

# Using Canada's Food Guide for Menu Planning in Early Learning and Child Cares

## Guidance for Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Programs

The **Early Learning and Child Care Act (2021)** states that meals and snacks be provided using a food guide recognized by Health Canada or Alberta Health\*. This document provides guidance for using Health Canada's Canada's Food Guide (2019). ELCC programs can help children meet their nutrition needs by using the [food guide plate](#) as a guide when offering meals and snacks. This can be met by offering children  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the plate vegetables and fruits,  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the plate protein foods, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the plate whole grain foods. Use the plate as a guide even when the foods in meals are mixed together, like in a soup, stir-fry, curry, stew, or casserole.

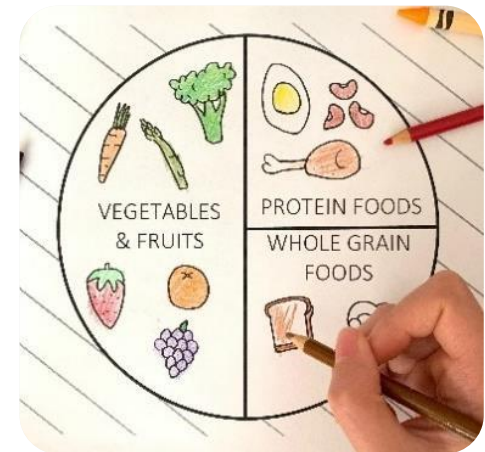
Choose and prepare foods with little to no added salt, saturated fats, and sugar to support children in learning to eat nutritious foods. Use the [% Daily Value \(DV\) on Nutrition Facts tables](#) as a guide: 5% DV or less is a little of a nutrient and 15% DV or more is a lot of a nutrient. **Choose foods with a lower % DV for sodium, saturated fats, and sugars.** To learn more visit: [Use food labels - Canada's Food Guide](#). When preparing food, use foods with healthy fats like avocado, fatty fish, hummus, and nut or seed butters. In cooking and baking use vegetable oils like olive or canola oil, and spreads like soft margarine. These foods help children meet their needs for energy.

### Roles in Feeding at Meals and Snacks

ELCC programs play an important role in feeding by determining what, when, and where food is offered. [Canada's food guide](#) helps childcares offer healthy food choices. Children then decide if and how much food they will eat from the foods offered. The amount eaten at meals and snacks will change depending on age, appetite, level of activity, and growth spurts, and will vary from day to day. Visit [Support Positive Mealtimes](#) for tips.

### How to Use This Resource

The 2019 Canada's food guide does not provide serving sizes or amounts. Use the **"suggested amounts to prepare"** in the charts below to guide how much food to prepare per child at each meal and snack. You can start by serving roughly these amounts. Follow children's cues, let them decide how much to eat or drink. If a child is still hungry, let them have more food. Over time, you can adjust amounts based on how much food is usually eaten. Remember that children may want to eat more or less, so plan to prepare a little bit extra. A sample one-week menu and a blank menu is also included for ideas.



## Vegetables and Fruits

Vegetables and Fruits	Suggested Amounts to Prepare Per Child at Meals and Snacks	
	1-3 Years	4 Years and over
<b>Cooked, canned, fresh, or frozen</b>	1/4 cup (60 mL)	1/2 cup (125 mL)
<b>Leafy vegetables or salad</b>	1/2 cup (125 mL)	1 cup (250 mL)

Offer a variety of vegetables and fruits throughout the day at meals and snacks. Offer vegetables and fruits that are fresh, frozen, or canned. To learn more about the many reasons to offer frozen vegetables and fruits, see: [10 reasons to buy frozen vegetables and fruits - Canada's Food Guide](#). Use healthier cooking methods like steaming, stir-frying, and baking instead of deep frying. The food guide recommends including dark green vegetables daily and orange vegetables a few times a week to provide sources of calcium, folate, vitamin C, and iron. To help meet this advice include these vegetables throughout the week.

### To help meet these recommendations:

- Prepare dark green vegetables like broccoli, kale, spinach, Brussels sprouts, and green peas. For example, frozen kale can be added to a baked pasta dish or a hearty stew. Broccoli can be added to a soup or stir-fry noodle dish.
- Prepare orange vegetables like carrots, sweet potato, bell peppers, or butternut squash. For example, carrots, squash, or sweet potato can be diced, roasted, and offered as a colourful side dish. Peppers can be chopped and added to an omelet or scrambled eggs.
- Add fresh or frozen vegetables to spaghetti sauce, soups, stews, chili, or casseroles.
- Add sliced fresh or frozen fruit to hot or cold cereal, smoothies, yogurt, or mix into pancake batter.
- Offer vegetables and fruits instead of juice to provide fibre, and less sugar. If offering dried fruit, do so less often and serve with meals, as they are higher in sugar, can stick to teeth, and increase risk for cavities. Dried fruits that are hard, small, and sticky can be a choking hazard for children under 4 years.
- If choosing canned fruit, pick varieties canned in juice and drain before serving. Fruit canned in water has artificial sweeteners, which are not advised for young children.
- Drain canned vegetables and rinse before serving to lower the salt content.



