

# Child Care Menu Planning with Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth

[Alberta Human Services](#) mandates child care licensing regulations for all licensed daycare, group family child care, and pre-school programs. [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\*.

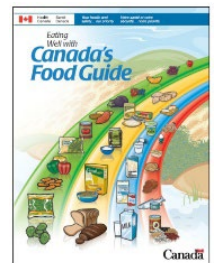
This resource is for those who wish to use [The Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth](#) (ANGCY) from the Alberta government.

There is also **Child Care Menu Planning with Canada's Food Guide** for those who wish to use the new [Canada's food guide](#). Your childcare program can decide which dietary guidelines they would like to follow. Visit [Menu Planning | Alberta Health Services](#)

There are a few differences in the recommendations. For example, the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth uses the 2007 Canada's food guide, which uses 4 food groups and serving sizes. The new Canada's food guide uses the healthy plate method.

The Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth uses a food rating system based on the **2007 Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide** to classify foods into the categories of Choose Most Often, Choose Sometimes, and Choose Least Often.

- **Choose Most Often** – High nutrient foods. Foods from this category are all healthy food choices from Canada's Food Guide. Offer these foods as often as possible. It is recommended that 100% of the foods available in child cares be from this category.
- **Choose Sometimes** – Moderate nutrient foods. While these foods can still provide some nutrients, they tend to be higher in added sugar, unhealthy fats, and sodium (salt).
- **Choose Least Often** – Low nutrient foods. Foods from this category are very low in nutrients and higher in calories, fat, sugar, and salt. It is not recommended that child cares offer these foods.



For more information about the guidelines, visit: [Nutrition Guidelines & Resources | Alberta Health Services](#).

## Menu Planning

Menus should be posted for licensing and to communicate menu information to parents. Be sure to note menu changes when they happen.

The menu planning checklist will help childcare facilities plan a menu using the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines that encourages healthy eating, growth, and development in children.

# Alberta Nutrition Guidelines Choose Most Often Foods for Child Care

For more information on “Choose Sometimes” and “Choose Least Often” foods, visit the [Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth](#).

## Examples of choose most often foods:

| Vegetables and Fruit   | Grain Products   | Milk and Alternatives  | Meat and Alternatives                    |
|--|--|--|--|
| Fresh, frozen or canned vegetables                                 | Rice (brown, wild)   | Milk, white  | Lean beef and pork                       |
| Fresh, frozen or canned fruit                                      | Quinoa, whole rye, barley, oats  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide 3.25% (homogenized) milk to children under 2 years of age</li> </ul>                              | Poultry (without skin)                   |
| 100% pure fruit or vegetable juice (limit to ½ cup/125 mL per day) | Whole grain pasta, couscous, bread, buns, bagels, pita, naan, wraps, pancakes                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skim, 1% and 2% milk can be served for children over 2 years</li> </ul>                                   | Canned/fresh fish                        |
| Unsweetened apple sauce or fruit sauces                            | Whole grain cold cereal with less than 8 g sugar, and more than 2 g fibre (such as bran or puffed wheat) | Unflavoured fortified soy beverage for children over 2 years   | Eggs                                     |
| Salad  | Whole grain hot cereal-oatmeal   | Hard cheeses, cheddar, mozzarella  | Tofu                                     |
|  | Whole grain crackers   | Plain yogurt   | Beans (kidney, white, brown) and lentils |
|  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.25% M.F. to children under 2 years of age</li> <li>2% M.F. or less for children over 2 years</li> </ul> | Chickpeas                                |
|  |  |  | Nut and seed butters                     |
|  |  |  | Lean, low salt, sliced meat              |
|  |  |  | Hamburger patty                          |

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# Child Care Menu Planning with the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines

## Feeding roles

Role modeling healthy eating habits can promote lifelong health. Communicating with the family about success and challenges concerning food and eating is important. Caregivers and children have different roles in feeding.

### Caregivers decide:

- **What food and drinks are offered.** Use Canada's food guide to plan meals and snacks.
- **When food and drinks are offered.** Offer meals and snacks at regular times each day, 2 to 3 hours apart.
- **Where food and drinks are offered.** Sit, eat, and talk together with children at meal and snack times. Turn off the TV and put aside phones and electronics.



### Children decide:

- **How much to eat from the choices you have offered.** Listen to them when they say they are full. Do not use food to bribe, punish, or reward. Children do not eat well when they are pressured or tricked into eating.
- **What to eat from the choices you have offered.** Some days children eat more and some days they eat less. This can change depending on their age, appetite, activity level, and growth spurts.

