

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](#)
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