Choose less processed vegetables and fruits. French fries, onion rings, hash browns, and instant mashed potatoes can be high in added fats and salt. Gummy fruit snacks are high in sugar and may contain little to no fruit or vegetables. Fruit leathers and bars are also high in sugar. Pickled vegetables are high in added salt.

## Whole Grain Foods

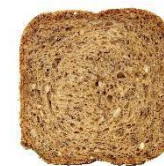
Whole Grain Foods	Suggested Amounts to Prepare Per Child at Meals and Snacks	
	1-3 Years	4 Years and over
<b>Bread</b>	1/2 -1 slice (18 g-37.5 g)	1-2 slices (37.5 g – 75 g)
<b>English muffin</b>	1/4 muffin (17 g)	1/2 muffin (35 g)
<b>Tortilla</b>	1/2 tortilla (27.5 g)	1 tortilla (55 g)
<b>Rice, quinoa, couscous, pasta</b>	1/3 – 1/2 cup (75 mL-125 mL) cooked	3/4 cup (175 mL) cooked
<b>Hot cereal</b>	1/2 cup (125 mL) prepared	1 cup (250 mL) prepared
<b>Cold cereal</b>	1/2 cup (125 mL) dry cereal	1 cup (250 mL) dry cereal
<b>Crackers</b>	3-5 crackers (10-15 g)	6-10 crackers (20-30 g)

Whole grain foods are higher in fibre – a nutrient most children aren't getting enough of. Offer children whole grains at meals and snacks, to provide more fibre, folate, iron, and magnesium than foods made with white flour.

### To help meet these recommendations:

- Choose grain foods that have “**whole wheat**” or “**whole grain**” listed as the first ingredient such as whole grain flour. Some grains like oats, oatmeal and quinoa are whole grains so will not have the word “whole” or “whole grain” in front of their name.
- Use ingredients like whole wheat flour, oats, oat flour, wheat bran or oat bran to add fibre to baked goods.
- Find other great ideas for whole grain recipes here: [Canada's Food Guide](#).

Choose less processed whole grains. Store-bought cookies, and baked goods like muffins can be high in added sugars, saturated fats, and salt. Many breakfast cereals and granola bars can also be high in added sugars and low in fibre.



## Protein Foods

<b>Protein Foods</b> Some foods have both Calcium and Iron - they are grouped below based on what they are higher in.			<b>Suggested Amounts to Prepare Per Child at Meals and Snacks</b>	
			<b>1-3 Years</b>	<b>4 Years and over</b>
<b>Calcium foods</b>	Plant based	Fortified soy beverage	2 -3 years: 1/2 cup (125 mL)	1 cup (250 mL)
		Tofu	1/3 cup (40 g)	2/3 cup (85 g)
	Animal based	Milk	1/2 cup (125 mL)	1 cup (250 mL)
		Cheese	15 g (1.5 cm cube)	30 g (3 cm cube)
		Yogurt	1/3 cup (80 g)	3/4 cup (175 g)
<b>Iron foods</b>	Plant based	Beans, lentils	1/4 cup (65 mL)	1/2 cup (125 mL)
		Nut butters	1/2 – 1 Tbsp (7.5- 15 mL)	1 Tbsp (15 mL)
	Animal based	Fish, meat, and poultry	30-60 g, cooked	55-100 g, cooked
		Eggs	1 egg	2 eggs

Offer a variety of protein foods at meals and most snacks to provide iron, vitamin B12, calcium, magnesium, and phosphorus. Include protein foods throughout the day. Fresh, frozen, or canned options can be prepared.

**Plant Based Proteins** are recommended daily because they are higher in fibre and lower in saturated fats, which is good for heart health. Help meet this advice by including a variety of plant-based proteins a few times a week or more. Choose beans, peas, chickpeas, lentils, tofu, or nut butters most often.

### To help meet these recommendations:

- Beans can be added to a taco or burrito filling. Lentils can be added to pasta sauce.
- Chickpeas can be used to make hummus or added to a chili recipe. For older children, cooked or canned chickpeas can be oven-roasted with oil and seasonings for a quick high fibre snack.
- Tofu can be stir-fried with veggies, rice, or noodles. Soft tofu can be blended with fruit, milk, or unsweetened fortified soy beverage to make a fruit smoothie.

To provide children with the benefits of plant-based foods, choose less processed options. Highly processed foods like veggie dogs, veggie burgers, and veggie nuggets can be high in added salt.

**Animal Based Proteins** like meats, provide children with iron and vitamin B12. Dairy foods provide calcium. Iron from animal sources is absorbed better than iron from plant sources. Choose:

- lean poultry and poultry without skin and trimmed of visible fat
- lean red meat, including wild game such as deer, moose and caribou
- fish and shellfish that are lower in sodium and without breading or batter. If offering canned tuna, choose 'light' tuna as it is lower in mercury. Canned salmon (without bones) is a source of Omega-3 fats.
- a variety of cheeses like mozzarella, cheddar, Swiss, Havarti
- eggs
- unsweetened or reduced sugar yogurt or kefir, without sugar substitute sweeteners



Highly processed meats like bologna, salami, corned beef, bacon, hot dogs, luncheon meat, and sausages, are high in salt and saturated fats. Processed cheese slices, spreadable cheese products, and powdered cheese seasoning can be high in saturated fats and salt. Choose less processed options.

