

Child Care Menu Planning with Canada's food guide



April 2025



**Nutrition
Services**

Essential partners
in health

Today's Session:

- Roles in feeding
- Menu planning using Canada's food guide
- Using food labels
- Tips to get started
- Questions



Roles in feeding

Adult's role

- **WHAT** foods to offer
- **WHEN** to offer food
- **WHERE** to offer food

Child's role

- **HOW MUCH** to eat
- **WHETHER OR NOT** to eat

Educators do not need to:

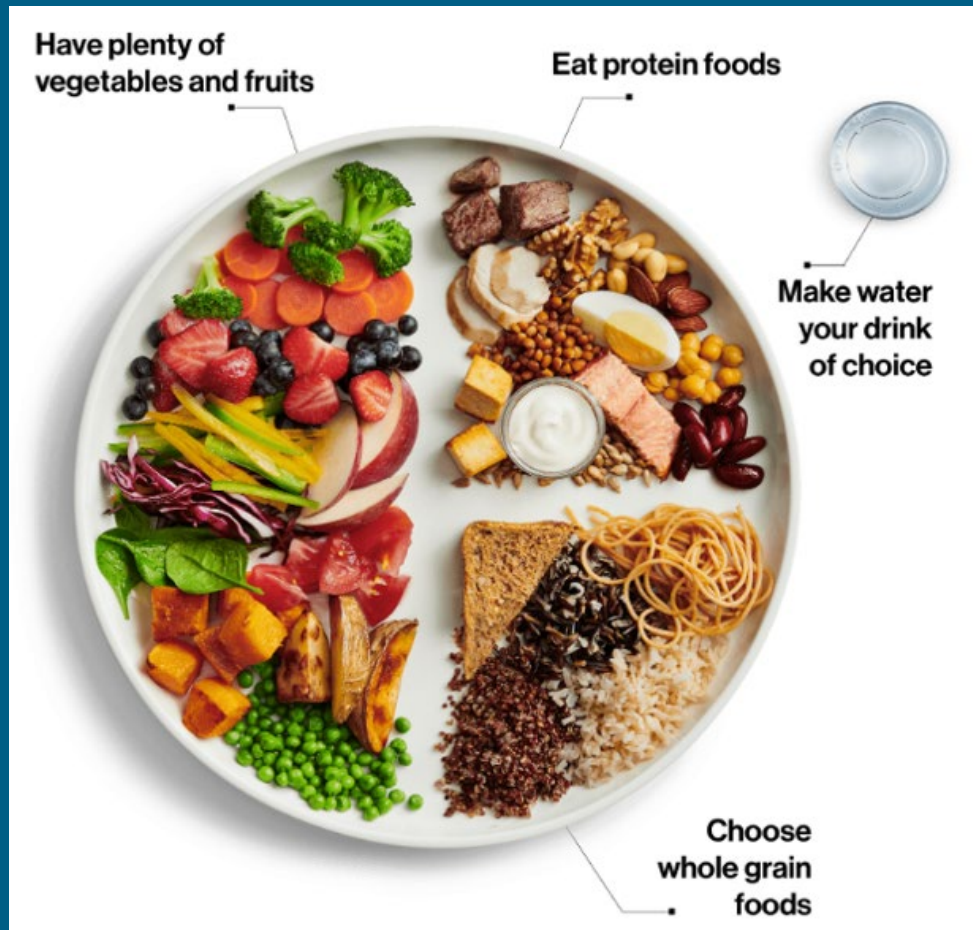
- Get children to eat food
 - Once meals/snacks are offered, your job is done!
- Teach young children about nutrition
 - Young children won't understand ideas like nutrients and nutrition
 - Children learn about food through their senses

It is important for educators to understand nutrition and use it to guide menu planning

Menu Planning using Canada's food guide



Canada's food guide



Do you use Canada's food guide to plan meals or snacks for your program?



