

SET GOALS CHOOSE WHOLE GRAINS EAT MORE FRUIT CHOOSE HEALTHY FOODS EAT MORE VEGETABLES SET GOALS CHOOSE HEALTHY FOODS CHOOSE WHOLE GRAINS SET GOALS FIND BALANCE CHOOSE HEALTHY FOODS

# STEPS TO A HEALTHY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT: School Nutrition Handbook

A resource for Kindergarten to Grade 12



DEVELOPED BY  
REGISTERED  
DIETITIANS









## Introduction

Healthy food choices and adequate nutrition are essential to physical well-being, healthy growth and development, readiness to learn, school performance and lowering risks of certain diseases.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Schools settings are an effective way to reach a large population, including students, school staff, families and community members. Schools can also play an important role for students during influential stages of their lives, when lifelong eating habits are formed.<sup>4</sup>

Most students receive excellent education on the importance of healthy food choices. However, they may be faced with an environment that does not allow the healthy choice to be the easy choice. The knowledge of healthy eating does not necessarily translate to better food choices unless supported by a healthy food environment.<sup>5</sup>

The *Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth* (June 2008) offers a starting point to change or improve the school nutrition environment. The goal of this School Nutrition Handbook is to assist everyone involved in schools (students, teachers, principals, parents and community members) to make it easy to eat healthy. It includes information on healthy vending machine choices, healthier cafeteria and school stores, healthy rewards, fundraising ideas and various other topics. The information and handouts in this handbook can be used for newsletter inserts, classroom education or as handouts for students, staff and parents.

The School Nutrition Handbook will help answer the following questions:

1. **What is the link between healthy eating and learning?**
2. **What are healthy food choices for schools?**
3. **How can schools make the healthy choice the easy choice?**
4. **How can your school get started?**



## What is the link between healthy eating and learning?

Good health and nutrition are required to achieve one's full educational potential.<sup>6</sup> Numerous studies have linked good nutrition with readiness to learn, academic achievement, as well as decreased discipline and emotional problems. A hungry child is not equipped to learn.<sup>7</sup>

Children may come to school hungry for a variety of reasons; eating early due to long bus ride/travel to school, lack of food, lack of time, or a lack of appetite early in the morning.

A healthy school environment, whether through breakfast programs, sale of healthy food choices or positive role modeling, benefits all members of the school community. Here is what research says about nutrition and learning:

### Breakfast:

- Breakfast consumption improves memory, test grades and school attendance.<sup>8</sup>
- School breakfast programs improve attendance and decrease lateness.<sup>9</sup>

### Lunch:

- Students that do not bring lunch to school may choose less healthy food options when hungry. Snack foods or vending machine selections offer quick energy to fill that hunger gap. However, these foods may be low in nutrients and tend to be high in fat, sugar and salt.

### Academic Performance and Attendance:

- Nutrition has a critical influence on cognitive development and academic performance in children and adolescents. Undernourished children are more likely to have low energy, may have difficulty concentrating and may be more disruptive.<sup>10</sup>
- Undernourished children have significantly poorer attendance than their well nourished classmates.<sup>11</sup>



## Eating Habits and Health Risks

Healthy eating contributes to physical and emotional wellbeing, which, in turn, significantly affect many other areas of students' lives. Poor nutrition has significant health risks. Poor eating habits can contribute to the rising rates of childhood obesity and overweight as well as risk for type 2 diabetes.<sup>12</sup>

### Eating Habits:

- In Alberta, a study on the eating patterns of youth showed that more than 45% of participants consumed foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt on a daily basis. The study also showed on average, boys consumed 6 servings per day and girls consumed 4 ½ servings per day of foods high in fat, sugar and salt.<sup>13</sup>
- The same study showed that 25% of boys and 50% of girls do not eat breakfast every day. It also highlighted that 18% of boys and 28% of girls report not eating lunch every day.<sup>13</sup>
- 22% of Alberta's children are either overweight or obese.<sup>14</sup>
- Obesity in children has been linked to sweetened drink consumption. One additional serving of pop each day may increase a child's risk of becoming obese by 60%.<sup>15</sup>

This information could suggest that many children and youth are replacing healthy food choices based on Canada's Food Guide with low-nutrient foods.

### Health Risks:

Research also shows that many youth have inconsistent meal patterns which may lead to malnutrition. Malnutrition due to a diet that is low in nutrients and high in fat, sugar and/or salt, may be a major contributor to overweight and obesity in children.<sup>16</sup>

Nutrient deficiency is related to not only lack of food but also to not eating the recommended foods from Canada's Food Guide. A recent study showed that Alberta girls are not meeting the recommendations for Canada's Food Guide in three of the four food groups (Vegetables and Fruit, Milk and Alternatives and Meat and Alternatives). Boys are meeting the minimum recommendations for all food groups.<sup>13</sup>

Nutrients of most concern for school age children are calcium and iron.<sup>17</sup>

Calcium: By not consuming the recommended amounts of Milk and Alternatives, youth are at risk of developing Osteopenia ("brittle bone disease") or the more advanced stage of bone disease, Osteoporosis.

Iron: Iron deficiency has been associated with poor performance on intelligence tests, difficulty with learning tasks and delayed academic achievement.<sup>17, 18</sup>

Poor eating habits in childhood may also be carried into adulthood and increase the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer.<sup>19</sup>

## Comprehensive School Health<sup>20</sup>

The health and well-being of children, youth and school personnel is influenced by many factors, often called “determinants of health”. These factors include family income, social support networks, personal health practices and coping methods, biology and genetics, education and physical environment of the home and school.

Comprehensive school health looks beyond the classroom and involves home, school and community. It addresses four distinct, but inter-related pillars that provide a strong foundation for comprehensive school health.

- Social and physical environment;
- Teaching and learning;
- Healthy school policy; and
- Partnerships and services.

The term “comprehensive school health” is widely used in Canada. Some refer to a similar approach as “health promoting schools” or “coordinated school health” and its pillars may be expressed in different ways. However, the underlying concepts are the same; they are all based on the World Health Organization’s Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986).<sup>21</sup>

The World Health Organization lists the following goals for health promoting schools:

1. Foster health and learning with all tools and supports available.
2. Engage health and education officials, teacher, students, parents, health providers and community leaders in efforts to make the school a healthy place for all.
3. Strive to provide:
  - a. A healthy environment
  - b. School health education and school health services
  - c. Health promotion programs for staff
  - d. Healthy food choices
  - e. Daily physical activity/education
  - f. Programs for counseling
  - g. Social support
  - h. Mental health promotion
4. Implement policies and practices that:
  - a. Respect an individual’s well-being and dignity
  - b. Provide multiple opportunities for success
  - c. Acknowledge good efforts and intentions as well as personal achievements.<sup>22</sup>

For more information on comprehensive school health, visit the Joint Consortium for School Health website at [www.jcsh-cces.ca](http://www.jcsh-cces.ca)



## What are Healthy Food Choices for Schools?

A healthy food choice includes not only the type of food but also the serving size, method of preparation, distribution and food safety. In order to assist in the task of choosing healthy foods, Alberta Health and Wellness has created a set of guidelines to help schools identify healthy options.

### Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth

The *Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth*<sup>5</sup> are designed to help Albertans create an environment which provides healthy food choices and promotes healthy eating habits. These guidelines can be used wherever food is offered to children and youth in childcare facilities, schools and recreation/community centres.

The guidelines include a food rating system to help schools choose healthy foods. They also provide information specifically for schools on healthy food options, suggestions for developing food policy, recommendations for change, as well as frequently asked questions. To view the complete guidelines and download your copy, visit [www.healthyalberta.ca](http://www.healthyalberta.ca).

### The Food Rating System

The *Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth* uses a food rating system as a simple way to separate healthy foods from less healthy foods and to decide which foods should be present in your school community.

The food rating system puts all foods into three categories, based on specific nutritional criteria. The three categories are: Choose Most Often, Choose Sometimes and Choose Least Often. Familiar symbols such as “Go, Yield and Stop” are an easy way to identify the three categories.

#### Choose Most Often – High nutrient foods



These foods should be consumed daily and in appropriate amounts and portion sizes, based on age category. These foods are all recommended as healthy choices in *Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide*.

#### Choose Sometimes – Moderate nutrient foods



No more than three servings from the Choose Sometimes category are recommended per week for consumption. While foods in this category may still provide beneficial nutrients, they tend to be higher in added sugar, unhealthy fat and sodium (salt).

#### Choose Least Often – Low nutrient foods



Eating these foods is not recommended. No more than one serving from the Choose Least Often category is recommended. Foods in this category tend to be high in added sugar, unhealthy fat and sodium; and low in fiber.

## School Recommendations

The guidelines outline specific recommendations for schools in terms of the availability of foods from each of the categories.

- **Elementary Schools:** 100% of the foods available for regular consumption should be foods from the Choose Most Often food category.
- **Junior High Schools:** 100% of the foods available for regular consumption should be foods from the Choose Most Often (60% of the food options) and Choose Sometimes (40% of the food options) food categories.
- **High Schools:** 100% of the foods available for regular consumption should be foods from the Choose Most Often (50% of the food options) and Choose Sometimes (50% of the food options) food categories.
- Where permitted offer only small portion sizes of Choose Least Often options. Multi-level schools should adhere to the most conservative recommendation.

## Label Reading

Understanding and using food rating system requires knowledge and understanding of how to read food labels. Foods can be assigned to the different categories based on their stated portion size and Nutrition Facts table. Here are some helpful tips on label reading.

### Using food labels

Food labels give you information to help you make healthy food choices and compare similar foods. Nutrition information is found in three different places on food labels:

1. Ingredient list
2. Nutrient content claims and health claims
3. Nutrition Facts table

#### 1. Ingredient List

Look for ingredient lists on food packages. The ingredient list provides an overview of what is in the food. Ingredients are listed by weight from most to least.

Example: Oat and Almond Bar

(Whole: Hard Red Winter Wheat, Oats, Rye, Barley, Triticale, Long Grain Brown Rice, Buckwheat, Sesame Seeds), Whole Almonds, Brown Rice Syrup, Soy Protein Isolate, Soy Grits, Evaporated Cane Juice Crystals, Chicory Root Fiber, Whole Flax Seeds, Evaporated Cane Juice Syrup, Rice Starch, Corn Flour, Honey, Expeller Pressed Canola Oil, Vegetable Glycerin, Oat Fiber, Evaporated Salt, Natural Flavors, Molasses, Soy Lecithin, Peanut Flour, Whey, Annatto Color.

Allergen Statement: CONTAINS WHEAT, ALMOND, SOY, PEANUT AND MILK INGREDIENTS. MAY CONTAIN TRACES OF OTHER TREE NUTS.

#### 2. Nutrient Content Claims and Health Claims

**Nutrient content claims** are statements which describe how much of a healthy nutrient is in a food. Example: “A very high source of fibre.”

**Health claims** describe a link between what you eat and certain diseases. Example: “A healthy diet low in saturated and trans fats may reduce the risk of heart disease.”

A food must meet government standards before it can display a nutrient content claim or a health claim. Nutrition information related to any claim must be present on the food package.

### 3. Nutrition Facts Table

The Nutrition Facts table provides information on serving size, calories and at least 13 different nutrients in an easy to read table.

Use the Nutrition Facts table to compare similar foods. Choose foods that are higher in fibre and lower in sugar, salt and fat.

**Oat and Almond Bar**

The information in this table is based on one serving of food. Look at the **serving size** listed on the Nutrition Facts table. If you eat more or less than the listed serving size you have to adjust the nutrient content listed below. For example, if you were to eat half of this bar you would divide all the nutrient values in half.

**Fat** is the total amount of fat in 1 serving. 5 g of fat is equal to 1 tsp of fat.

**Saturated and trans fats** are part of the total amount of fat. These fats raise the “bad” blood cholesterol. Choose foods that are lower in saturated fat and contain no trans fat.

Nutrition Facts	
Per 1 bar ( 35 g)	
Amount Per Serving	% Daily Value
<b>Calories 130</b>	
<b>Fat</b> 2 g	3 %
Saturated Fat 0.5 g + Trans 0 g	3 %
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0 mg	0 %
<b>Sodium</b> 65 mg	3 %
<b>Carbohydrate</b> 24 g	8 %
<b>Fibre</b> 4 g	16 %
<b>Sugars</b> 8 g	
<b>Protein</b> 5 g	
Vitamin A 2 %	Vitamin C 0 %
Calcium 2 %	Iron 10 %

**Calories** are the amount of energy in 1 serving.

**Sodium** is the amount of sodium in 1 serving. 2300 mg of sodium is equal to 1 tsp (5 mL) of salt.

**Fibre** helps to promote a healthy heart and control blood sugars. Choose foods that are higher in fibre.

**Sugar** includes added sugar and sugar naturally found in the food item. 4 g is equal to 1 tsp (5 mL) of sugar.

Note: This bar fits into the Choose Most Often category for Grain Products (Whole Grain Baked Product).

## Food Safety

It is important to be aware that food-borne illness is always a possibility when food is served in schools. Failure to safely prepare or store food may cause bacteria in food to multiply and could result in a food-borne illness if the food is consumed. The symptoms of food-borne illness can include nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea and can result in serious health concerns.

Ensure that everyone involved with food preparation, serving, or storage of food has training in safe food handling. Remember frequent hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of food-borne illness.

## Hygiene

### Hand Washing

Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds:

- Before preparing and serving food
- While handling food and after handling meat, poultry, eggs and seafood
- After cleaning spills
- After coughing or sneezing into your hands or into a tissue
- After going to the toilet
- Before eating

### General Tips

- Avoid sampling food while you are cooking.
- Keep your hair tied back.
- Take off your rings and bracelets.
- Leave all of your outside clothes and backpacks away from the food preparation/eating area.