## Drinks

**Milk and Fortified Soy Beverage** help meet daily needs for protein, calcium, and vitamin D.

- Offer full fat homogenized 3.25% M.F (milk fat) milk for children 9 months to 2 years.
- 1% or 2% milk may be offered for children 2 years or older. They are not recommended for children under 2.
- If offering **soy beverage to children 2 years or older**, choose one that is unsweetened and fortified. Soy beverage is not recommended for children under 2.
- If offering smoothies to children, make them with plain milk and yogurt, or unsweetened fortified soy beverage instead of fruit juice to lower the added sugar.
- If parents are providing breastmilk or infant formula for their child, continue to provide it instead of milk or fortified soy beverage.



**Water** can be offered throughout the day.

**Sugary Drinks** don't contain many nutrients, increase children's risk for dental cavities, and may replace other healthy foods. In addition to fruit juice, other sugary drinks include: fruit-flavoured drinks, fruit punch, fruit cocktails, iced tea, pop, slushies, sports drinks, and flavoured waters including those sweetened or with sugar substitutes. Offer water, milk, or fortified soy beverage instead of sugary drinks.



Time	Food Type	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning Snack	Vegetables and Fruits	Banana	Canned pears in juice, drained	Diced cantaloupe	Defrosted frozen blueberries	Unsweetened applesauce
	Protein foods and/or Whole Grain foods	Whole grain bagel with smooth nut or seed butter	Whole grain blueberry muffin	Whole grain cereal Milk/soy beverage	Oatmeal made with milk /soy beverage	Homemade whole wheat banana bread
	Drink	Water, Milk, or Fortified Soy Beverage				
Lunch	Meal description	Lasagna with broccoli	Tofu and chicken stir-fry served with brown rice	Vegetarian bean chili served with Bannock and peas	Lean chicken or beef burger with oven roasted potato	Salmon or tuna salad wrap with carrot sticks
	Vegetables and Fruits	Tomato sauce	Red bell pepper, carrots, and snap peas	Carrots, celery, canned corn	Lettuce, tomato	Diced celery, cucumber, lettuce
		Boiled broccoli		Boiled peas	Oven roasted diced sweet potatoes	Carrots, thinly sliced
	Whole Grain foods	Whole grain lasagna noodles	Brown rice	Bannock	Whole wheat burger bun	Whole grain or whole wheat tortilla
	Protein foods	Ground chicken, beef or wild game mozzarella cheese	Chicken breast and tofu	Canned chickpeas, kidney and pinto beans	Lean chicken or beef burger Cheddar cheese	Canned salmon without bones or light tuna
		Milk or fortified soy beverage	Milk or fortified soy beverage	Milk or fortified soy beverage	Milk or fortified soy beverage	Milk or fortified soy beverage
Afternoon Snack	Vegetables and Fruits	Sliced carrots and red bell peppers	Baby tomatoes and cucumber slices	Grapes, quartered	Canned peaches	Fruit smoothie: Frozen fruit blended with milk or fortified soy beverage, and soft tofu
	Protein foods and/or Whole Grain foods	Hummus Whole grain pita bread	Cottage cheese	Whole grain crackers Sliced mozzarella cheese	Plain yogurt	
	Drink	Water, Milk, or Fortified Soy Beverage				

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## Getting started with Your Menu

Follow the tips below to plan your menu. Put a check in the box if your menu follows the tips.

### Overall Key Points

Meals and snacks offered are based on Canada's Food Guide

- Meals offered have  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the **plate vegetables and fruits**,  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the plate **protein foods**, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the plate **whole grain foods**.
- Snacks offered have: **Vegetable/fruit** plus a **protein food** or a whole grain food or both.
- Menu includes mostly homemade foods.
- If packaged foods are used, **foods with a lower % DV for sodium, saturated fats, and sugars are chosen**.

### Tips for Meals and Snacks

- Dark green and orange vegetables are included throughout the week.
- A variety of protein foods are offered at meals and snacks.
- Plant based proteins are offered.
- Whole grain foods are offered more often than refined grain products.
- Plain milk or unsweetened fortified soy beverage (**for children 2 years and older**) are offered at meals and/or snacks.
- Water is offered throughout the day.
- Sugary drinks like fruit juice, and drinks with artificial sweeteners are not offered.

Time	Food Type	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning Snack	Vegetables and Fruits					
	Protein foods and/or Whole Grain foods					
	Drink					
Lunch	Meal description					
	Vegetables and Fruits					
	Whole Grain foods					
	Protein foods					
Afternoon Snack	Vegetables and Fruits					
	Protein foods and/or Whole Grain foods					
	Drink					