



Offering nutritious foods in schools helps students to be healthy, learn well and gives them the opportunity to:

- The goal is to make sure the foods and beverages offered in schools are healthy.

A menu is an important part of all nutrition programs for children. Planning menus can help to make sure meals and snacks are balanced. Having a planned menu will also help to:

- involve students;
- base menus on Canada's Food Guide with:
  - » BREAKFAST containing at least three food groups;
  - » SNACK containing the vegetables and fruit group plus one other food group; and,
  - » LUNCH containing all four food groups;
- emphasize foods from the **Choose Most Often** category of Healthy Foods for my School;
- use a wide variety of foods, including foods from many cultures;
- consider the time, cost, skills and equipment you have available; and,
- make small changes to recipes to make them healthier.

*For more information on menu planning contact your local public health nutritionist/dietitian.*

# What and How Much to Serve

## What food to serve?

Use these tools to help choose healthy foods for your menus.

- *Canada's Food Guide* defines the amount and type of food needed each day for people over the age of two years. There are four food groups in Canada's Food Guide: Vegetables and Fruit; Grain Products; Milk and Alternatives; and Meat and Alternatives.
- *Healthy Foods for my School* classifies foods into **Choose Most Often** and **Choose Sometimes** categories. Most foods and beverages served or sold in school should fall within the **Choose Most Often** category.

## How much food to serve?

Offer enough to provide children with the opportunity to eat at least one food guide serving of each food group. You may need to have more or less food available depending on children's appetites, activity levels, food preferences, sizes and ages.

- BREAKFAST—contains at least one food guide serving from three of the food groups;
- SNACK—contains at least one food guide serving from the vegetables and fruit group plus one other food group; and
- LUNCH—contains at least one food guide serving from each of the four food groups.

## SCHOOL NUTRITION POLICIES AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

Take the guesswork out of what to serve and sell in school:

- ask your school principal if there is a nutrition policy or administrative procedure for your school or school division;
- form a school committee to plan and implement school nutrition and food guidelines;
- use *Nourishing Minds* and *Healthy Foods for My School* to help guide your discussion; and,
- post the *Healthy Eating Guidelines* poster in your school as a quick and easy reference to help identify **Choose Most Often** foods.



## What does a food guide serving look like?

### Vegetables and Fruit

- 1 medium sized vegetable or fruit = a tennis ball
- 125 ml (½ cup) fresh vegetables or fruit = a hockey puck
- 250 ml (1 cup) leafy raw vegetables = a baseball
- 125 ml (½ cup) frozen, cooked or canned vegetables or fruit = a hockey puck



### Grain Products

- hamburger bun or bannock = a hockey puck
- ½ pita
- 1 slice of bread
- 75 ml (¾ cup) hot cereal = a tennis ball
- 125 ml (½ cup) pasta = a hockey puck



### Milk and Alternatives

- 250 ml (1 cup) milk or fortified soy beverage = a baseball
- 175 ml (¾ cup) yogurt = a tennis ball
- 50 g (1 ½ oz) cheese = 2 erasers



### Meat and Alternatives

- 75 g (2 ½ oz) of cooked lean meat, fish or poultry = a hockey puck
- 2 eggs
- 175 ml (¾ cup) pulses such as cooked dried beans or lentils



Adults planning school meals and snacks are responsible for offering nutritious food; however, children are the best judges of how much food, if any, to eat. Children may eat different amounts of foods depending on their appetites, activity levels, food preferences, sizes and ages. A child may eat more or less than a full food guide serving at a meal or snack.



# Planning the Menu

## Menu planning steps

Consider developing a cycle menu. A cycle menu is a plan for meals and snacks created for a certain period of time and repeated. For example, menus can be planned for four to six weeks and then repeated throughout the school year.

### Step 1

Organize your space and gather the following:

- A menu planning template. Dietitians of Canada has a template available at [unlockfood.ca](http://unlockfood.ca).
- Recipe books and a list of favourite menu items; ask students and staff for meal and snack ideas.
- Copies of *Canada's Food Guide*, *Healthy Foods for my School*, and *Food Safety for my School*.

