

# A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD

Every child and adult have their own relationship with food. This looks different for everyone and can change, especially as children grow and develop.

Parents, caregivers, guardians, and other adults play an important role in helping children eat well and maintain a positive relationship with food.



## Some practical tips include:

- Introduce new foods often, with curiosity and excitement. Explore foods of various colours, textures, and flavours
- Cook and prepare food in the home more often. Involve children by choosing recipes together or providing them with age-appropriate cooking tasks. Try making this [tasty taco recipe!](#)
- Model a positive relationship with food yourself by following [Canada's Food Guide](#)
- Respond to your internal hunger cues, and encourage children to do the same
- Use neutral words when describing foods, like “crunchy”, “colourful”, instead of labelling foods as “good” or “bad”
- When talking about food, focus on the benefits of eating a variety of foods and enjoying meals with others
- Set aside time for eating, conversation, and connection to strengthen relationships

For additional information on nutrition for schools visit [york.ca/schoolnutrition](http://york.ca/schoolnutrition).

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# BE “FOOD SAFE” WHEN PACKING LUNCHES

Keep children safe by using these four simple food safety steps when preparing and packing your child’s lunch and snacks:

- **Clean:** Wash your hands, for 15 to 20 seconds, before preparing food. Wash fresh fruit and vegetables under cool running water. This includes fruit and vegetables with a skin/rind that is not eaten. Wash lunch bags, food storage containers and water bottles every day.
- **Chill:** Use an insulated lunch bag with ice packs to ensure food is kept cold at 4°C (40°F) or below. Refrigerate foods prepared ahead of time until packing the lunch.
- **Cook:** Keep cooked, hot food that is to be held hot for lunch, at a temperature of 60°C (140°F) or higher. Use a properly insulated thermal container. Bring soups to a rolling boil and stir prior to packing in lunch bag (thermal container). See the [Safe Internal Cooking Temperature Chart](#) for information on cooking temperatures.
- **Separate:** Store lunches above, and away from any raw meat, poultry or seafood in the fridge. Throw out any hazardous food (e.g., cheese, sandwiches, yogurt, etc.) that has returned home in the lunch bag.



For more tips on packing school lunches and/or general safe food handling practices, please visit [Be Food Safe When Packing Lunches](#) and [york.ca/foodsafety](http://york.ca/foodsafety). For additional information on nutrition for schools visit [york.ca/schoolnutrition](http://york.ca/schoolnutrition).

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# BLAST OFF WITH BREAKFAST!

Start the day by giving yourself a few extra minutes in the morning to enjoy breakfast with your family. Did you know eating breakfast may help improve concentration in the morning.

Here are some tips to make breakfasts quick and easy:

- Make whole grain muffins, pancakes or waffles ahead of time and freeze them; you can quickly take them out of the freezer, pop them in the toaster or microwave and serve them with some fruit and milk
- Boil and peel several eggs or make a few omelets one evening. Store them in the fridge. Serve them with toast and fruit
- Make a wrap by spreading peanut butter on a whole wheat pita or tortilla and wrapping the pita or tortilla around a banana
- Make a breakfast shake with milk, yogurt, whole oats, frozen berries and a banana
- Enjoy a high-fibre cereal with milk and sliced fruit



Explore Cookspiration's [breakfast recipes](#) for ideas! For additional information on nutrition for schools visit [york.ca/schoolnutrition](http://york.ca/schoolnutrition).

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# CANADA'S FOOD GUIDE

Are you familiar with [Canada's Food Guide](#)? This guide acknowledges healthy eating is more than the foods you eat; it is also about where, when, why, and how you eat. The food guide encourages us to eat foods that are good for the planet and that provide us with the nutrients we need by focusing on vegetables and fruit, whole grains and plant-based protein foods.