**Sometimes new foods take time!** Children don't always like new foods right away. Offer new foods many times, prepared in different ways. Include familiar foods along with new foods. It may take 15 or more tries at different times before a child accepts a new food.

### Dental health:

To promote healthy teeth in children, limit the use of sugary and sticky foods, especially for snacks. If sweet, sugary, and sticky foods are served, give with a meal rather than as a snack. If children are unable to brush and floss after a meal or snack, have them rinse their mouths with water.



### Food restrictions:

Some children have allergy, cultural food requirements, religious requirements, or other specific food needs. Extra planning, including following instructions from parents, will help meet these children's needs. For more information about food allergies visit: [Allergies | Alberta Health Services](#).

# Child Care Menu Planning with Alberta Nutrition Guidelines

## Making Meals Healthier

Here are some suggestions to make meals healthier:

- Choose frozen vegetables and fruits without added sugar, sauce, salt, or seasonings, if possible.
- Choose canned fruit packed in juice instead of syrup and drain before eating.
- Rinse canned vegetables under water to reduce salt.
- Add extra vegetables to soups, stews, lasagna, or casserole dishes.
- Replace macaroni and cheese with whole wheat pasta, tomato sauce, and grated cheese.
- If possible, replace some of the white flour in baking with whole grain oatmeal.
- Choose whole grain breads, cereals and crackers, whole wheat pasta, and brown rice.
- Choose low-sodium canned soups and soup bases, when possible.
- Use healthier fats such as oil instead of block margarine, shortening or butter.
- Reduce the fat, sugar or salt in homemade recipes.
- Use cooking methods such as baking, broiling, stir-frying, poaching, barbequing and microwaving instead of deep frying.
- Use herbs and spices instead of salt for seasoning.
- Trim visible fat from meats and poultry.
- Add beans to soups, such as navy beans, black beans or lentils.



Visit [Nutrition Guidelines & Resources | Alberta Health Services](#) for more ideas.



# Child Care Menu Planning with Alberta Nutrition Guidelines

## Sample Menu Plan

Include 4 food groups for a meal and 2 food groups for a snack.

| Sample Menu                               |   |   |  |  |   |
|---|---|---|--|--|---|
|   | Monday  | Tuesday   | Wednesday  | Thursday   | Friday  |
| <b>AM Snack</b><br>(Choose 2 food groups) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sliced carrots &amp; celery</li> <li><a href="#">Bean dip</a></li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whole wheat pancakes</li> <li>Yogurt</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whole wheat bagel</li> <li>Nut/seed butter</li> </ul>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Banana</li> <li>Whole grain crackers</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Fruit smoothie</a></li> </ul>  |
| <b>Lunch</b><br>(Choose 4 food groups)    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whole wheat pita</li> <li>Lean meat</li> <li>Lettuce</li> <li>Tomato slices</li> <li>Cheddar cheese</li> <li>Milk</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cheese Omelet</li> <li>Whole wheat toast</li> <li>Salad with dressing</li> <li>Milk</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spaghetti</li> <li>Tomato &amp; meat sauce</li> <li>Sliced peppers</li> <li>Milk</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sliced cucumbers</li> <li>Whole wheat Bannock</li> <li>Chicken noodle soup</li> <li>Milk</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tuna noodle casserole</li> <li>Steamed mixed vegetables</li> <li>Milk</li> </ul> |
| <b>PM Snack</b><br>(Choose 2 food groups) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fruit cup</li> <li><a href="#">Oatmeal banana muffin</a></li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apple slices</li> <li>Cheese cubes</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Orange slices</li> <li>Bran muffin</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pita chips</li> <li><a href="#">Hummus</a></li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Yogurt parfait</a></li> </ul>  |



# Child Care menu planning with Alberta Nutrition Guidelines

## Sample Snack Ideas

### Choose 2 food groups for a snack.

Some examples:

- Apple or pear slices and cheese
- Fruit and yogurt dip
- Fruit slices and milk
- Applesauce and milk
- Canned fruit and yogurt
- Banana and milk
- Carrot or zucchini muffin
- Apple slices with nut, seed or soy butter
- Pear slices and hard-boiled egg
- Sliced strawberries and scrambled eggs
- Applesauce and whole grain crackers
- Sliced banana and whole wheat toast with nut seed or soy butter
- Apple slices and whole grain cereal
- Oatmeal cereal with blueberries
- Whole grain waffle slices dipped in applesauce
- Veggie wraps (a tortilla with cucumbers, lettuce and carrots)
- Carrot sticks, cheese and whole grain crackers
- Vegetable sticks and hummus
- Vegetable sticks and Greek yogurt dip
- Scrambled egg with diced vegetables
- Crackers and tuna
- Pizza toast (whole grain bread with tomato sauce, cheese and meat)
- Homemade pasta salad and cold sliced meat
- Crackers and hard-boiled egg
- Whole wheat pita bread and hummus
- Beans in tomato sauce on toast