## Safe Food Handling

Four principles of safe food handling are clean, separate, cook and chill. <sup>23</sup>

### Clean

- Wash your hands, utensils and cooking surfaces (including microwaves) with soap and hot water before you handle food, during preparation, and again when you've finished. Wash all vegetables and fruits under cool running water before eating or cooking.
- Sanitize countertops, cutting boards and utensils with a mild bleach and water solution.

### Separate

- Keep meats and their juices separated from other food during storage and preparation.
- Keep separate cutting boards for raw meats.
- Always keep foods covered.
- In the refrigerator, store raw foods below cooked foods.

### Cook

- Prepare foods quickly.
- Cook foods thoroughly. Make sure that meat and poultry are cooked to the following temperatures:
  - Beef, veal, lamb to 77°C (170°F)
  - Pork, ground meat to 71°C (160°F)
  - Poultry (pieces) to 74°C (165°F)
  - Poultry (whole) to 85°C (185 °F)
- Serve food immediately.
- If foods need to be reheated, reheat foods to 74°C (165°F).

*Don't let foods sit at temperatures where bacteria can grow. The **danger zone** is between 4°C (40°F) and 60°C (140°F)*

### Chill

- Refrigerate or freeze leftovers within two hours.
- Refrigerate or freeze leftovers in shallow, covered containers or zippered plastic bags for quick cooling.
- Make sure the refrigerator is set at a temperature of 4°C (40°F) or colder.
- Keep the freezer set at -18°C (0°F) or colder.

For further information on food safety, visit [www.canfightbac.org](http://www.canfightbac.org) , contact your local Environmental Public Health Officer or visit [www.albertahealthservices.ca](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca).

## Kitchen Safety<sup>24</sup>

### Prevent Burns

- Never fool around when using a stove, oven or microwave.
- Always use oven mitts or pot holders to handle pots and pans.
- Open lids or remove tinfoil or plastic wrap away from you to prevent scalding from escaping steam.

### Prevent Cuts

- Never fool around when using a knife.
- Keep your focus on what you are cutting up.
- When you are finished, make sure you lay the knife down beside the sink where it will not fall off the counter.
- When walking with a knife, hold it by your side pointed towards the floor.
- Never leave a knife in the sink filled with soap and water.

### Prevent an Electrical Shock

- Water and electricity do not mix. Do not use electrical equipment near a sink or water source.
- Do not use electrical appliances/equipment with frayed cords.

### Prevent Spills

- Keep handles of pots and pans that are on the stove facing inwards.
- Keep all sleeves rolled up so that they do not hook onto cooking equipment.

## Microwave Oven Safety<sup>24</sup>

Microwave ovens allow students and staff to have more options for their lunches. Schools may choose to have microwave ovens in lunchrooms, cafeterias or classrooms. There are potential dangers associated with the use of microwave ovens. Below is a list of safety tips to consider when students will be using microwave ovens.

### Prevent Accidents

- To ensure adequate supervision, students should have to ask for permission from a teacher or lunchroom supervisor before using the microwave oven.
- Students should stand at least one meter way from the microwave oven when it is in use to avoid crowding.

### Prevent Burns

- Microwave ovens should be placed securely on a stand that is low enough for students to use. There is more risk for burns if a student has to reach too high to pull out a hot dish.
- Oven mitts should be provided next to the microwave for safe removal of hot foods.
- Students should be supervised and may need assistance when heating liquids in the microwave, due to higher risk of burns.

### Prevent Fires

- Paper bags should not be put in microwave ovens, as they may cause fires.
- Metal items such as aluminum foil, cutlery, twist ties or juices boxes should not be put in the microwave.
- Ensure that students and teachers follow the microwave directions on a food package in order to prevent spills and fires, and to keep packages from bursting.

### Prevent Spills

- Food items should be covered with an appropriate lid or spatter cover.
- Spills in the microwave should be cleaned immediately.

## Food Allergy and Food Intolerance<sup>25</sup>

### Food Allergy

A **food allergy** is an immune system response that is diagnosed by a physician. An allergic reaction is usually due to the protein in a food or a food additive. A reaction can be mild or very serious. Common examples include peanut or shellfish allergies.

The most common reactions to a food allergy are:

- Itchy lips or tongue
- Hives or rash
- Eyes, lips or throat swelling
- Difficulty breathing
- Anaphylaxis (includes difficulty breathing, drop in blood pressure, shock and passing out)

There are no cures for food allergies, although there is some evidence that children may outgrow their food allergies. To prevent a reaction the foods must be avoided completely.

If there are students or staff members with severe food allergies it is important to know the allergy protocol of your school. When a severe allergic reaction occurs, such as difficulty breathing or anaphylaxis, administer an injection of adrenaline immediately. An Epi-Pen<sup>®</sup> is an auto-injection device that is often used for a severe allergic reaction. Training or an understanding of how an Epi-Pen<sup>®</sup> works is important.

### Food Intolerance

A **food intolerance** is a reaction to a food or food additive that does not involve the immune system. The symptoms can range from mild to serious. A common food intolerance is lactose intolerance.

Symptoms of food intolerance can include:

- Upset stomach
- Diarrhea
- Gas
- Abdominal cramps
- Chronic headaches.

## Allergy Awareness

Allergy awareness is important to ensure a safe and healthy school environment for students and staff. It can be challenging for students with allergies, especially when they have severe or life threatening reactions.

When food is offered at schools, ensure that food choices are healthy and clearly labeled. Serve simple, less processed foods most often. Highly processed foods may contain ingredients that cannot be eaten by those with allergies or special diets.

Severe allergies can be triggered not only from a food source, but also from touching the allergen. This can cause concern for the whole school. Most school districts have a policy on allergy awareness. Students or staff with severe allergies should be identified by a photo with information on the type of allergy, appropriate treatment as well as medical and emergency contacts. This information is often posted in the teacher's staff room to ensure confidentiality and to inform new staff.

The Alberta School Board Association had a policy advisory regarding anaphylaxis. This advisory can be found online at <http://www.asba.ab.ca/services/policy-ad-anaphyl07.asp>.

### Allergy avoidance strategies<sup>26</sup>

- Adult supervision of young children while eating is strongly recommended.
- Individuals with food allergy should not trade or share food, food utensils, or food containers.
- Parents should work closely with food service staff to ensure that food being served during lunch and snack programs is appropriate.
- The use of food in crafts and cooking classes may need to be modified or restricted depending on the allergies of the children.
- Ingredients of food brought in for special events by the school community, served in school cafeterias, or provided by catering companies should be clearly identified.
- All children should be encouraged to comply with a 'no eating' rule during daily travel on school buses.
- All children should wash their hands before and after eating.
- Surfaces such as tables, toys, etc. should be carefully cleaned of contaminating foods.

For more information, visit Allergy Safe Communities at <http://www.allergysafecommunities.ca/pages/default.asp?catid=11>

For information on specific allergies, visit the Health Canada web site at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/allerg/fa-aa/index-eng.php>.



## How Can Schools Make the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice?

Students and staff are influenced by their surroundings. A school environment that supports healthy food choices will enable students to put their nutrition and health education into practice. The information outlined in the *Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth*, Label Reading and Food Safety sections of this handbook can all be used to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

The following section provides ideas and suggestions to help schools choose foods that fall within the Choose Most Often and Choose Sometimes categories.

