

# 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](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page8942.aspx)



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# 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  $\frac{1}{2}$  vegetables and fruits,  $\frac{1}{4}$  whole grain foods, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  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 healthy 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.



# Child Care Menu Planning with Canada's Food Guide

## Tips for Menu Planning

Early Learning and Child Care programs can help children meet their nutrition needs by using [Canada's food guide plate](#) to plan meals and snacks. Use the food guide plate to offer foods that provide important vitamins and minerals:

- ½ vegetables and fruits
- ¼ whole grain foods
- ¼ protein foods

Visit [Make healthy meals with Canada's food guide plate](#) for videos and tips that show you how to do this.



### Vegetables and Fruits

Offer a variety of vegetables and fruits at meals and snacks. Fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables and fruits can all be offered. They all offer equal nutrition. Include dark green and orange vegetables throughout the week.

#### Tips

- Prepare dark green vegetables like green peas, broccoli, and spinach. Add frozen peas to a baked pasta dish or stew. Try adding broccoli to a soup or a stir-fry dish.
- Prepare orange vegetables like carrots, sweet potato, bell peppers, or butternut squash. Carrots, squash, or sweet potato can be diced, roasted, and offered on the side. Peppers can be chopped and added to an omelet or scrambled eggs.
- Add fresh or frozen mixed vegetables to spaghetti sauce, soups, stews, chili, curries, or casseroles.
- Add sliced fresh, frozen, or canned fruit to hot or cold cereal, smoothies, yogurt, or mix into pancake batter.
- When using canned fruit, drain before serving to lower the amount of added sugar. Fruit canned in water has sugar substitutes, which are not advised for young children.
- Choose canned vegetables with little to no added salt. Drain and rinse those that are not labeled as low salt.
- Drain canned vegetables and rinse with water before serving to lower the salt content or choose low-salt options.
- Offer vegetables and fruits instead of juice. They have fibre and less sugar.



Dried fruit is higher in sugar - it can stick to teeth and increase risk for cavities. Hard, small, and sticky dried fruit can be a choking hazard for children under 4 years.

## Whole Grain Foods

Offer whole grain foods at meals and snacks to provide fibre and other important nutrients.

### Tips

- 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 grain foods so they won't 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.



## Protein Foods

Offer protein foods at meals and snacks to provide important vitamins and minerals. Fresh, frozen, or canned options can be prepared. Include a variety of protein foods on your menu.

**Plant-based proteins** are higher in fibre and lower in saturated fats. on your menu. Try beans, chickpeas, lentils, tofu, or nut or seed butters.

### Choose a variety of plant-based proteins such as:

- Add beans to a taco or burrito filling.
- Try lentils for a protein in a pasta sauce.
- Use chickpeas to make hummus.
- For older children, oven roast cooked or canned chickpeas with oil and seasonings for a crunchy, high fibre snack.
- Stir-fry tofu with veggies, rice, or noodles.
- Blend soft tofu with fruit, milk, or an unsweetened fortified beverage to make a fruit smoothie. Choose tofu that has calcium in the ingredient list.



**Animal-based proteins** provide other important nutrients like iron, calcium, and vitamin D.

### Choose a variety of animal-based proteins, such as:

- Eggs
- Fish and shellfish that are lower in salt. Choose “light” canned tuna, it is lower in mercury.
- Inspected farm raised meat such as elk or bison, beef, pork, chicken, turkey, and duck.
- Yogurt or kefir, without added sugar substitute sweeteners.
- Pasteurized cheeses like mozzarella and cheddar.



## Drinks

Offer water throughout the day and offer milk at meals or snacks.

### Tips

- If parents are providing breastmilk or infant formula for their child, continue to provide it. If a child is drinking soy infant formula continue to offer it. Offer homogenized 3.25% M.F. (milk fat) milk for children 9 months to 2 years.
- For children 2 years of age and older, 2% or 1% milk or an unsweetened fortified soy beverage can be offered. These options are not recommended for children under 2 as they don't contain enough fat.
- If offering smoothies, use fruit with yogurt and plain milk or unsweetened fortified soy beverage, instead of fruit juice.



