

Nutrition Matters

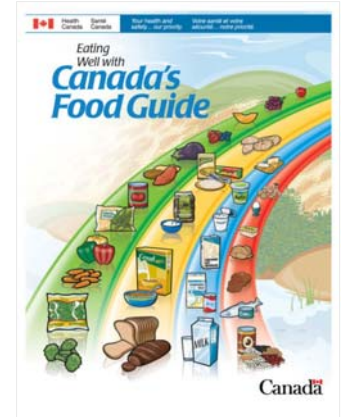
Nutrition Services, Community and Health Services

Healthy meals for *fast-paced* lives

Today's fast paced way of life has families eating out more often and spending less time preparing and eating meals together. Getting healthy meals on the table takes less time and is easier than you might think. It's all about being prepared!



Aim for meals that include foods from at least three out of the four food groups and snacks that include at least one or two foods from the four food groups according to *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*.



A little planning goes a long way...

Planning ahead makes it easier to prepare healthy meals. It can help to cut down on trips to the store, save you money, and reduce ordering take-out or delivered foods.

Once a week, set aside some time to plan your family's meals for the week ahead. When menu planning, take time to consider:

- The contents of your fridge, freezer and cupboards
- Your family's food preferences
- Your family's evening activities
- What foods are "on sale" and in season at the grocery store
- Your food budget

Budget Tip

Use weekly grocery store flyers to take advantage of items on sale. Plan your menus around specials and include foods that can be used for leftovers.

Use your weekly menu to create a grocery list. Keep a shopping list on the fridge so food items can be added throughout the week. Post the week's menu and recipes on the fridge. This will help reduce the number of trips to the grocery store.



Get the entire family involved!

Did you know...? Families who prepare and eat meals together have healthier eating habits. Get your family involved in meal preparation and clean-up. This will save time and will teach your children valuable life skills! Younger children can help set the table and older children can help with food preparation.

Get organized!

An organized kitchen and the right tools will make preparing tasty and healthy meals easier and more enjoyable.

Tips for getting organized:

- Wash and prepare fruits and vegetables in advance and store them, and other ready-to-go healthy items, near the front of your fridge for easy access
- Pack snacks and lunch items into easy-to-grab small portions using baggies and small plastic containers. Some snack ideas include: grapes, berries, raw vegetable sticks and dip, or cheese and crackers
- Separate large packages of meat, fish and poultry into meal-sized portions and date them before putting them into the freezer
- Make space on the lowest shelf of your refrigerator to allow for thawing of meat, poultry, fish and other frozen foods
- Use multi-purpose dishes that are safe in the microwave, oven, fridge, freezer and dishwasher. The fewer dishes you have to wash, the more time you will have for other things!

Healthy tools for the kitchen

Having the right tools in the kitchen can help you save time and effort. Here are some kitchen helpers you won't want to be without:

- **Slow cooker** – saves time by letting you cook a meal without even being there
- **Indoor grill** – allows you to quickly prepare meats all year-round
- **Steamer** – a quick and nutritious way to cook a variety of vegetables or fish
- **Cutting Boards (2)** – one for raw meat, poultry and fish and one for produce and ready-to-eat foods
- **Blender** – great for making smoothies, sauces and dressings
- **Cookbooks** – keep on hand cookbooks and recipes for quick, tasty and healthy meals

Convenience foods



Canned, frozen and packaged convenience foods are generally more expensive but can help to speed up preparation time and can be part of a nutritious meal plan.