### Healthy Choices for Vending Machines

#### Beverages

Traditional beverage vending contains high volumes of sugar sweetened beverages including soft drinks, sweetened juice drinks and caffeinated drinks. Studies have shown that each additional serving of soda or juice drink a child consumes per day increases the child's chance of becoming overweight by 60%.<sup>15</sup>

The *Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth* provide the following recommendations for beverages:

1. Promote the consumption of water to quench thirst and provide adequate hydration.
2. Provide access to refrigerated milk, fortified soy beverages and 100% vegetable and fruit juices.
3. Avoid beverages such as pop, iced tea, sports drinks, diet beverages, fruit punches, fruit drinks and fruit 'ades' (such as lemonade).

#### Foods

School food vending machines traditionally provide food items not found in the four food groups of Canada's Food Guide. Many of these items would be considered Choose Least Often foods.

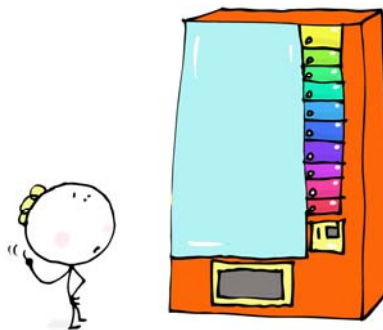
The guidelines recommend that all vending machines in schools contain healthy food options in appropriate serving sizes. Increased selections of healthier vending choices can offer students and staff supplementary choices to their meals. See the table on the following page for healthy food choices for vending machines.

A list of packaged foods that fit in the Choose Most Often and Choose Sometimes categories is available on the *Single Serving Packaged Food List* available at [www.achsc.org](http://www.achsc.org).

## Food Examples for Vending Machines

The following table includes suggestions for items that fit within the Choose Most Often category. Please read the Nutrition Facts label and refer to the guidelines to determine which category a food fits.

Food Item	Choose Most Often
<b>Beverages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plain water</li> <li>• Milk (skim, 1%, 2%)</li> <li>• Soy beverage (unflavoured and fortified)</li> <li>• 100% pure fruit or vegetable juice</li> </ul>
<b>Vegetables and Fruit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fruit, canned in juice</li> <li>• Dried fruit or 100% dried fruit leather</li> <li>• Apple sauce, unsweetened</li> <li>• Frozen 100% fruit bars</li> </ul>
<b>Grain Products</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole grain crackers</li> <li>• Whole grain cereal without added sugar</li> <li>• Small whole grain bagels</li> <li>• Some whole grain granola bars</li> <li>• Small whole grain muffin</li> </ul>
<b>Milk and Alternatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard cheese portions</li> <li>• Plain yogurt</li> </ul>
<b>Meat and Alternatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nuts or seeds, unsalted</li> <li>• Tuna to-go packages</li> <li>• Peanut butter</li> </ul>





## Point of Sale Healthy Eating Messages

Point of sales messages are fun, quick messages that reinforce healthy eating and healthy food choices. They can be placed near the cash register in a cafeteria, near vending machines, or used as daily PA announcements or in school newsletters. Here are some fun sayings to get you started: <sup>27</sup>

### Vegetable and Fruit Messages:

- “Get back to your roots...eat your veggies!”
- “GO FOR IT...try something new!”
- “Nature’s Candy!...Try sweet and juicy fruit.”
- “Add colour and variety to your plate with nutritious vegetables!”
- “Go for the Green and Orange!”

### Grain Product Messages:

- “For fibre and flavour...enjoy whole grain muffins, breads wraps and rolls!”
- “Really hungry?...Add some rice or pasta to your meal!”

### Milk and Alternatives Product Messages:

- “Looking for something healthy and delicious...try yogurt!”
- “Try ice cold milk for a refreshing break!”

### Meat and Alternatives Product Messages:

- “Lean roast beef, ham, turkey or chicken breast are great sandwich choices!”
- “Add protein to your salad...try beans or hard cooked eggs!”

### Snacks:

- “Here’s a hunch – raw vegetables provide a snack with a low fat crunch!”
- “Have you had a fresh fruit today? ... It’s an easy fast food or snack.”

### Other:

- “WATER! A great way to quench thirst and replenish body fluids!”
- “Extra hungry? Add soup to your lunch!”



## Healthy Choices for Special Event Days

Schools host a variety of events, including parent teacher nights, sports days, school fairs and carnivals. These events provide an excellent opportunity to demonstrate healthy food choices to students, families and the community. Many food items can be prepared in your own facility or they may be ordered from a local restaurant. Here are some ideas for your next school celebration.

Instead of...	Try this...
Pop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Milk, 100% juice or water</b></li> </ul>
Frozen treats: Popsicles, ice cream bars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Yogurt or pudding pops:</b> Place plastic wrap in the bottom of a plastic popsicle holder prior to filling to allow for each pop to be wrapped. Fill molds with yogurt, apple sauce or fresh smoothies. Cover with tin foil. Place popsicle stick through foil, and freeze. Or try using single serve yogurt or milk pudding and freeze.</li> <li>• <b>Fruit bars:</b> Made with 100% fruit juice.</li> <li>• <b>“Juice-icles”:</b> Pour unsweetened juice into molds. Skewer a piece of fruit on a stick and place in mold and freeze.</li> </ul>
Potato chips or taco chips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Veggie or fruit tray or baked pita chips:</b> Serve with low fat dips.</li> <li>• <b>Low fat popcorn</b></li> </ul>
Hot dogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Wraps:</b> Choose whole grain wraps with a variety of fillings such as vegetables, cheese, lean meats, egg or hummus.</li> </ul>
Hamburgers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Submarine sandwiches:</b> Choose whole grain buns with lean meats and extra veggies!</li> </ul>
Traditional pizza	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Healthy pizza:</b> Look for thin, whole wheat crust with lean meat, low fat cheese and extra veggies.</li> </ul>
Cakes, cookies other sweets	<p><b>Fruit and milk based desserts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fresh fruit salad, fruit chunks with yogurt dip</li> <li>• Apple sauce or apple and fruit blends</li> <li>• Peel an orange and place a popsicle stick in the middle to form an orangesicle</li> <li>• Flavoured yogurt parfaits</li> <li>• Milk pudding (lower fat), tapioca or rice pudding</li> <li>• Frozen lower fat yogurt</li> <li>• Decorate graham crackers with fresh fruit and yogurt to make funny faces</li> </ul>

### Here are some other ideas....

- Ethnic Foods: Curry chicken with rice; Stir-fried vegetables with noodles; Chicken fajitas, burritos or tacos; Souvlaki and Greek salad; Cabbage rolls and perogies
- Chili and a bun, sloppy joes, taco salad or hot soup with bread or buns
- Whole wheat pasta: with tomato or meat sauce

## Healthy Fundraising Ideas

Schools often rely on fundraising to help support field trips, sports equipment and other items students may need. Think beyond selling chocolates and other high fat and sugar treats as fundraisers this year. There are many non-food and healthier food items that schools can use to raise money. Here are some ideas:

### Food ideas

- Seasonings, spices
- Grocery store vouchers and cards
- Popcorn (plain, trans fat free)
- Fresh fruit (e.g. Mandarin oranges at Christmas or apples in the fall)

### Non-food ideas

- Singing telegrams, flower grams or bouquets of balloons
- Calendars or event planners (e.g. Happily Ever Active [www.everactive.org](http://www.everactive.org) )
- Cookbooks – recipes submitted by students, parents and staff
- Items from a catalogue
- Bookmarks
- Yearbooks
- Class rings
- Raffle tickets for gift baskets
- Book fairs
- Garage/rummage sales
- Bowling night
- Sport or game tournaments (e.g. badminton or chess)
- Silent/live auction
- Talent shows
- Carnival (with healthy snacks and prizes)
- Concert
- Walk-a-thons/dance-a-thon/spelling bees
- Tree Seedlings

### Things to collect

- Empty printer cartridges (e.g. Cartridges 4 Kids Program™)
- Cans/bottles to be recycled

## Healthy Rewards

It is important to be consistent when teaching children. Beyond vending machines or cafeterias, there are many ways to model healthy eating. Classroom rewards and healthy classroom parties are excellent opportunities to demonstrate the nutrition education taught in the classroom.

Classroom rewards are often used to reinforce good behaviour. Using food as a reward, especially less healthy foods such as candy or other sweet treats, may cause children to learn that the reward food is more valuable than other foods.<sup>29, 30</sup> Frequent sweet food rewards throughout the day can also lead to cavities.<sup>31</sup> Here are some ideas of non-food rewards that you can use in the classroom:

### Positive Recognition

Words of praise and recognition are the best rewards for children because they reinforce the behaviour right away and help build self-confidence. Besides, they are free!

- Use words like, “Good job”, “I am proud of what you just did”, “You have really improved”, and “Thank you for trying that.”
- Offer certificates, ribbons, trophies or plaques
- Write a thank-you note or a letter of achievement that recognizes the child’s behaviour
- Announce a child’s achievement at a school-wide assembly or on the school’s website
- Choice of an item from a “treasure box” of non-food treats. See Healthy Eating for the Holidays section for ideas.

### Privileges

Privileges are a great way to motivate positive behaviour. Brainstorm ideas with your students so they are more interested in working for the rewards.

- Have the children write a list of fun activities they like to do. Use as rewards or privileges.
- Grant extra time for playing in the gymnasium or on the playground.
- Allow children to be the leader, choose the next activity or be a special helper.

## Healthy Classroom Parties

The school year provides many opportunities for classroom parties. It is important to balance between healthy food choices and typical sweet treats. To make your classroom party a healthy success, try some of the ideas below:

<p><b>Snacks</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Fresh fruit kabobs</b></li> <li>• <b>Class fruit salad:</b> Have each student bring one piece of fruit to create a fruit salad</li> <li>• <b>Cheese and vegetable kabobs</b></li> <li>• <b>Veggie sticks:</b> Carrot, peppers (green, red, yellow), broccoli, cucumber, celery, cherry tomatoes, snow peas, cauliflower</li> <li>• <b>Fruit and yogurt parfait:</b> Layer yogurt with fruit chunks and top off with granola</li> <li>• <b>Hummus and whole wheat pita</b></li> <li>• <b>Trail mix or popcorn</b></li> <li>• <b>Roasted pumpkin seeds</b></li> <li>• <b>Crunchy snack mix:</b> Dry cereal, popcorn, crackers, pretzels (low salt)</li> <li>• <b>Mini-pizza:</b> On whole wheat English muffins or pitas</li> <li>• <b>Crackers with low fat cheese</b></li> <li>• <b>Applesauce Cup:</b> Unsweetened</li> <li>• <b>Frozen fruit:</b> Freeze fruit (pineapple, grapes, strawberries, blueberries) on a cookie sheet and serve</li> <li>• <b>Banana splits:</b> With fruit topping and frozen yogurt</li> <li>• <b>Tropical banana:</b> Dip banana chunks into orange juice and roll in coconut and freeze</li> <li>• <b>Ants on a log:</b> Celery sticks filled with low fat cream cheese and sprinkled with raisins</li> <li>• <b>Fruit delight:</b> Place a spoonful of pudding or yogurt on a graham cracker and top with sliced fruit</li> </ul>
<p><b>Drinks</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Milk:</b> Skim, 1% , 2% or flavored (chocolate, strawberry or banana)</li> <li>• <b>Fortified Soy Beverage</b></li> <li>• <b>Water:</b> Spruce up your water with slices of lemon, lime or oranges</li> <li>• <b>Juice:</b> 100% pure, unsweetened</li> <li>• <b>Healthy Fruit Punch:</b> 100% fruit juice, club soda and slices or chunks of fresh or frozen fruit</li> <li>• <b>Smoothies:</b> Add fruit, yogurt and 100% juice or milk into a blender</li> <li>• <b>Fruit Slushes:</b> Mix 1 part 100% frozen juice with 4 parts crushed ice</li> <li>• <b>Wacky Watermelon:</b> Blend watermelon chunks and ice until smooth</li> <li>• <b>Hot Apple Cider:</b> Heat up 100% apple juice with spice mix and cinnamon sticks</li> <li>• <b>Hot Chocolate:</b> Look for lower sugar mix, or make your own with cocoa or just heat chocolate milk.</li> </ul>

## Healthy Eating for Holidays

Common holidays that are celebrated in schools include Halloween, winter celebrations (e.g., Christmas and Hanukah), Valentine’s Day and spring celebrations (e.g. Easter). Food is a central theme for many of these holidays or celebrations. Often the food served on special occasions is higher in fat, sugar and/or salt and portion sizes tend to be large. Below are some food-free and healthier food ideas for celebrations and tips to make it a healthy holiday season.

### Halloween

Halloween is an exciting and creative time for children. With classroom parties, school celebrations and trick-or-treating, children end up collecting a lot of candy. Plan ahead this season for healthier alternatives to candy at school events and at home. Below is a list non-food option or healthier ideas that can be used as treats on Halloween.

Non-Food Treats	Healthier Food Treats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stickers</li> <li>• Yo-yos</li> <li>• Bouncy balls</li> <li>• Slinkies</li> <li>• Puzzle games</li> <li>• Skipping ropes</li> <li>• Box of crayons, coloured chalk</li> <li>• Fun shoe laces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real fruit leather</li> <li>• Juice box (100% pure fruit juice)</li> <li>• Small bag of trail mix</li> <li>• Box of raisins</li> <li>• Small bag of pretzels</li> <li>• Small bag of popcorn</li> <li>• Individual hot chocolate packages (look for <u>low sugar</u> content)</li> </ul>

### Fun Halloween Activities

Take the focus off of candy and plan some fun activities this Halloween. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Ghost-sack races (white pillow case instead of a potato sack).
- Pin the nose on the witch (or vampire).
- Mask or costume parade (from classroom-made masks or simple costumes).