### Step 2

Develop the menu

- Use *Canada's Food Guide* and ensure that:
  - » breakfast contains food from three out of the four food groups,
  - » snacks include vegetables or fruit and one other food group, and
  - » lunch contains food from all four food groups.
- » Use *Healthy Foods for my School* to help identify and choose foods that are from the **Choose Most Often** category.

### Step 3

Review the menu and consider the following:

- Appearance and flavour— Include foods with a variety of shapes, textures, colours, temperatures and flavours.
- Budget— Make sure the food items chosen are affordable.
- Time— Review the recipes to ensure there is enough time to make them.
- Equipment— Does the kitchen have all of the equipment needed for the recipes? Will the needed equipment be in use for another menu item at the same time?
- Storage— Is there enough refrigerator, freezer and shelf space for all food items?

- Culture— Reflect the cultural diversity of students with the foods in your menu. Ask students and families for ideas.
- Holidays and celebrations— Plan healthy meals or snacks for special occasions.
- Other considerations— Are there certain foods that should be avoided due to student allergies or religious practices?

### Step 4

Estimate the amount of food needed

- Base the amount of food to purchase and prepare on the number of people who will be eating and the appropriate number of food guide servings.
- Consider the amount of food you purchased last time and how much was left over.

### Step 5

Make the grocery list

- Review your menu and consider what you already have on hand in order to decide what you will need to buy.

#### Recipes and Resources for Quantity Cooking:

- *Tips and Recipes for Quantity Cooking*— Nourishing Minds and Bodies (Healthy Schools BC, 2014)
- *Serve It Up*— Recipes that meet the school food and beverage policy and nutrition standards for Ontario Schools (Government of Ontario, 2013)
- *Making the Move to Healthy Choices*— a healthy eating toolkit for recreation, sport, and community food service providers in Newfoundland (Eat Great and Participate, 2014)
- *Healthy Food Guidelines for First Nations Communities in BC* (BC First Nations Health Authority, 2014)
- *Healthy Start*— a Saskatchewan initiative focused on healthy eating and physical activity in childcare facilities (Réseau Santé en français de la Saskatchewan, 2018)

## Ways to involve students and families

- Ask the parent or student council to help with menu planning, evaluation and advertising.
- Survey students about what foods they want in the meal and snack program, canteen, or cafeteria. Have a contest and ask parents or students to submit their favourite family recipe; showcase recipes in the menu plan.
- Host taste testing sessions at a parents' night.
- Include plans for new menu items in the school newsletter.
- Introduce new foods by including small samples with meals.
- Ask for volunteers to help with food preparation, clean up, and grocery shopping. Students could also help to deliver meals and snacks.
- Host food naming contests such as "Tasty Taco Tuesday" or "Breakfast for Lunch". Have poster contests to advertise healthy canteen or menu items.
- Use a simple survey to see if students like a new menu item. Getting feedback doesn't have to be a lot of work.

### Helpful equipment and tools for the kitchen:

- Good quality knives
- Cutting boards
- Immersion (hand held) blender
- Meat slicer
- Wire or electric cheese slicer
- Moveable table or island
- Large, good quality soup pots
- Electric griddle
- Food processor
- Rice cooker
- Traditional or electric roaster
- Good quality cookie sheets
- Standing mixer

At least one person who has successfully completed an approved food safety course must be present when food is being prepared and served. Contact your local [public health inspector](#) for more information.



# Example Meals and Snacks



## Breakfast

## Morning Snack

## Lunch

- Grapes
- Cold cereal
- Milk

Monday

- Tomato vegetable chutney
- Toasted naan triangles

- Beef and vegetable soup
- Carrot sticks
- Whole grain crackers
- Milk



- Orange slices
- Whole wheat toast
- Scrambled eggs

Tuesday



- Apple wedges
- Yogurt

- Homemade tomato sauce (with lentils or ground turkey)
- Whole wheat pasta
- Mixed vegetables
- Milk

- Berries
- Oatmeal
- Milk



- Celery sticks
- Hummus
- Pita wedges

- Chicken caesar salad
- Whole wheat bun
- Milk

Wednesday

- Strawberries
- Whole wheat pancakes
- Yogurt



- Cantaloupe pieces
- Swiss cheese

- Bean and vegetable chili
- Whole wheat bannock
- Milk

Thursday



- Whole wheat toast
- Banana
- Milk



- Raw broccoli and sliced cucumbers
- Hardboiled egg

- Ham, cheese and lettuce tortilla wrap
- Peach slices
- Milk

Friday

### Emergency Meals

It may be useful to have a stock of healthy foods on hand for students in need. Consider partnering with community organizations to help stock food items. Some healthy food ideas are:

- fresh fruit
- fruit cups
- tuna & cracker kits
- yogurt
- cereal
- ready-to-eat soup

Food photos ©Dietitians of Canada

See Dietitians of Canada, [unlockfood.ca](http://unlockfood.ca), for a menu planning template.