Poll Question

AHS Resource for Child Care Menu Planning

Child Care Menu Planning with Canada's Food Guide Resources to Support Menu Planning

The [Early Learning and Child Care Act \(2021\)](#) states that if programs provide meals and snacks, they must follow a food guide recognized by Health Canada or Alberta Health. Canada's food guide is recognized by Health Canada.

You can use the resources listed below to plan meals and snacks for your Early Learning and Child Care program using [Canada's food guide](#). To plan your menu using the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth, which are food guidelines recognized by Alberta Health. Visit [Menu Planning | Alberta Health Services](#) www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page8942.aspx



Table of Contents

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A checklist to help plan meals, snacks, and choose foods based on Canada's food guide.

Tips to plan your menu using Canada's food guide

Suggestions and practical tips for choosing and preparing vegetables and fruits, whole grain foods, protein foods, drinks, and unsaturated fats.

Reading nutrition labels

How to use food labels to choose healthier foods and avoid food allergens.

Understanding processed foods

Lists of unprocessed, less processed, and processed foods.

Roles in feeding

Caregiver and child roles in feeding, and how this supports growth and brain development. How the roles in feeding can guide menu planning.

Suggested amounts of food to offer

Examples of amounts of foods to prepare per child at each meal and snack. Some children may eat more or eat less. This is just a guideline in the approximate amounts of foods to prepare.

Sample menu

One-week sample menu based on Canada's food guide principles.

Menu templates

Menu templates to plan meals and snacks based on Canada's food guide principles.

Food safety

Includes information on where to find food safety regulations and courses approved by Alberta Health.

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Child Care Menu Planning with Canada's Food Guide: Sample Menu

Time	Food Type	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breakfast	Meal description	Hardboiled egg with whole grain bagel and grapes	Yogurt with whole grain muffin and fruit	Egg wrap with vegetables in whole grain tortilla	Banana pancakes with smooth nut or seed butter and applesauce	Oatmeal with milk and frozen blueberries
	Vegetables and Fruits	Grapes, quartered	Frozen mixed berries	Peppers	Bananas	Frozen blueberries, thawed
	Whole Grain foods	Whole grain bagel	Bran muffin	Whole grain tortilla	Unsweetened applesauce	Oatmeal
	Protein foods (with milk or *fortified soy beverage to drink)	Eggs, hard boiled	Yogurt	Eggs, scrambled	Smooth nut or seed butter	Milk or fortified soy beverage
Morning Snack	Vegetables and Fruits	Apple slices	Canned peaches, drained	Oranges, sliced	Canned pears, drained	Fruit smoothie: Mixed fruit, frozen and thawed
	Whole Grain foods	Whole grain cereal snack mix	Whole grain English muffin	Whole grain cereal	Whole grain crackers	
	And/or Protein foods		Smooth nut or seed butter	Milk or fortified soy beverage	Cheddar cheese, cubed	Plain yogurt, milk
	Drink (water, milk, or *fortified soy beverage)	Water	Milk or fortified soy beverage	Water	Water	Water
Lunch	Meal description	Tofu/chicken stir-fry with brown rice	Beef or meat stew with Bannock	Vegetarian bean chili with whole grain bun	Grilled chicken burger with oven roasted sweet potato fries	Tuna salad wrap with carrot sticks
	Vegetables and Fruits	Frozen mixed vegetables, California style, stir-fried	Carrots and potatoes	Carrots, celery, canned corn	Lettuce, tomato	Celery, cucumber, diced
	Whole Grain foods	Brown rice	Whole grain Bannock	Whole grain bun	Sweet potatoes, roasted	Carrots, shredded
	Protein foods (with milk or *fortified soy beverage to drink)	Chicken or Tofu, Milk or fortified soy beverage	Beef or meat, Milk or fortified soy beverage	Canned kidney and pinto beans, Milk or fortified soy beverage	Milk or fortified soy beverage	Whole grain tortilla
Afternoon Snack	Vegetables and Fruits	Canned peaches, drained	Apples, thinly sliced	Red and green bell peppers, sliced	Snap peas	Banana, sliced
	Whole Grain foods	Granola or muesli	Whole grain pita	Whole wheat naan	Whole grain pita	Whole grain bread
	And/or Protein foods	Plain yogurt	Mozzarella cheese, sliced	Yogurt dip	Hummus	Nut or seed butter
	Drink (water, milk, or *fortified soy beverage)	Water	Water	Water	Water	Milk or fortified soy beverage