### Winter Celebrations

Christmas and Hanukah can be a busy time of year with numerous celebrations and opportunities for less healthy food choices. Classroom parties are a great way to start healthier traditions. Think beyond food and treats this season. Take the focus off of receiving and have the class work together to give to others. Below is a list of ideas.

- Create tree ornaments or holiday cards to give to others.
- Have the students create coupon book for parents, elderly relatives or neighbours with helpful tasks, such as snow shoveling or walking the dog.
- Practice and perform carols at a nursing home or mall.
- Collect non-perishable food items or winter coats, blankets, toques, etc. for a local emergency shelter.
- Contact local agencies that distribute gift items and necessities to those in need. As a class, collect the items that are required.

## Valentine's Day

Celebrate without chocolate and candy this Valentine's Day. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- Have students create and decorate Valentines cards for their families or school staff.
- Have students write one positive comment about each classmate and pass them out for Valentines.
- Have a “dress in red” contest and see which student wears the most red items.
- Have the students create a Valentine's poem and read them aloud to the class. Have the class vote on the favourite poem and showcase the classroom winners in a school assembly.
- Have a tasting day where students taste healthy foods that are red; e.g., tomatoes, strawberries, grapes, peppers, radishes.

## Spring Celebrations

Celebrate spring! Instead of scavenger hunts for chocolate eggs or baskets of candy, here are some ideas that children will love.

- Have a spring scavenger hunt outdoors and see who collect the most items off this list.
  - Suggestions for a scavenger hunt:
    - collect 1 leaf
    - collect 4 rocks
    - collect 2 pieces of litter
    - find (but don't pick) a spring flower
- Have a classroom scavenger hunt for non-food items. (See the Halloween section for non-food ideas.)
- Have an outdoor obstacle course. Yes, even in the snow!
- Celebrate spring by having the students decorate or paint a small planting pot and plant a mini daffodil or a kitchen herb.
- Instead of a hunt for chocolate Easter eggs, hide hollow plastic eggs that contain fitness activities written on small strips of paper:
  - Move like a rabbit and jump five big jumps forward using legs and arms.
  - With your hands on your head and fingers pointing up to form ears, hop on two feet from pylon to pylon.
  - Everyone tries to collect 8 – 10 eggs and performs the activities they have collected.
  - Fill the eggs with positive messages that the students have written.

## Healthy Workplace

A comprehensive school health approach aims to promote healthy lifestyles among all who use the school. Staff wellness is intended to increase staff interest in health and help them achieve or maintain a healthy lifestyle.<sup>32</sup> Healthy food choices are an important aspect of staff wellness.

A healthy workplace can include:

- Promotion and distribution of nutrition information for staff to use at work or at home. Refer to [www.albertahealthservices.ca](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca) for resource ideas.
- If the healthy choice is the easy choice, staff will participate in healthy eating. Provide healthy snacks at staff meetings and other gatherings of staff. See next section for ideas.
- Healthy lunch theme weeks to allow staff to share and learn about healthy food choices for lunches.
- Sharing healthy recipes among staff or creating healthy food choices recipe books (see fundraising section).
- Participation in providing a new nutrition tip or goal each week.
- Have a look at the *Fresh Look at Healthy Workplaces* resource online at [www.healthyalberta.com](http://www.healthyalberta.com).

## Healthy Staff

Why is healthy eating important for school staff?

School staff spend many hours at school. The food choices made while working can have a huge impact on an individual's overall health and wellness.

Healthy eating can:

- Improve overall health. Unhealthy food choices can contribute to fatigue, risks for chronic disease and difficulty in maintaining healthy body weights.
- Help staff perform their job duties better.

Remember, school staff can be role models to the students and can help to demonstrate healthy food choices.

## Healthy Everyday

Other ways to support staff wellness include:

- Keep a small supply of non-perishable food nearby. Examples include: individual containers of canned fruit, whole grain crackers or rice cakes, dried fruit, canned tuna, a whole grain granola bar or trail mix.
- Keep a few healthy items in the lunchroom fridge. Examples include: bagels, yogurt, cottage cheese, raw vegetables, fresh fruit or milk.
- Keep a water bottle at school. A lack of water can affect your ability to concentrate and your work performance. Often when you feel hungry, you are actually dehydrated. Have a drink of water before reaching for something to eat.
- Choose water throughout the day instead of pop, energy drinks, specialty coffees or teas.
- Pack a lunch. You have more control of portion sizes and healthy choices when you bring a lunch from home.
- If possible, avoid eating at your desk. Enjoy lunch with other staff in the lunchroom or outdoors, if the weather permits.<sup>33</sup>



## Healthy Meetings and Catering

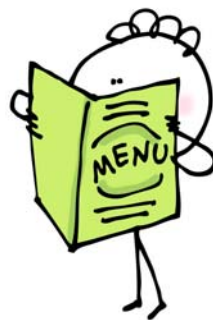
Not all meetings require food. Sometimes just providing beverages is enough. If food is offered, ensure healthy choices are available.

When ordering food, request foods be prepared and served the way your group prefers. You may want to make some modifications to make the choices healthier.

To make simple but healthy changes to what you order:

- Ask for food to be prepared with little or no added fats and oils.
- Request meat, fish or poultry dishes to be baked, poached, grilled, steamed or broiled (never fried).
- Always offer a vegetarian option at meals.
- Ask for sauces and salad dressings (always low-fat and low-salt) to be served on the side.
- Ask for the bread in sandwiches to be buttered lightly or on one side only.
- Choose broth- or tomato-based sauces and soups, rather than creamed.
- Offer fruit spreads for bread, muffins or bagels instead of butter or margarine.
- Avoid serving processed cheese and meat (bologna, bacon, pepperoni, etc.).
- Limit cakes, pastries, donuts, cookies and squares, and do not put out bowls of candy or mints on the meeting tables.<sup>34</sup>

For more information on healthy catering options, check out the *Eat Smart, Meet Smart* resource online at [www.healthyalberta.com](http://www.healthyalberta.com).



## Healthy Foods from Home

The type of food brought in by staff or parents for meetings, lunches or events can encourage healthy food choices. Here are some ideas to demonstrate healthy choices:

- Vegetables sticks with dips such as hummus, low fat tzatziki, black bean or guacamole
- Bruschetta with toasted dry baguettes
- Kabobs made of vegetables and low fat cheese
- Salads with low fat dressing or vinaigrette on the side
- Small whole grain sandwiches. Load up the sandwiches with veggies such as tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers, bell peppers, grated carrots or sprouts.
- Build your own sandwich or wrap. Provide a platter with lean meats, lower fat cheese and vegetables. (Use low-fat spreads: mustard, salsa, horseradish, light mayonnaise or light cream cheese).
- Smaller portions such as bagels, buns, sandwiches and wraps cut in half
- Sushi or California rolls platter
- Vegetarian or ham and pineapple pizza: consider a thin crust and/or whole wheat pizza
- Kabobs made of lean meat or low fat cheese
- Whole wheat pasta in tomato, vegetable or marinara sauce
- Fresh fruit salad and kabobs
- Vegetables with low fat dip
- Whole grain crackers with low fat cheese
- Hummus and pita wedges
- Low fat yogurt and granola

Remember: bakery or dessert foods such as cakes and squares are only needed for special occasions.<sup>34</sup>



## Waste-Free Environments

Reduce, re-use and recycle. Prepackaged foods contribute to considerable waste. Underutilized recycling programs not only add to municipal landfills, but are also a missed opportunity for teaching children about conservation.