## Unsaturated Fats and Oils

Choose and prepare foods with unsaturated fats. These are healthy fats that help children meet their needs for energy and fat.

### Choose

- Vegetable oils like canola and olive oil
- Spreads made with unsaturated oils like soft margarine
- Nut and seed butters
- Fatty fish like herring, salmon, or sardines



## For more information

Visit [Canada's Food Guide.ca](https://www.canada.ca/food-guide).

# Child Care Menu Planning with Canada's Food Guide

## Using Food Labels

Using food labels can help you choose healthy foods for your childcare program. Food packages in Canada include a Nutrition Facts table, an ingredient list and food allergen labelling.

### Nutrition Facts table

Look at the % Daily Value (DV) on the Nutrition Facts table to see if there is a little or a lot of a nutrient.

- **5% DV or less is a little.** Aim for lower % DV for nutrients like sodium (salt), sugars, and saturated fat.
- **15% DV or more is a lot.** Aim for higher % DV for nutrients like iron, fiber, calcium, and potassium.

### Ingredient list

The ingredient list tells you all the ingredients in a food product, listed by weight from most to least.

Nutrition Facts	
Per 12 crackers (30 g)	
	% Daily Value*
<b>Calories</b> 107	
<b>Fat</b> 1 g	1 %
Saturated 0 g	0 %
+Trans 0 g	
<b>Carbohydrate</b> 27 g	
Fibre 1 g	4 %
Sugars 3 g	3 %
<b>Protein</b> 3 g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0 mg	
<b>Sodium</b> 370 mg	16 %
Potassium 50 mg	1 %
Calcium 10 mg	1 %
Iron 2 mg	11 %

\*5% or less is a little, 15% or more is a lot

**Ingredients:** White beans, Water, Sugars, Pork, Salt, Modified cornstarch, Onion powder, Mustard, Spices  
**Contains:** Mustard. **May contain:** Sesame, Soybean

### Food allergens

Food labels in Canada must clearly list common (priority) allergens and gluten sources. If a common allergen has been added to a food, a “Contains” statement must be on the label. May contain statements are not required or checked by Health Canada. Look for allergens in the **ingredient list** or in a “**Contains**” statement after the ingredient list. Common allergens must be in the “Contains” statement if they are in a food.

#### These allergens are:

- Eggs
- Fish
- Crustaceans and mollusks
- Milk
- Mustard
- Peanuts
- Sesame seeds
- Soy
- Sulphites
- Tree nuts
- Wheat and triticale

If a child has an allergy to a food that is not in the list above, that food will not be in the “contains” statement. You will need to look in the ingredient list. If you are unsure if a food is safe for a child with allergies in your center, talk to their parent or caregiver.

**For more information visit:** [Food labels](#) or [Food Allergy Canada](#)



# Child Care Menu Planning with Canada's Food Guide

## Understanding processed foods

When ingredients such as fat, sugar or salt are added to foods and they are packaged, the result is **processed foods**. Over time, eating too much of these foods can increase the risk of chronic diseases like heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers.

Limit highly processed foods and drinks and offer alternatives that are a part of a healthy eating pattern.

**Some examples of highly processed foods to limit are listed below:**

### Processed vegetables and fruits

- French fries, hash browns, tater tots, onion rings, and instant mashed potatoes are high in salt and saturated fat.
- Pickles are high in salt.
- Breaded vegetables are high in saturated fat.
- Gummy fruit snacks, fruit leathers, and fruit bars are high in sugar.

### Processed grain foods

- Purchased baked goods, muffins, loaves, pastries, cakes, and cookies can be high in sugars and saturated fat, and low in fibre.
- Chocolate or yogurt coated granola bars and sugary breakfast cereals, can be low in fibre and high in sugar.