Drinks: *Fortified soy beverage may be offered to children 2 years. Have water available throughout the day.

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Benefits of using the resource

- Child care programs can help children meet their nutrition needs.
- AHS dietitians developed the **Child Care Menu Planning with Canada's Food Guide** resource to help.

Child Care Menu Planning with Canada's Food Guide Resources to Support Menu Planning

[The Early Learning and Child Care Act \(2021\)](#) states that if programs provide meals and snacks, they must follow a food guide recognized by Health Canada or Alberta Health. Canada's food guide is recognized by Health Canada.

You can use the resources listed below to plan meals and snacks for your Early Learning and Child Care program using [Canada's food guide](#). To plan your menu using the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth, which are food guidelines recognized by Alberta Health. Visit [Menu Planning | Alberta Health Services](#) www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page8942.aspx



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Using Canada's food guide to plan meals:

With each meal, offer:

- Vegetables and fruits
- Protein foods
- Whole grain foods
- Milk to drink



Using Canada's food guide to plan snacks:

With each snack, offer:

- A vegetable or fruit
- A whole grain food, a protein food, or both
- Water or milk to drink





Vegetables and Fruits



Vegetables and fruits

- Offer at every meal and snack
- Offer dark green and orange vegetables throughout the week
- Fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables and fruits can all be offered



Image source: Freepik

Suggested amounts to help plan and shop for the food

Vegetables and Fruits	1-3 Years	4 Years +
Cooked, canned, fresh, or frozen	¼ cup (60 mL)	½ cup (125 mL)
Leafy vegetables or salad	½ cup (125 mL)	1 cup (250 mL)

Children always decide how much to eat

Cost saving tips for vegetables and fruits

- ✓ **Fresh** - when in season
- ✓ **Frozen** - winter and year-round
- ✓ **Canned** - stock up on sale
- ✓ Store brand/no name brands
- ✓ Substitutions
- ✓ 'Naturally Imperfect' bags of vegetables and fruits



Protein Foods



Protein foods

- Offer protein foods at meals and snacks
- Include a variety of protein foods on your menu
 - Offer plant-based proteins a few times a week
- Fresh, frozen, or canned options can be prepared



Protein foods



Beans, peas,
and lentils



Fish, eggs,
lean meats,
and poultry

Fortified soy
beverage



Milk, yogurt,
and cheese



Nut and seed
butters

Suggested amounts to help plan and shop for the food

Protein foods		1-3 years	4 years and Over
Plant based	Fortified soy beverage	2 – 3 years: ½ cup (125mL)	1 cup (250 mL)
	Tofu	1/3 cup (40 g)	2/3 cup (85 g)
	Beans, lentils	¼ cup (65 mL)	½ cup (125 mL)
	Nut butters	½ - 1 Tbsp (7.5 – 15 mL)	1 Tbsp (15 mL)
Animal based	Milk	½ cup (125 mL)	1 cup (250 mL)
	Cheese	1.5 cm cube (15 g)	3 cm cube (30 g)
	Yogurt	1/3 cup (80 g)	¾ cup (175 g)
	Fish, meat, poultry (cooked)	2 Tbsp – ¼ cup (30–60 g)	¼ cup – ½ cup (55-100 g)
	Eggs	1 egg	1-2 eggs

Children always decide how much to eat

Cost saving tips for protein foods

- ✓ Beans, peas, or lentils combined with meat
- ✓ Substitutions
- ✓ Canned chicken and fish
- ✓ Eggs