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# Child Care Menu Planning with Alberta Nutrition Guidelines

## Menu Checklist

**Use this checklist to help you review your child care menu.** You may wish to make changes to your menu in the areas you marked as 'sometimes' or 'never'. Use the Comments box to write down ideas for change or to add other notes.

| Overall Recommendations  | Always | Sometimes | Never | Comments |
|--|--------|-----------|-------|----------|
| A variety of foods from each of the four food groups in Canada's food Guide (2007) is included.  |        |           |       |          |
| Options for religious or dietary restrictions, like vegetarian choices, are offered.   |        |           |       |          |
| Multicultural foods are included in the menu.  |        |           |       |          |
| Meals include foods from each of the four food groups in Canada's Food Guide (2007).   |        |           |       |          |
| Snacks include foods from two or more food groups in Canada's Food Guide (2007).   |        |           |       |          |
| Each food at a meal or snack equals ½ to 1 serving from Canada's Food Guide. Extra servings are provided as needed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In a mixed dish, the amount of food included from each of Canada's Food Guide food groups is enough to equal ½ to 1 serving for each child. Example: tuna noodle casserole- tuna provides ½ to 1 serving of Meat &amp; Alternatives food group for each child.</li> </ul> |        |           |       |          |
| Food offered is free from food safety issues.  |        |           |       |          |
| Food choking risks and any allergens are avoided.  |        |           |       |          |
| Food offered includes a variety of textures, flavours, colours, shapes.  |        |           |       |          |
| Cooking and baking methods use little or no added fat, sugar or salt.  |        |           |       |          |
| Meals and snacks are prepared with fresh, frozen, or canned foods that have little or no added fat, sugar, or salt.  |        |           |       |          |
| Plain water is available throughout the day, and at meals and snacks.  |        |           |       |          |

| Food Group Recommendations  | Always | Sometimes | Never | Comments |
|---|--------|-----------|-------|----------|
| Vegetables & Fruit: A variety of fresh, frozen, and canned vegetables and fruit are offered.  |        |           |       |          |
| Vegetables or fruit are offered instead of juice.   |        |           |       |          |
| Seasonal fruits and vegetables are offered when possible.   |        |           |       |          |
| A vegetable or fruit is included at most snacks.  |        |           |       |          |
| Grain Products: At least half of the grain products are whole grain, like whole wheat bread, buns, bagels, tortillas, pita bread, noodles and brown or wild rice. |        |           |       |          |
| Milk & Alternatives: Unflavored milk and unsweetened or plain fortified soy beverage are offered to children 2 years and older.                                   |        |           |       |          |
| Children 9-12 months old and up to 2 years old are offered 3.25% (homogenized) milk.  |        |           |       |          |
| Milk or fortified soy beverage is offered at meals.   |        |           |       |          |
| Meat & Alternatives: A variety of lean meats, poultry, fish and meat alternatives like eggs, beans, lentils, or tofu are offered.                                 |        |           |       |          |
| Processed meats like sausages and hot dogs are avoided.   |        |           |       |          |

| Food Not Recommended   | Always | Sometimes | Never | Comments |
|--|--------|-----------|-------|----------|
| Foods high in saturated and trans fats (hydrogenated oil and shortening), sugar, and salt are not offered. Example: cookies, chips, ice cream. |        |           |       |          |
| Deep-fried foods are not served. Example: chicken nuggets and burgers, fish sticks, French fries, onion rings.                                 |        |           |       |          |
| Sugar sweetened beverages and sugar substitutes (artificial sweeteners) in beverages are avoided. Example: pop, iced tea, fruit punch.         |        |           |       |          |
| Sticky, sweet food, which can stick to the teeth and cause cavities, is avoided. Example: dried fruit, candy.                                  |        |           |       |          |





# Child Care Menu Planning with Alberta Nutrition Guidelines

## Food Safety

Preparing and storing food safely to prevent foodborne illness is important in early learning and childcare centers. Children are at greater risk for severe foodborne illness.

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 | Alberta Health Services](#). Pages 14 and 15 refer to 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](#)

### For more information

For additional resources on food safety visit Alberta Health Services Environmental Public Health at: [Environmental Public Health | Alberta Health Services](#).

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

