

Marketing Healthy Food Choices

Although children's food choices are affected by many factors, how food is marketed plays a key role. Food marketing attracts children's attention, influences their food choices, and prompts them to buy products. To encourage students, staff and visitors to choose healthy foods, schools should consider the [Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth](#) and the 4 P's of marketing:

- Product availability
- Promotion
- Pricing
- Placement

Product availability

To market healthy food and beverage choices, they must be available in all venues at all times. Providing a variety of healthy choices at all times will encourage staff and students to purchase these healthier products. Consider only offering healthy choices so that they are not in competition with less healthy choices.

Look at the food and beverage choices offered in your school at these locations and events:

- cafeterias
- vending machines
- extracurricular and special events
- snack shops
- special food days (i.e. pizza day)
- sports days and tournaments
- classroom celebrations
- classroom rewards and incentives

Take a look at what healthy choices your school already offers and where you might consider making changes.

Promotion

Promoting healthy food choices is very important. **What** products you choose to promote and **how** you go about promoting them are both important considerations.

What to promote?

Promote the healthy food options available. Do not label foods as "healthy" or unhealthy". Instead, focus on recommendations from Canada's Food Guide and promote the positive attributes of food such as what nutrients they contain, how they fuel the body and how they keep the body healthy.

How to promote?

There are many fun, creative ways to promote healthy food choices to students. Examples are:

- Provide lunch specials that include all 4 of the food groups.
- Use frequent buyer cards or programs for healthy choices.
- Have discount days such as "Thirsty Thursday" with a price reduction on milk and 100% juice or lower the price of fruit on "Fresh Fruit Fridays".
- Market healthy food as the popular choice. Have a "hot sellers" section filled with healthier foods and beverages.
- Promote the performance benefits of good nutrition (such as better grades and sports performance).
- Host a food fair and have students select from a variety of healthy choices.
- Change the fronts of vending machines to promote healthier choices.
- Get staff support. Try a healthy eating challenge between students and staff.
- Use attractive, environmentally friendly packaging.
- Use social media to market healthy choices, such as Twitter or text messages.
- Newsletters, student posters and PA announcements are good ways to promote healthy food and beverage choices.

Remember to involve students in the promotion process – ask them how to get support and buy-in!

Pricing

Price may be the most important factor in helping students make healthier choices. If healthy foods cost more than less healthy foods, it may discourage students from purchasing them. Make it easier for a student to choose healthier food and beverage options by trying these tips:

- Offer healthy choices as part of a special or “meal deal.”
- Price healthy choices at the same or at a lower cost than less healthy options to encourage sales.
- If an item is popular – price may not matter. Ask your student population for suggestions of what healthy choices they would like to see offered. Your sales of these foods may soar!
- Raise the prices of less healthy choices; this will help make up for decreased profits on healthy choices.

Placement

Remember the saying “out of sight...out of mind”? Healthier food choices should be more plentiful and more visible than the less healthy choices. Try these tips:

- Put healthy foods up-front-and-centre where students can see them right away.
- Place healthy foods at eye level and in easy to access displays. Mark prices clearly.
- Make healthy foods more appealing. Use baskets, attractive arrangements, colorful food choices and garnishes to make these foods stand out.
- Have a lot of healthy choices available in all venues at all times.
- Position vending machines with healthy choices in high traffic locations. Keep healthy choices at eye level and consider labeling which choices are the healthiest.
- Move vending machines with less healthy choices to low traffic areas.

Policy

Consider a fifth P to your plan – policy. Creating a policy for your school helps establish a continued commitment to creating a healthy eating environment for your students, staff and visitors.

- Create a policy that supports the sale and distribution of healthy food choices. Use the *Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth* to develop a policy for your site or facility.
- Involve key stakeholders (students, teachers, parents and staff) in policy development to ensure buy-in and support from a variety of individuals.
- Consider a policy where changes are implemented one at a time to support success. Set a timeline (i.e. two years) for your school to implement the healthy choices policy.
- Reinforce your policy by including sponsored events, fundraising activities, extra-curricular events, etc.

Remember, a consistent message promotes and supports your cause.

Additional resources can be found at www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page2929.aspx, choose:

- *Healthy Eating and Active Living For your 1 to 5 year old*
- *Healthy Eating and Active Living For your 6 to 12 year old*
- *Healthy Eating and Active Living For Ages 13 to 18 years*