Image source: Canva

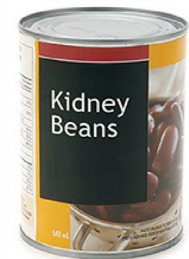


Image source: Freepik

Whole Grain Foods



Whole grain foods

Offer a variety of whole grains:

- Whole grain bread
- Whole grain pasta
- Brown rice
- Oatmeal
- Whole grain muffin
- Barley



Suggested amounts to help plan and shop for the food

Whole Grain Foods	1-3 Years	4 Years and Over
Bread	½-1 slice (18-37.5 g)	1-2 slices (37.5-75 g)
English muffin	¼ muffin (17 g)	½ muffin (35 g)
Tortilla	½ tortilla (27.5 g)	1 tortilla (55 g)
Rice, quinoa, couscous, pasta	⅓-½ cup (75-125 mL) cooked	¾ cup (175 mL) cooked
Hot cereal	½ cup (125 mL) prepared	1 cup (250 mL) prepared
Cold cereal	½ cup (125 mL) dry cereal	1 cup (250 mL) dry cereal
Crackers	3-5 crackers (10-15 g)	6-10 crackers (20-30 g)

Children always decide how much to eat

Cost saving tips for whole grains

- ✓ Buy whole grain foods on sale or in bulk – they freeze well
- ✓ Make it yourself - granola bars, muffins, pancakes, bannock
- ✓ Offer cooked oatmeal instead of boxed breakfast cereals
- ✓ Buy less processed ingredients and make meals from scratch



Image source: Canva



Image source: Canva

Drinks to Offer



Image source: Freepik

Drinks to offer

- Water
- Milk
- Unsweetened fortified soy beverage can be offered to children 2 years of age or older



Serve drinks in an open cup

Types of milk to offer

For children 9–24 months of age:

- Breastmilk
- 3.25% milk*
- Commercial infant formula

For children 2 years of age and older:

- Breastmilk
- 3.25%, 2% or 1% milk
- Fortified soy beverage

*3.25% (homogenized) milk can be introduced to healthy term infants between 9 – 12 months of age.

Answer in the chat!

Does
Canada's food
guide
recommend
juice?



No

When planning your menu, avoid highly processed foods.

- Highly processed foods are high in added sodium/salt, sugar, or saturated fat
- Highly processed foods are usually packaged



Image source: Freepik



Image source: Freepik



To follow Canada's food guide, which **protein food** would you serve on your child care menu?

- Chicken nuggets
- Canned chickpeas
- Hot dogs
- Eggs



To follow Canada's food guide, which **protein food** would you serve on your child care menu?

Poll Question

- Chicken nuggets
- Canned chickpeas
- Hot dogs
- Eggs



Offer foods from Canada's food guide

When offering packaged foods:

