

Menu Criteria Backgrounder

Menu Requirements & Considerations

Canada's Food Guide (2019) sets out Health Canada's objectives and guidelines for the promotion of healthy eating and overall nutritional well-being of children. The recommendations for meals and snacks in child care settings are based on Canada's Food Guide and guidance from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health. The guidelines are meant to help support children in child care settings have adequate opportunity to meet their daily nutrient requirements.

The 2019 guide differs from recent guides as it does not specify amounts that should be consumed from each food group. Instead, Canada's Food Guide recommends that a variety of nutritious foods be provided at meals and snacks according to relative proportions. For example, half the plate be vegetables and fruits, with whole grains and protein foods making up the rest of the plate (i.e. 50% vegetables/fruit, 25% whole grains, 25% protein foods).

The following is an example of a full day menu plan (includes breakfast, morning snack, lunch, afternoon snack and supper):

- **Breakfast:** consists of at least 2 vegetable or 2 fruit options, 1 grain option, and 1 protein option.
- **Lunch & Supper:** consists of at least 1 kind of vegetable and 1 kind of fruit or 2 kinds of vegetables, 1 grain option, and 1 protein option.
- **Snacks:** both a morning and afternoon snack are to be provided each day. Snacks are to consist of at least 1 kind of vegetable and 1 grain or 1 fruit and 1 grain or 1 vegetable and 1 protein or 1 fruit and 1 protein.
- **Beverages:** consists of plain milk or plain (unsweetened or original) fortified soy beverage at one meal and at one snack if the facility offers one meal per day. If the facility provides two or three meals per day, the facility is to offer at each meal. Offer water throughout the day and at all meals.

The amount of food a child eats at meals and snacks will vary each day depending on the child's activity level, appetite, food preferences, and growth rate. For example, one child may eat half a banana while another child may eat a whole banana. The child care provider is responsible for offering regular nutritious meals and snacks; however, children are the best judges of how much food, if any, they need to eat.

Foods that are hard, small and round, or smooth and sticky foods should be avoided. For example:

- Whole grapes are sliced lengthwise;
- Pits are removed from fruit before serving; and,
- Peanut butter is spread thinly.

Beverages

Milk provides an important source of calcium and vitamin D which are important nutrients for growth and development. Plain milk or plain (unsweetened or original) fortified soy beverage should be offered at one meal and at one snack per day for facilities offering one meal per day. For facilities serving two or three meals per day, children under two years of age should be offered whole milk only (3.25% M.F.) at each meal.

For children younger than two years of age, plant-based beverages should not be used as the main milk source. For children two years of age and older, lower fat milk (0-2% M.F.) or plain fortified soy beverage should be offered at each meal.

Water is to be offered at all meals, snacks and throughout the day to satisfy a children's thirst.

Plant Based Foods

The guide recommends offering plant-based protein foods regularly. This can include adding a plant-based protein food to a meal or snack that contains animal-based protein food and/or offering a plant-based protein food instead of an animal-based protein food at a meal or snack.

Plant-based protein foods include baked beans, vegetarian chili, pea soup, lentil and vegetable soup, chickpeas, and hummus. Peanut butter, nuts and seeds are also plant-based protein foods.

Foods and Beverages that undermine Healthy Eating

Foods and beverages that are high in sodium, sugar, or saturated fat should be limited.

Beverages that contain sugars (including 100% fruit juice) have been associated with a higher risk of dental decay in children and should not be offered. Sugary drinks include soft drinks, fruit-flavoured drinks, 100% fruit juice, flavoured waters with added sugars, sport and energy drinks, and other sweetened hot or cold beverages, such as iced tea, cold coffee beverages, sweetened milks (i.e. chocolate milk), and sweetened plant-based beverages are considered foods to limit.

In order to provide some flexibility, child care operators may offer foods that do not meet the requirements outlined in the Canadian Food Guide. Foods including processed meat, deep-fried foods, ready-to-heat packaged dishes, high sugar breakfast cereals, cakes, cookies and pastries, chocolate and candies, ice cream and frozen desserts are considered foods to limit and should not be offered more than two times per week.