### Processed protein foods

- Hot dogs, bologna, bacon, luncheon meat, sausages, and salami are high in sodium and saturated fat.
- Processed vegetarian meat substitute foods, such as veggie dogs, veggie burgers, veggie nuggets can be high in sodium.
- Processed cheese slices, spreadable cheese products, and powdered cheese seasoning can be high in saturated fat and sodium.

### Drinks

- Fruit juice, fruit-flavored drinks, fruit punch, fruit cocktails, powdered drink mix or crystals, iced tea, lemonade, pop, slushies, sports drinks, and flavored waters are all high in sugar.
- Sugar substitutes are not recommended for children.

### Other processed foods

- Frozen entrees like pizza, pizza pops or pockets, and pasta dishes can be high in added sodium and saturated fat.
- Potato chips, and some crackers can be high in sodium and saturated fat.
- Chocolates, candies, syrups, jams, and jellies can be high in sugar.
- Ice cream and frozen desserts can be high in sugar and saturated fat.

## Choose unprocessed or less processed foods

Unprocessed and less processed foods have nutrients that help promote health, like vitamins, minerals, and fibre. They have little to no added sodium (salt), sugars, or saturated fat. Some examples of less processed foods are listed below. Some of these less processed foods use types of processing that help keep our food supply safe. Other types of processing can be used to help preserve food and retain nutrients, such as drying, canning, and freezing.

If you are offering highly processed foods, try to serve them less often, provide them in small amounts or replace them with less processed options. **Some examples of less processed options:**

### Vegetables and fruits

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Drain canned fruits to remove any juice or syrup.
- Applesauce and other fruit sauces with no added sugar
- Frozen fruit and vegetables with no added sodium (salt), sugars, or saturated fat
- Canned vegetables with little to no added sodium (salt). If low salt or low sodium isn't available, drain and rinse to remove the added salt or sodium.

### Grain foods

- Brown rice, oats, barley, and quinoa
- Whole grain bread, tortilla, pita, naan, Bannock, English muffins, bagels, and whole grain cereals
- Whole grain pasta or couscous
- Whole grain granola bars and whole grain crackers

### Protein foods

- Cooked dried or canned beans, peas, chickpeas, and lentils with little to no added sodium (salt)
- Drain canned beans, peas, and lentils and rinse with water to remove some of the sodium (salt).
- Tofu
- Nut or seed butters, like peanut butter, cashew butter, sunflower butter, and almond butter
- Poultry and lean meats
- Fish and shellfish
- Dairy products, such as yogurt, kefir, and cheese
- Eggs

### Drinks

- Water or unsweetened milk
- Unsweetened fortified soy beverage may be offered to children over 2 years of age.

### Other foods

- Vegetable oils like olive, canola, and spreads like soft margarine
- For spreads or dips, use hummus, avocado, yogurt dip, salsa, nut or seed butters, tzatziki, or salad dressing.
- Flavor foods with herbs and spices instead of salt.



## For more information

- Visit [Using Canada's food guide](#) for tips on choosing vegetables and fruits, whole grain foods, and protein foods.
- Visit [Reading Nutrition Labels](#) for tips on choosing packaged foods lower in added sodium, sugars, or saturated fat.
- For **recipes** visit:
  - [Child Care Recipes | Alberta Health Services](#)
  - [Recipes: Inspiring Healthy Eating | Alberta Health Services](#)
  - [Search recipes - Canada's Food Guide](#)
  - [Cookspiration](#)

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# Child Care Menu Planning with Canada's Food Guide

## Roles in Feeding

### Roles in feeding

Early Learning and Child Care professionals play a key role in promoting health in the early years.

Caregivers and children have separate roles in feeding. Understanding the roles in feeding can help support children's growth and brain development. This will also help children learn to eat well and enjoy eating.