It has been estimated that on average a school-age child using a disposable lunch generates 67 pounds of waste per school year. That equates to 18,760 pounds of lunch waste for just one average-size elementary school.<sup>35</sup>

A school waste management program can help students connect daily life with the need to conserve natural resources.

Encourage children and staff to:

- Pack snacks and lunches in reusable containers.
- Avoid single use water bottles.
- Purchase foods in bulk to reduce packaging.
- Pack a cloth napkin instead of a paper napkin.
- Pack stainless steel utensils instead of disposable plastics.
- Pack a reusable drink container instead of disposable juice boxes, juice pouches and cans.
- Pack lunch items in reusable containers. Avoid using plastic wraps, plastic bags, wax-paper bags and aluminum foil.
- Avoid purchasing pre-packaged items. Buy foods in larger containers and leave them at home for recycling.
- Pack lunches in a lunch box or backpack instead of relying on paper or plastic bags.<sup>26</sup>

Check out [www.wastefreelunches.org](http://www.wastefreelunches.org) for information on how to get started.



## Healthier and Waste-Free Lunches

While pre-packaged foods are a convenient choice for busy people on a budget, they tend to be higher in sugar, unhealthy fat and salt.

Healthy lunches don't have to be more expensive. The following examples of pre-packaged and waste-free lunches show how to save money and reduce packaging while providing healthy food items.

Remember with a waste-free lunch, food items can be bought in bulk. The packaging can be left at home for reuse or recycling. This is not only a wise environmental choice, but less expensive as well.

### Waste-free lunches vs. pre-packaged lunches

A waste-free lunch can save one person \$466.00 in one year! Imagine what it would save a family of four!

Pre-Packaged	Cost (approx)	Waste Free	Cost (approx)
Small pre-packaged lunch meat and cheese	<b>\$2.99</b>	Homemade lunch of meat and cheese in reusable container:	<b>\$1.25</b>
1 can pop	<b>\$0.50</b>	• 6 whole grain crackers	
1 fruit jelly roll-up	<b>\$0.62</b>	• 38 g slice of low-fat deli turkey	
1 bag potato chips, 28 g - 30 g	<b>\$0.36</b>	• 25 g slice of reduced-fat cheese	
		Water, 1 bottle	<b>\$0.00</b>
		113 g container	<b>\$0.40</b>
		unsweetened applesauce	
		125 g yogurt	<b>\$0.40</b>
		GST	<b>\$0.22</b>
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>Cost (approx)</b>	<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>Cost (approx)</b>
Per Day	\$4.69	Per Day	\$2.36
Per Week	\$23.45	Per Week	\$11.80
Per Year	\$938.00	Per Year	\$472.00
<b>Higher in:</b>		<b>Higher in:</b>	
• Fat		• Vitamin C	
• Sugar		• Protein	
• Salt		• Calcium	
		• Vitamin A	
		• Vitamin D	

Table content from the *Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth* – Prices are January 2008, Edmonton



## How Can Your School Get Started?

Small changes can make a big impact on health. Implementing a formal nutrition policy is not the only way to start. Changing classroom practices, fundraising and special events are great ways to begin working towards a healthy eating environment.

It is important to follow the comprehensive school health approach with any new practices. This approach is based on partnerships between students, teachers, administrators, parents and the community. Even small things like classroom parties can be more successful if all partners are involved.

## What can each partner do?

### Students:

- Promote healthy choices through poster contests or activities.
  - Make posters to hang near vending machines or school stores highlighting the healthy choices.
  - Make posters explaining the difference between Choose Most Often Foods and Choose Sometimes Foods.
  - Design and make frequent purchase cards for healthy food products. Offer a free incentive after purchasing a set number of healthy choices.
  - Have taste testing events to trial new foods.
- Provide input into healthy food choices to encourage intake.
  - Suggest new foods to trial at school and events.
- Participate in sale and preparation of foods for sale.
  - Volunteer to help out with school store and cafeteria sales.
  - Create point of sale message cards and posters to be placed in food sales areas to reinforce healthy messages.
- Form student leadership teams to help with planning, sales and choices and evaluations.
  - Participate in a healthy eating committee to ensure student input and suggestions.
  - Create a student newsletter (or website) with healthy food ideas, fun food facts or puzzles and games.
- Be leaders and role models to younger students, peers, parents and other family members.
  - Practice healthy eating habits at all events.
  - Encourage other students and staff to do the same.
  - Make healthy eating every day the normal way to eat.
  - Take healthy eating messages home to parents and family members. Be the healthy eating teacher at home!
  - Recognize and celebrate healthy eating practices by fellow students with a “I’m a healthy eater” sticker or some other form of recognition.

## What can each partner do? (continued)

### Teachers:

- Link healthy eating messages and choices to the curriculum.
  - Use the Nutrition Resource Kits to teach healthy eating and meet the Health and Life Skills curriculum outcomes. See the Healthy Eating Resources for Teachers section for more information.
- Provide healthy rewards.
  - Refer to healthy rewards section for ideas and ways to demonstrate healthy choices in the classroom.
- Demonstrate healthy choices by role modeling.
  - Students practice what they see, encourage water consumption in class (put away the coffee mug if you can) and try implementing a midday snack break for refueling!
- Recognize and encourage healthy food choices brought from home.
- Become a school champion.
  - Be the voice of your school, encourage students, other staff members, parents and administrators to form a healthy eating committee.

### Administration:

- Support and encourage champion teachers and student leadership.
- Encourage the development of a School Health Team or Nutrition Committee in the school.
- Demonstrate healthy choices by role modeling.
- Provide incentives for healthy behaviours.
- Provide fridges/stoves/microwaves for healthier lunches.
- Negotiate healthier vendor contracts.
- Advocate to your School Board and community for healthy food programs.
- Ensure students and staff have a pleasant environment for eating.
- Ensure adequate time for students to eat lunch or snacks and participate in activities.
- Consider “recess before lunch” for younger grades. This idea allows children to resist the temptation to rush through eating their lunch to get out and play.
- Educate staff on all aspects of healthy eating:
  - food safety
  - hunger
  - role modeling
- Include healthy eating announcements in morning PA activities.
- Do an environmental survey of your school’s nutrition accomplishments. Recognize and celebrate the successes and plan for future goals. See tips in the Developing School Nutrition Guidelines section.

