

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).