**Caregivers** decide **what** foods to offer, **when** to offer food, and **where** to offer food.

- Use Canada's food guide to plan meals and snacks.
- Offer meals and snacks at regular times each day, 2 to 3 hours apart.
- Sit, eat, and talk together with children at meal and snack times. Turn off screens and put aside toys.

**Children** decide **if** they eat and **how much** they will eat from the foods offered.

- Let them decide how much to eat and drink from the foods and drinks offered.
- The amount they eat may change from meal to meal or day to day, depending on their age, appetite, activity level, and growth spurts.
- If a child chooses not to eat, don't force them.

### For more information

- Visit [Feeding Toddlers and Young Children](#) for more information about the roles in feeding and common feeding habits.
- Visit [Support Positive Mealtimes](#) for ideas and resources to make mealtimes pleasant.
- Visit Canada's food guide [Healthy eating for parents and children](#) and [Eat meals with others](#) for tips for parents and caregivers.



# Child Care Menu Planning with Canada's Food Guide

## Suggested Amounts of Food to Prepare

- Canada's food guide does not list serving sizes or amounts.
- The table below shows some examples of how much food to prepare per child if that food is offered at a meal or snack. It is based on amounts typically eaten by children at a meal or snack. You can start by offering 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. For more information, visit [Feeding Toddlers and Young Children](#).
- Over time, you can adjust amounts based on how much food is usually eaten.
- Children may want to eat more than the amounts in the table, so prepare a little bit extra.

### Vegetables and Fruits

	1-3 years	4 years and over
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)

### 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, naan, pita, Bannock	½ piece (27.5 g)	1 piece (55 g)
Rice, quinoa, couscous, pasta (cooked)	⅓–½ cup (75–125 mL)	¾ cup (175 mL)
Hot cereal (prepared)	½ cup (125 mL)	1 cup (250 mL)
Cold cereal (dry cereal)	½ cup (125 mL)	1 cup (250 mL)
Crackers	3–5 crackers (10–15 g)	6–10 crackers (20–30 g)

### Protein Foods

Some protein foods have both calcium and iron. They are grouped below based on what they are higher in.

		1-3 years	4 years and over
Calcium foods	Fortified soy beverage	2 -3 years: ½ cup (125 mL)	1 cup (250 mL)
	Milk	½ cup (125 mL)	1 cup (250 mL)
	Tofu prepared with calcium	⅓ cup (40 g)	⅔ cup (85 g)
	Cheese	1.5 cm cube (15 g)	3 cm cube (30 g)
	Yogurt	⅓ cup (80 g)	¾ cup (175 g)
	Beans, lentils	¼ cup (65 mL)	½ cup (125 mL)
Iron foods	Nut butters	½–1 Tbsp (7.5–15 mL)	1 Tbsp (15 mL)
	Fish, meat, and poultry (cooked)	2 Tbsp–¼ cup (30–60 g)	¼ cup–½ cup (55–100 g)
	Eggs	1 egg	1–2 eggs

## Mixed Dishes

Mixed dishes may contain vegetables, fruits, protein foods and whole grains. The milliliter amount could be rounded up or down to the nearest 60 mL for ease of portioning.

	<b>1-3 years</b>	<b>4 years and over</b>
Burrito or enchilada	½ cup (100 g/ 135 mL)	1 cup (200 g/ 270 mL)
Cabbage roll, perogy	⅔ cup (100 g/ 156 mL)	1¼ cups (200 g/ 312 mL)
Chicken with rice and vegetables	1 cup (150 g/ 225 mL)	2 cup (300 g/ 450 mL)
Chili with beans and vegetables	½ cup (150 g/ 140 mL)	1 cup (300 g/ 277 mL)
Hearty soups (beef barley or minestrone)	½ cup (150 g/ 140 mL)	1 cup (300 g/ 277 mL)
Lasagna	½ cup (150 g/ 140 mL)	1 cup (300 g/ 286 mL)
Quiche	⅔ cup (100 g/ 156 mL)	1½ cup (200 g/ 312 mL)
Sheperd's pie, moussaka, or stews	¾ cup 150 g/ 185 mL	1½ cups (300 g/ 370 mL)

Health Canada uses reference amounts to decide the serving size for single-serving or multiple-serving prepackaged products. For foods not listed, visit [Nutrition Labelling - Table of Reference Amounts for Food](#) for a general idea of amounts to serve.

