

Helping Your Child Eat Well in Hospital

Your child needs enough food and good nutrition to get better.

Eating well in hospital can help your child:

- get energy and maintain strength
- heal and recover
- avoid weight and muscle loss
- reduce the length of stay in the hospital

Nutrition while in hospital

Your child's healthcare team will order a diet based on your child's needs. This 'diet order' may depend on how your child was eating at home. Talk to your healthcare team about how your child usually eats:

- **how often** and **how much** they are eating (meal and snack routine, or tube feeding)
- **what** they are eating (allergies, formula, special diets, texture of solids, and favourite foods)

Tip:

Show photos to your healthcare team of what you offer your child at home. This provides details that may be hard to remember, such as:

- formula brands
- supplements (vitamins, minerals)

Preparing for tests and surgery

There may be times in the hospital when your child is not able to have food. **Talk to your team about:**

- food or drink that your child can have before a test or procedure
- the last time your child can eat or drink before a test or procedure
- when and what is safe for your child to start eating after a test or procedure
- when and what your child can eat if their test or procedure gets cancelled or delayed
- when your child can have meals if they have not eaten for 24 hours

Eating well in hospital

Try the tips below to help your child get enough nutrition while in the hospital.

- Be present at mealtimes to offer help if needed.
- Make sure your child is comfortable. Try to support them so they can sit upright.
- Ask your healthcare team if you would like a highchair for your child.
- If needed, help your child by:
 - opening food packages
 - cutting foods into smaller pieces
 - providing help with eating
- Ask for larger servings at meals if your child is hungry after meals.
- Ask for condiments such as ketchup, margarine, gravy, or sour cream. These may make foods more appealing to your child.
- Avoid adding medication to your child's food at meals. This can change the taste or texture.



Talk to your healthcare team if your child is having trouble chewing or swallowing.

If your child is not eating well

- You can encourage your child to try to eat small amounts at mealtimes.
- Your child can drink liquids between or after meals to have more room for food at mealtimes.
- Ask your healthcare team if you can bring your child's favourite foods from home.
 - Your healthcare team can tell you how to label and safely store foods brought from home.



Nutrition supplements

Nutrition supplements provide extra calories, protein, and nutrients. These come in many forms: drinks, bars, puddings, and powders. They may help if your child:

- has a poor appetite
- is unable to eat enough of their food at meals and snacks

Examples that you may see in the hospital:

- PediaSure®
- Ensure®

Ordering meals in the hospital

Some hospitals have a program where patients can order their meals. Ask your healthcare team if your hospital has this program. If they do, these tips may help:

- Fill out your menu before lunch. This can ensure your child gets the food they want for the next day.
- Choose foods from each group on the menu. This makes sure your child gets a variety of foods and nutrients.
- You can help your child choose foods that are familiar to them.
- Write "X 2" on any item on your menu to get double portions.
- Ask your healthcare team if there is food on the unit for your child between meals.

Note: If you do not fill out a menu, your child will still get meals.



Please circle items of your choice	
Friday	Supper
Entree	
029 Meatballs/Gravy	
031 Salmon/Lemon Dill Sauce	
Side Dish	
045 Coleslaw	
051 Peas	
036 Mashed Potato	
012 Brown Dinner Roll	
Dessert	
047 Mandarin Orange Cup	
049 Vanilla Pudding	
Beverage	
014 1% Milk	
016 2% Milk X 2	
Condiment	
062 Pepper	023 Mustard
064 Mrs. Dash	025 Ketchup
018 Margarine X 2	027 Low Sodium Soya Sauce
Your Diet Order: Pediatric (example)	

For more support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on ahs.ca/811.
- Visit ahs.ca/nutrition.

