parsley chopped small
1 slice stale bread
Juice of 1 lemon or
3 tbsp lemon concentrate
1/2 tsp ground cumin
pinch chili powder
pinch salt
8 tbsp flour
1 1/2 tsp baking powder

Grate or put bread in food processor until it turns into crumbs. Put aside. Mash the chickpeas in a bowl. Add onion, garlic, and cilantro to chickpeas and mash or put in food processor to blend. Add bread and blend in with other ingredients. Add lemon juice and season with spices. Add flour and baking powder and knead into dough, add some water, if necessary. Heat oil in a frying pan on medium-high. Form little balls and squash slightly and fry until golden brown. Put into a pita and add tomatoes, cucumber, onion, and add a little low fat plain yogurt or tzatziki.

Green Meatballs

3 cups chopped fresh broccoli florets
8 oz extra-lean ground beef, chicken
or pork
1 tbsp finely chopped fresh ginger
1 tbsp rice wine (optional) or use rice
wine vinegar
1 clove garlic, minced
1/2 tsp each salt and pepper

Cook broccoli in boiling water for 8 min. or until very tender. Drain well and mash until smooth to make about 250 mL (1 cup); let cool slightly. Combine beef, ginger, rice wine, garlic, salt and pepper. Add broccoli and, using hands, mix together until broccoli is evenly distributed. Using 1 tbsp of mixture, roll into balls and place on lined baking sheet. Bake in 180°C (375°F) oven for 20 min. or until no longer pink inside and golden brown. Makes 30 meatballs.

- unlockfood.ca

Healthy Recipes

Lentil Burgers

1 can (19 oz/540 ml) lentils, drained
2/3 cup rolled oats
1/4 cup chopped onion
1/4 cup chopped celery
1/3 cup water
1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
1 tsp garlic powder
1/4 tsp salt
1/4 tsp pepper
vegetable oil
4 cheese slices
Hamburger buns or pita pockets

Mash lentils in a large bowl, using a fork or masher. Stir in oats, onion, celery, water, Worcestershire sauce, garlic powder, salt, and pepper. Mix well. Shape lentil mixture into 4 patties. Chill in the refrigerator for 20 to 30 minutes. Turn on stove to medium-high heat. Put a little oil in a large fry pan. Fry patties until golden brown on both sides. Just before the second side is done, put a cheese slice on top. Serve the lentil burgers on whole grain hamburger buns or pita pockets. Dress them with your favourite fixings (eg. Lettuce, tomato, mustard).

Easy Black Bean Dip

15 oz can black beans, rinsed
1/2 cup of mild salsa
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
2-3 tablespoons of chopped fresh cilantro
1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
Salt to taste

Use a potato masher or food processor to blend all ingredients until smooth. Use as a dip for vegetables, crackers or pita bread.

Cheese Tortellini and Vegetable Soup

Olive oil
1 chopped medium onion
2-4 diced or pressed cloves of garlic
2 cups chopped celery
2 cups chopped carrots
1 (796mL/28oz can diced or crushed tomatoes
4 cups of broth
1 package frozen cheese tortellini
Juice of half a lemon
Pepper to taste

Heat olive oil in a large stock pot and fry onions for a few minutes. Add celery and carrots and continue to cook. Add garlic and continue to cook for 1-2 minutes. Do not let the garlic burn.

Add soup stock. Simmer until the vegetables are tender to your taste. Add the tortellini and cook until the tortellini float to the top. Add additional spices if needed. Add lemon juice at the end of cooking.

Variations: Add chopped parsley to the soup. Add other vegetables like spinach. Top soup with some freshly shredded Parmesan or similar cheese. Try using different tortellini like tri-coloured or herbed pasta.

Makes approximately 6-8 servings.

Sample Menu

Following the Food Guide For Younger Children

	Vegetables & Fruit	Whole Grains	Protein Foods
Breakfast	Banana	15 grams cereal	1/2 cup milk or breast milk
Snack	Avocado	3 whole grain crackers	
Lunch	1/2 cup strawberries	1 slice whole wheat bread	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1/2 cup milk or breast milk • Egg salad with mayonnaise (1 egg)
Snack	Frozen fruit blend, thawed		Yogurt cup
Dinner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1/4 cup broccoli florets • 1/4 cup sliced tomatoes 	1/4 cup whole grain noodles with 1/2 tsp margarine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1/2 cup milk or breast milk • 1/2 of a 75 g pork chop
Snack	Apple slices	1/4 of a whole grain bagel	1/2 cup milk or breast milk

Your child may eat more or less depending on appetite, growth spurts, illness, and other factors. Remember to trust your child to eat the right amount for him or her.

For 4-5 year olds:

Increase serving sizes or add another vegetable or fruit.

Example: add 1/2 of a banana at breakfast or 1/2 cup of cucumber slices at lunch and add another 1/2 cup of pasta to dinner.

Water should be offered when children are thirsty between meals and at snack times.

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