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

Time	Food Type	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breakfast	<b>Meal description</b>	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
	<b>Vegetables and Fruits</b>	Grapes, quartered	Frozen mixed berries	Peppers	Bananas Unsweetened applesauce	Frozen blueberries, thawed
	<b>Whole Grain foods</b>	Whole grain bagel	Bran muffin	Whole grain tortilla	Whole wheat banana pancakes	Oatmeal
	<b>Protein foods</b> (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	<b>Vegetables and Fruits</b>	Apple slices	Canned peaches, drained	Oranges, sliced	Canned pears, drained	Fruit smoothie: Mixed fruit, frozen and thawed
	<b>Whole Grain foods</b>	Whole grain cereal snack mix	Whole grain English muffin	Whole grain cereal	Whole grain crackers	
	<b>And/or Protein foods</b>		Smooth nut or seed butter	Milk or fortified soy beverage	Cheddar cheese, cubed	Plain yogurt, milk
	<b>Drink</b> (water, milk, or *fortified soy beverage)	Water	Milk or fortified soy beverage	Water	Water	Water
Lunch	<b>Meal description</b>	Tofu or 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
	<b>Vegetables and Fruits</b>	Frozen mixed vegetables, California style, stir-fried	Carrots and potatoes	Carrots, celery, canned corn	Lettuce, tomato Sweet potatoes, roasted	Celery, cucumber, diced Carrots, shredded Lettuce
	<b>Whole Grain foods</b>	Brown rice	Whole grain Bannock	Whole grain bun	Whole wheat burger bun	Whole grain tortilla
	<b>Protein foods</b> (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	Chicken burger Cheddar cheese Milk or fortified soy beverage	Light tuna, canned, Milk or fortified soy beverage
Afternoon Snack	<b>Vegetables and Fruits</b>	Canned peaches, drained	Apples, thinly sliced	Red and green bell peppers, sliced	Snap peas	Banana, sliced
	<b>Whole Grain foods</b>	Granola or muesli	Whole grain pita	Whole wheat naan	Whole grain pita	Whole grain bread
	<b>And/or Protein foods</b>	Plain yogurt	Mozzarella cheese, sliced	Yogurt dip	Hummus	Nut or seed butter
	<b>Drink</b> (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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# Child Care Menu Planning with Canada's Food Guide: Menu Template with Breakfast

Time	Food Type	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breakfast	Meal description					
	Vegetables and Fruits					
	Whole Grain Foods					
	Protein Foods (with milk or *fortified soy beverage to drink)					
Morning Snack	Vegetables and Fruits					
	Whole Grain Foods					
	And/or Protein Foods					
	Drink (water, milk, or *fortified soy beverage)					
Lunch	Meal description					
	Vegetables and Fruits					
	Whole Grain Foods					
	Protein Foods (with milk or *fortified soy beverage to drink)					
Afternoon Snack	Vegetables and Fruits					
	Whole Grain Foods					
	And/or Protein Foods					
	Drink (water, milk, or *fortified soy beverage)					

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



# 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)					
Lunch	Meal Description					
	Vegetables and Fruits					
	Whole Grain Foods					
	Protein Foods (with milk or *fortified soy beverage to drink)					
Afternoon Snack	Vegetables and Fruits					
	Whole Grain Foods					
	And/or Protein Foods					
	Drink (water, milk, or *fortified soy beverage)					

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



# 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](#)