**Here are the Healthy Eating Recommendations from Canada's Food Guide for planning meals for you and your family:**

- [Be mindful of your eating habits](#)
- [Cook more often](#)
- [Enjoy your food](#)
- [Eat meals with others](#)

**In addition, make it a habit to eat a variety of foods each day:**

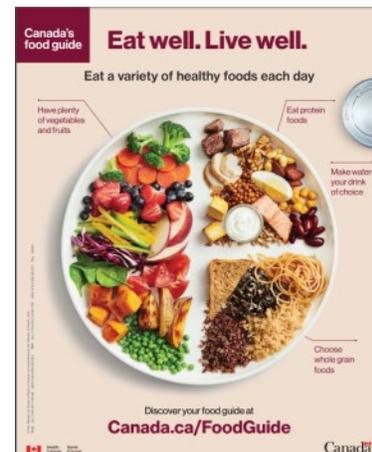
- [Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits, whole grain foods and protein foods.](#) Choose protein foods that come from plants more often
- [Limit highly processed foods.](#) If you choose these foods, eat them less often and in small amounts
- [Make water your drink of choice](#)
- [Use food labels](#)
- [Be aware that food marketing can influence your choices](#)

Visit [Canada.ca/Foodguide](https://Canada.ca/Foodguide) to access supporting resources such as recipes.

Visit [www.unlockfood.ca](https://www.unlockfood.ca) for more information and additional nutrition resources. To speak to a registered dietitian at no cost, dial 811 to reach Health811 (TTY: 1-866-797-0007). For additional information on nutrition for schools visit [york.ca/schoolnutrition](https://york.ca/schoolnutrition).

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# COOKING TOGETHER - SO MUCH TO GAIN

Cooking is a great family activity! Families can share food traditions, favourite recipes and learn about cultural roots.

Cooking with kids can also provides learning opportunities. Kids can:

- Strengthen language skills when reading recipes and writing grocery lists.
- Incorporate math skills when working with fractions to measure ingredients
- Learn about costing and money management when grocery shopping



Kids learn about food through their senses (sight, touch, smell, hearing and tasting). By teaching kids food skills, you are also teaching them important life skills.

**Here are some ideas for different kitchen skills based on age** (Children's skills may vary and so parental discretion and adult supervision is recommended):

- **2 to 3 years:** Adding ingredients to a bowl, stirring to combine ingredients, helping to find ingredients
- **4 to 6 years:** Helping to measure ingredients, crack and beat egg, mash soft fruit or vegetables (e.g., banana)
- **7 to 8 years:** Use simple kitchen equipment (e.g., garlic press, cheese grater), use the microwave with adult supervision, write a grocery list
- **9 to 11 years:** Use a knife to cut foods (such as cooked meat, fruit, cheese), use kitchen equipment with adult supervision such as blender or mixer
- **12 years and older:** Working towards independently following recipe, developing grocery shopping skills (e.g., selecting items, cost)

For more ideas of age-appropriate ideas see [Kitchen Skills at Every Age](#)

Find more information about creating a healthy school food culture at [brightbites.ca](#). For additional information on nutrition for schools visit [york.ca/schoolnutrition](#).

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# EATING FOR BRAIN HEALTH

We know healthy eating is good for overall physical health, but did you know good nutrition is also good for a healthy mind?

Choosing whole, unprocessed foods may improve mood, alertness, concentration, performance, memory, and the ability to acquire knowledge. It has also been linked to improved symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression in [adults and children](#).



## Choose more of the following foods for a healthy mind:

- Vegetables and fruit, particularly dark green and orange
- Whole grains like oatmeal and barley
- Milk or fortified soy beverages, yogurt or other fermented foods
- Beans and other legumes, try this [5-minute Hummus](#) for a tasty snack with vegetables strips and whole grain crackers
- Fish and lean meats

Eating for mental health isn't just about **what** you eat; it's also about **how** you eat! Planning, cooking and enjoying meals with family and friends, and teaching your children to cook, promotes social and emotional connections, which can help build positive mental health.

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# FOR THIRST CHOOSE WATER

Children lose water throughout the day through sweating, breathing and need to replace what is lost. Drinking water is important for overall health, a great way to quench thirst and to stay hydrated.

## Help your child choose water as their drink of choice:

- Send your child to school with a reusable water bottle. To help keep water cold, put it in the refrigerator overnight and add ice cubes in the morning
- Offer water during and after physical activity or playing sports
- Keep a pitcher of water in the fridge or on the table for easy access
- Add fruits and herbs to water for flavour, try these combinations:
  - Fresh raspberries and cucumber
  - Chopped apples and a cinnamon stick
  - Strawberries and fresh basil



Include your child in choosing and preparing the ingredients.

For more information about how you can help your child's school create a healthy school nutrition environment, visit [www.brightbites.ca](http://www.brightbites.ca). For additional information on nutrition for schools visit [york.ca/schoolnutrition](http://york.ca/schoolnutrition).