- Choose ones with **little or no added sodium/salt, sugars, and saturated fat**



Image source: Canva

Food labels can help with menu planning and buying food

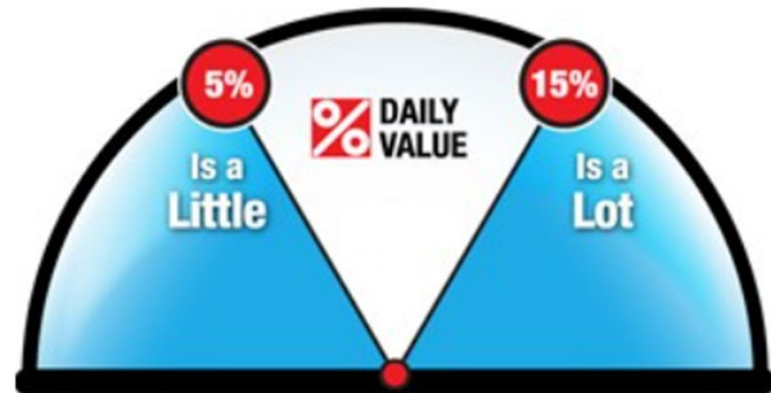


Using Food Labels: Nutrition Facts Table

Nutrition Facts	
Valeur nutritive	
Per 1 cup (250 mL) pour 1 tasse (250 mL)	
Calories 110	% Daily Value*
	% valeur quotidienne*
Fat / Lipides 0 g	0 %
Saturated / saturés 0 g + Trans / trans 0 g	0 %
Carbohydrate / Glucides 26 g	
Fibre / Fibres 0 g	0 %
Sugars / Sucres 22 g	22 %
Protein / Protéines 2 g	
Cholesterol / Cholestérol 0 mg	
Sodium 0 mg	0 %
Potassium 450 mg	10 %
Calcium 30 mg	2 %
Iron / Fer 0 mg	0 %

*5% or less is a little, 15% or more is a lot
*5% ou moins c'est peu, 15% ou plus c'est beaucoup

Percent daily value (%DV)
on most packaged foods




Which cereal would you offer?

A)

Nutrition Facts	
Per 1 cup (49 g)	
Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 190	
Fat 1 g	2 %
Saturated 0 g + Trans 0 g	0 %
Cholesterol 0 mg	
Sodium 5 mg	0 %
Carbohydrate 38 g	13 %
Fibre 1 g	4 %
Sugars 16 g	32 %
Protein 6 g	

B)

Nutrition Facts	
Per 1 cup (49 g)	
Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 190	
Fat 1 g	2 %
Saturated 0 g + Trans 0 g	0 %
Cholesterol 0 mg	
Sodium 5 mg	0 %
Carbohydrate 38 g	13 %
Fibre 6 g	24 %
Sugars 2 g	4 %
Protein 6 g	



Using Food Labels: Ingredients

- ✓ Ingredients are listed in order by weight, from highest to lowest amount
- ✓ Look for options that list “sugars” later in the ingredient list
- ✓ Look for words like “whole grain” or “fortified”



Ingredients: Whole grain wheat □ Dark chocolate bits (sugar, unsweetened chocolate, cocoa butter, soy lecithin, vanilla extract) □ Cocoa □ Mixed tocopherols (to preserve freshness)
Contains: Wheat □ Soy.

Using Food Labels: Food Allergens

- Common allergens sources must be labelled
- Look for the specific allergens in the:
 - ✓ *ingredient list*
 - ✓ “contains” or “may contain” statements
- Check out [Food Allergy Canada](#) for recipes and substitutions for common allergens.



Food Safety

- [AHS ELCC Food Safety Resource](#)
- Sign up for food recall notices: [Health Canada Recalls](#)

Child Care Menu Planning with Canada's Food Guide Food Safety

Preparing and storing food safely to prevent foodborne illness is important in early learning and childcare centers.

 Programs that provide food to 10 or more children are required to follow the [Food Regulation](#).



Refer to the guide developed by Environmental Public Health in Alberta Health Services: [Health and Safety Guide for Operators of Child Care Facilities \(albertahealthservices.ca\)](#) on pages 14 and 15 for more information on Food Safety.

The following courses are available for those responsible for food preparation:

- Approved food safety courses are available at this link: [Recognized food safety courses in Alberta](#)
- Additional food basic courses are available at this link (note that the free courses do not meet Sec 31 requirements of the Food regulation): [Take a Course | Alberta Health Services](#)



To receive notifications for new and updated food recalls and alerts, visit: [Recalls, advisories and safety alerts](#)

For more information and guidance on food safety, please contact your Environmental Public Health Officer

How do I start making
changes?

Let's discuss ideas

How do I get started?

Child Care Menu Planning with Canada's Food Guide Planning your Menu Checklist

Check the boxes to see how your menu compares to the recommendations from Canada's food guide below. The unchecked boxes are a place to start if you are looking to improve your menu.