## What can each partner do? (continued)

### Parents:

- Provide healthy lunches in reusable containers.
  - Refer to Waste-Free lunch section for more ideas.
- Ensure healthy snacks are available before/after school.
- Volunteer in school meal programs.
  - Lack of volunteers is a common barrier to implementing healthy food programs. Offer to spend 1 or 2 hours per week to help prepare and serve food for your school.
- Insist on a nutritious breakfast every day.
- Positive role modeling in food choices at home.
  - You have the most influence over what your children eat, are willing to try and what they will refuse to eat. Be open to trying new foods, encourage your children to eat something from each food group at all meals.
- Join the school’s healthy eating committee to help guide choices, guidelines and events.
  - Parents are an important member of the healthy eating committee; show your kids that their health and food choices are a priority to you.



## Developing Healthy Eating Guidelines for Your School

Schools have been described an “ideal setting to establish and promote healthy eating practices in children and adolescents”.<sup>36</sup> Developing nutrition guidelines for your school is an important step in creating a healthy food environment for students, staff and parents. Healthy eating guidelines link classroom education with the school environment and help make the healthy choice the easy choice.

The *Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth* provide guidelines for policy development. These are outlined below.

### Step 1 – Form a Nutrition Action Committee

Include representatives from all groups who will be affected by proposed changes. Look for champions — people who will be interested and excited about creating a healthier environment.

Consider including the following individuals on your committee:

- Parents
- Children and youth
- School Staff
- Food service providers and vendors
- Community dietitians
- School health nurse or community health nurse
- Health promotion/wellness co-ordinators
- Dental health staff

### Step 2 — Discuss the purpose and goals of your policy

Reflect on your priorities and capacity for change. Create your own vision statement. Consider the following questions:

- Why are nutrition policies important to our group?
- How will nutrition policies impact our environment?
- What are our goals?
- Where are we now? Where do we want to be?
- How much time, money, people and material will the change require?
- Will the change fit with our values and culture?
- How easy will the change be?
- How much risk does the change involve?
- Can the change be broken down to easy, manageable steps?
- What will determine our success?

**Step 3 — Write your nutrition policy**

The nutrition policies that you formulate should reflect the most important concerns of your group. Some of the issues you might want to address include:

- Definition of a healthy food
- Variety
- Portion sizes
- Availability of, and access to safe, nutritious foods
- Supportive environments
- Adult modeling of healthy eating
- Vending machines
- Pricing
- Visibility and attractiveness of healthy foods
- Food safety
- Fundraising

**Step 4 — Develop a transition plan**

It is important to allow enough time for children, youth, parents and other stakeholders to adapt to changes. Stakeholders also need time to work with vendors on product changes, or to honour existing contracts. It is usually easiest to begin with small, simple initiatives and gradually introduce larger changes.

**Step 5 — Monitor and evaluate the change.**

It is important to see if your efforts are making a difference. Monitoring what works and what does not, will help you to improve your policies over time. Always make sure that someone is responsible for monitoring policy.



## Keys to School Nutrition Success

There are seven characteristics generally present in a comprehensive school health approach that have successful nutrition programs, policies and environments. The keys to school nutrition **SUCCESS** are: <sup>37</sup>

**S** = School food and nutrition guidelines are developed to provide context and direction.

- Schools need to establish school food and nutrition guidelines to help make healthy choices easy for the school community. Guidelines should be broad enough to address more than one aspect of the school food environment.

**U** = Use foods served in school to reinforce nutrition guidelines and curriculum.

- Make healthy food choices available in schools in order to facilitate healthy eating. Studies have shown that the availability of food has an impact on food selections.

**C** = Curriculum involves experiential nutrition education that is fun, culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate.

- Nutrition education is critical for success, as behaviour change in children correlates with the amount of nutrition instruction received.

**C** = Community programs, resources and services are engaged in healthy eating initiatives in schools.

- Communities are very influential to the health of school-aged children and youth. Community members include health authority nurses, dietitians, agencies such as Breakfast for Learning, local businesses and neighbours.

**E** = Encourage parent and family involvement in healthy eating at home and at school.

- Involving parents and families provides opportunities to encourage and reinforce healthy behaviours at home and may contribute to lasting changes. Parents serve as role models and may require support in nutrition knowledge and skills in order to help their children at home.

**S** = Students and youth are engaged as leaders and decision-makers regarding healthy eating at school.

- Research has shown that youth who are highly involved with the promotion of healthy eating and peer education eat more healthful foods themselves.

**S** = School staff support and participate in healthy eating initiatives in school.

- School administration and staff support is necessary when creating a healthy school nutrition environment and to maintain the commitment to this action. Staff serves as role models for school-aged children and youth.

## Myths and Realities

With change comes questions, skepticism and sometimes criticism. Here are replies to some common concerns.

Myth	Reality	Tips
<b>Loss of Revenue</b>		
Nutrition guidelines will negatively affect special events and fundraising.	There are many non-food fundraising items. Many of which can earn more money than traditional food items such as chocolates. <sup>38</sup>	Parents often spend more money and time for fundraisers such as bake sales. Often they have to purchase back the foods they supply.
<b>Loss of choice</b>		
Students will leave school grounds more to purchase foods no longer available in school.	By competitively pricing healthy food options and promoting the idea that healthy food choices taste good, are inexpensive and are easy to 'eat on the run', students are more likely to purchase foods at school than convenience stores. <sup>39</sup>	Include students in selection, promotion and distribution of foods to encourage participation and 'buy in'
Healthy choices will result in limited selection	By moving away from traditional vending and cafeteria choices, schools have the opportunity to incorporate various cultural and ethnic food choices.	A great way to link parents to schools is to encourage sharing of food ideas that are culturally relevant.
<b>Food prices will be too expensive</b>		
Prices will increase	Unhealthy food choices, if available, should be priced higher than healthy choices. This will offset any price increase with healthy choices. <sup>39</sup>	By using rotating and seasonal menus, purchasing prices can be kept as low as possible. Providing healthy food choices should not be a school's primary income source. Focusing on non-food items to generate funds is a better approach.
Schools will lose money with no vending machines.	"Most schools (77%) valued their total annual revenues from food and beverage sales at \$10,000 or less. Most (58%) reported no impact from implementation of policy- some saw increases." <sup>40</sup>	"It is short sighted to fund our schools at the expense of our children's health." <sup>44</sup>  Many vending machine companies are able to find products that fit the Nutrition Guideline criteria for schools
<b>Not the school's responsibility</b>		
It's the parent's responsibility to monitor their children's eating habits.	Children spend up to ½ of their waking hours at school. By providing only healthy food choices, schools can play an important role in ensuring optimal intake of healthy foods aside from those sent from home. Providing unhealthy food choices undermines the nutrition and health education students receive in the classroom. <sup>41</sup>	Encourage parents to be part of the discussion around food choices for schools. Educate them on healthy foods to send to school and to have available after school hours. This will further reinforce the message the children receive at school.
Children need to learn how to make choices – how will they know if there aren't both healthy and unhealthy foods?	Albertans have the highest food service sales per capita in Canada, spending 39% of their household food dollars, or 11% of total income, in food service establishments. <sup>4</sup>	By only providing healthy food options, schools have the opportunity to model healthy food choices. This also provides an opportunity for students and staff to have access to healthy foods they might not otherwise have.





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