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# HELPING CHILDREN AND YOUTH FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES

Body image is what you believe, think and how you feel about your body. A positive body image can contribute to higher self-esteem in children, often leading to healthier and more positive life choices. Try these simple ways to help children have a positive body image.

## Encourage children to think about:

- All bodies come in different shapes and sizes
- How media images are not realistic and are often fabricated and use filters
- All the things they do well
- The ways their body works for them
- How to take care of themselves and listen to their body (e.g., sleep well, eat well, participate in activities they enjoy, spend time with family and friends)
- When upset, identify positive ways to cope with their feelings (e.g., go for a walk, talk to family or friends, write in a journal)



**Be a positive role model:** Be aware of the messages you convey about your body and the comments you make about the appearance of others. If children hear adults' express dissatisfaction with their bodies, they may place inappropriate importance on physical appearance and think that being an adult means being unhappy with your body.

**Treat others with respect:** Teach and model that all bodies deserve to be respected and accepted, regardless of shape, size or ability.

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# HOW WE EAT CAN IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH

**What** foods you eat and **how** you eat them can contribute to positive mental health. Eating behaviours, such as how often you eat nutritious meals together and involving children in meal preparation builds social connectedness and valuable cooking skills. These behaviours contribute to more resilient children.

## Boost your children's mental health:

1. Slow down and take time to sit, relax, talk and enjoy good food together
2. Recognize when you are hungry or full to guide when you eat
3. Trust your child to decide for himself/herself **which foods** and **how much** to eat
4. Involve the whole family in meal preparation
5. Teach children how to cook
6. Feel good about what you eat



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# LUNCHES KIDS WILL MUNCH

Well-nourished children can concentrate longer and perform better in school. When it comes to lunch at school, many people have a role. Parents and caregivers decide what to pack. The child decides what and how much to eat from their lunch. The school decides when and where students eat. Here are some lunch ideas that children will enjoy!



## When packing lunch include these 3 items:

1. Pack plenty of vegetables and fruit such as broccoli florets, carrot sticks or melon cubes
2. Include a protein food such as lentils, chickpeas, bean dip, a hard-boiled egg, cheese, yogurt, lean meat
3. Include whole grain foods such as pasta, brown rice, pita, bun or tortilla

## Additional helpful suggestions:

4. Keep a list of lunch and snack ideas on hand that align with [Canada's Food Guide](#)
5. Involve your children in planning and preparing their lunches
6. Children have limited time to eat, usually around 20 minutes, help them save time by peeling fruit in advance or cutting food into smaller, bite-sized pieces
7. Soup, leftovers, rice or pasta dishes can be heated in the morning and stored in pre-heated thermal containers
8. Send a reusable water bottle

Children may not always eat their entire lunch. Be sure to offer other meals and snacks throughout the day.

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# MEAL PLANNING TIPS FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY

The food children eat influences their growth, development, health and learning ability. Good nutrition ensures children get the nutrients they need to grow into healthy adults.

Here are some tips for planning family meals. **Try the following:**

- Pack a lunch that includes plenty of vegetables and fruit, whole grains and protein foods. Choose protein foods that come from plants more often, for example, try adding lentils to soup
- Keep foods that are ready-to-eat on hand for after school, work, or bedtime snacks (e.g. cut up fruit, vegetables, yogurt, nuts, low-fat cheese)
- Include your children in planning meals – including packing their lunches
- Teach your children to cook – it is a skill that allows them to make healthy choices later in life. Looking for recipe inspiration? Visit [Cookspiration](#) for a collection of delicious recipes



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# MORE FRUITS AND VEGGIES, PLEASE!

Include plenty of vegetables and fruits in your meals and snacks. [Canada's Food Guide](#) recommends filling up half of your plate with vegetables and fruit.

Promote variety by choosing different colours, textures and shapes. Fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables and fruits can all be great options.

## How to help your child eat more vegetables and fruits:

- Include fruit at breakfast; try adding slices of banana or berries to cereal
- Include fruit and vegetables in lunch bags daily
- Keep washed fruit and vegetables that are ready-to-eat on hand
- Serve a snack after school that includes a fruit or vegetable; try serving fresh fruit slices with cheese or yogurt. Check out these recipes: [Bagel Crunch \(cookspiration.com\)](#) or [Banana Yogurt Jam Wrap Up \(cookspiration.com\)](#)
- Set a good example by eating lots of vegetables and fruits yourself



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