- Meals are ½ vegetables and fruits, ¼ whole grain foods, and ¼ protein foods.
- Dark green and orange vegetables are offered throughout the week.
- Most grain products offered are whole grain.
- Plant-based protein foods are offered a few times a week.
- Snacks alternate between having a vegetable/fruit plus a protein food and a vegetable/fruit plus a whole grain food.
- Plain milk or unsweetened fortified soy beverage is offered at meals.
- Fortified soy beverage is not offered to children under 2 years of age.
- Water is offered throughout the day.
- Meals and snacks are offered 2 to 3 hours apart.
- Unprocessed or less processed foods are used as much as possible.
- Include culturally diverse food choices. See [Cultures, food traditions and health eating](#).
- Sugary drinks like fruit juices, powdered drink mixes, punches and juice cocktails are not offered.

If packaged foods are used, check the label and select foods with:

- Lower % Daily Value (DV) (5% or less) for sodium (salt), saturated fats, and sugar.
- Higher % Daily Value (DV) (15% or more) for fibre, iron, calcium, and potassium.

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Use the Menu Planning Checklist!

- ✓ Check your menu against the checklist
- ✓ Check off all the boxes that apply to your menu
- ✓ Identify areas to improve
- ✓ Make small changes over time

Try out the Menu Template

- ✓ Shows meals and snack by food type
- ✓ Includes drink

Child Care Menu Planning with Canada's Food Guide: Menu Template						
Time	Food Type	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning Snack	Vegetables and Fruits					
	Whole Grain Foods					
	And/or Protein Foods					
	Drink (water, milk, or *fortified soy beverage)					
	Meal Description					

Time	Food Type	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breakfast	Meal description	Hardboiled egg with whole grain bagel and grapes	Yogurt with wholegrain muffin and fruit	Egg wrap with vegetables in whole grain tortilla	Banana pancakes with smooth nut or seed butter and applesauce	Oatmeal with milk and frozen blueberries
	Vegetables and Fruits	Grapes, quartered	Frozen mixed berries	Peppers	Bananas Unsweetened applesauce	Frozen blueberries, thawed
	Whole Grain foods	Whole grain bagel	Bran muffin	Whole grain tortilla	Whole wheat banana pancakes	Oatmeal
	Protein foods (with milk or *fortified soy beverage to drink)	Eggs, hard boiled	Yogurt	Eggs, scrambled	Smooth nut or seed butter	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	

Drinks: *Fortified soy beverage may be offered to children over 2 years. Have water available throughout the day.

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What is missing from this meal?

Add your ideas to the chat!

Included:

- Meatballs
- Salad with lettuce, tomatoes, and cucumber
- Glass of milk



What is missing from this meal?

Included:

- Homemade macaroni and cheese
 - Made with whole grain noodles
 - Made with real cheese
- Glass of milk



Add your ideas to the chat!

Recipe ideas - vegetables and fruits



[Fruit Kabobs with Yogurt Dip](#)



[Fruit salad](#)



[Dilly Dip for Veggies](#)



[Banana Berry Blast Smoothie](#)



Recipe ideas - protein foods



[Moose stew](#)



[Tuna Mini Sandwiches](#)



[Vegetarian Chili](#)



[Meatballs and Tomato Sauce](#)



[Easy Oven Omelette](#)



[Beef and Barley Chili](#)

Recipe ideas - whole grain foods



Wheat and Oat
Pancakes



Baked
Bannock



Apple pie oatmeal



Oatmeal Raisin Cookies



Muffins

Recipe ideas – 50 servings

[Recipes | Alberta Health Services](#)

www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page8943.aspx

Recipes that are scaled to 50 servings for child care programs

Recipes include:

- Oat Bran Banana Muffins
 - Vegetable Chili
 - Vegetable Frittata
 - Whole Wheat Mac'n Cheese
 - Yogurt Parfait
 - Zucchini Loaf
-

QUESTIONS ?



➤ For more information contact us at
PublicHealthNutrition@ahs.ca