# Helpful Tips

## Work within your budget

- Using your menu, make a detailed grocery list to help ensure the right amounts and types of foods are purchased.
- Watch for sales of commonly used items.
- Compare brands and choose the cheaper one.
- Buy foods in season when they may cost less.
- Buy in bulk when appropriate. Consider partnering with other schools.
- Invest in a freezer. Often cheese, bread, meat, milk and yogurt can be purchased on sale, frozen and used another time. Many fresh vegetables such as tomatoes, onions, spinach, and celery can be chopped or pureed and frozen for later use in soups, stews and sauces.
- Prepare most foods from scratch. "Homemade" foods can be less expensive than prepackaged or convenience foods.
- Use legumes such as dried beans or lentils in place of meat for soups, stews and sauces.
- Plant a school garden and use the produce for meals and snacks.
- Contact your local public health inspector before accepting donated food as there could be food safety concerns.

## Save Time on Food Preparation

- Plan ahead. A cycle menu and a detailed grocery list save time.
- Prepare some items ahead of time. For example, hard boil eggs for snacks and sandwiches or cook ground meat for pasta sauces and chili.
- Prepare foods in bulk such as pancakes, soup, cooked rice and lentils, pasta sauce, and casseroles. Freeze portions for later use.
- Recruit student or parent volunteers to help with food preparation. Make sure volunteers use safe food and cooking practices.
- Plan to use leftovers from the previous day in the next day's meal. For example if chicken caesar salad was served Monday, use leftover chicken for sandwiches Tuesday.
- To cut down on preparation time, use canned, frozen or prepared vegetables and fruit. However, only use these occasionally as they can be more expensive.
- Partner with a high school cooking class or the "before and after school" program to help prepare some food items.
- Try "kids assemble" lunch ideas. For example, have a make-your-own taco, sandwich or salad bar.



# Creating a Supportive Environment

## Make meal and snack times pleasant

- Turn off televisions, phones and other technology. Let students visit with each other while eating.
- Give students enough time to eat. Provide at least 20 - 30 minutes for meals and 15 minutes for snacks.
- Make sure students have desks or chairs and tables to sit at for meals and snacks.
- Model healthy meal time behaviour.
- Encourage staff and volunteers to eat with and interact positively with students.

Adults and children have different roles when it comes to eating. Healthy eating habits develop when adults and children trust each other with their roles.

- Adults choose what foods to offer, when to offer them, and where they will be eaten.
- Children choose how much or whether to eat the food that is offered.

To learn more go to the [Ellyn Satter Institute website](#).

## Help children accept new foods

- Offer a variety of foods each week. Do not limit the menu to students' favourite foods.
- Pair familiar foods with new foods.
- Include a new food several times within your cycle menu. Students may need to see a food many times before accepting it.
- Involve students in menu planning and food preparation.
- Celebrate cultures by serving foods that show the diversity of your school.
- Plant a school garden to help kids get excited about where food comes from.

## Make the healthy choice the easy choice

- Presentation—Make healthy foods look attractive and desirable. For example offer a variety of raw vegetables in a cup with salad dressing dip or use wraps made from colourful tortillas rather than bread.
- Placement—Put healthy food options front and centre. Stock healthy food at eye level in vending machines, display coolers, canteens and cafeterias.
- Price—Sell healthy foods and beverages at the same or lower price than less healthy foods.
- Promotion - Advertise healthy menu options in school announcements. Provide samples of healthy items for students to taste.

Work with your school administration to look for funding opportunities for the school nutrition program. For example a local organization or business may be willing to help with purchasing a freezer or starting a school garden.



For more information contact your local public health nutritionist/dietitian.