Some healthy ideas:

- Pre-washed and ready-to-eat produce, such as broccoli, coleslaw, spinach and lettuce can be used as a base for salads. Simply add cherry tomatoes, baby corn or mini carrots for extra colour and crunch
- Pre-washed small or Parisian potatoes can be roasted in a snap
- Frozen vegetables are great steamed to keep colour and flavour
- Frozen fruits can be used in smoothies, on cereal, or in a fruit crisp
- Canned fruit (packaged in its own juice) is great for dessert, topping on salads, or added to yogurt
- Canned legumes such as chick peas, beans or lentils make a healthy and easy alternative to meat (rinse them in cold water first)
- A cooked rotisserie chicken with a salad or veggies for an easy supper
- Precooked beef or chicken strips can help make stir-frys and fajitas a breeze
- Pre-shredded, low-fat cheese for topping on pasta, pizza or salads
- Canned salmon or tuna (in water) makes an easy lunch or dinner
- Fillets of fish (e.g., salmon, trout) can be broiled in the oven in minutes
- Peeled and cored pineapple makes a healthy snack or dessert

Health Tip

Some pre-packaged foods are higher in salt, sugar and/or fat and lower in fibre. Use the *Nutrition Facts* table on the food package to help you make healthy choices.

Cook once, eat twice!

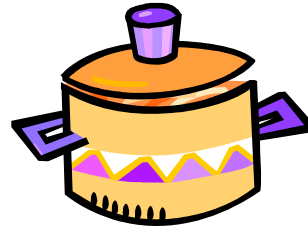
Weekends are a good time to prepare big batches of food that can be refrigerated or frozen for busy days. Try getting together with family or friends and share the work.

When cooking in big batches, it is a good idea to prepare two or three dishes that have common ingredients to maximize your time. For instance, make “master mixes”, where you make different food bases that are added to different meals. For example, cooked ground meat, onions, peppers and tomatoes can be frozen into meal portions for future meals such as spaghetti, Sheppard’s pie, chili, or as a topping for baked potatoes

Freeze meal-sized portions in airtight containers or resealable freezer bags that can be defrosted on nights when time is tight. Label the containers with the date the meal was made and name of the dish.

Ideas for “big batch” cooking:

- Soups, stews or chili
- Tomato sauce
- Casseroles (e.g., lasagne, enchiladas)
- Cut-up cooked vegetables
- Muffins, loaves or scones
- Breakfast items such as French toast and pancakes
- Pre-cooked meats (e.g. sliced cooked chicken breasts, cooked ground meat)

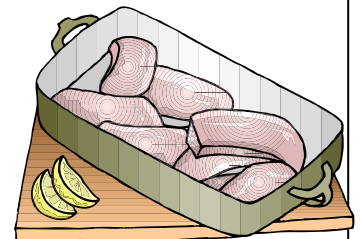


Safety Tip

Always defrost your meal in the fridge or microwave. Do not leave frozen meals on the counter to thaw at room temperature.

Get creative with leftovers

Get the most out of your time by cooking more food than you need. Make ‘planned extras’ that will be on hand for the next lunch or supper. Save meal preparation time by using leftovers in a different way from the original meal. Below are some great ‘planned extra’ ideas:



Great planned extras

Suggestions for the second meal

Cook an extra batch of vegetables	Use in frittata, pasta sauce, vegetable soup or in a wrap with hummus
Cook a double batch of brown rice	Make stir-fried rice, add to soups, or make rice pudding
Cook a double batch of whole wheat pasta	Add to soups, stir fries, make a baked pasta dish or make a cold pasta salad
Grill extra salmon fillets	Make fish cakes, salmon salad or place on top of a green salad
Cook extra chicken breast or pork tenderloin	Cut into strips and use as a topping for pizza or salad, use in quesadillas, toss with whole wheat pasta and leftover vegetables, or great for sandwiches
Cook extra beef	Slice and use for beef sandwiches or add small cubes to a vegetable soup or spaghetti sauce
Roast a whole chicken	Use in casseroles, make chicken salad for lunches, top a green salad with cooked chicken slices

Stock your pantry!

Having a well stocked pantry means having a ready supply of basics that will help you pull together tasty and nutritious meals and snacks in a hurry.

Some ideas include:

On the counter:

- Bananas
- Tomatoes
- Melons (e.g., cantaloupe, honeydew)

In the cupboards:

- Canned fruit, vegetables, beans, lentils
- Tomato-based pasta sauces, salsa
- Dried fruit (e.g., apricots, raisins, dates)
- Whole grain cereals
- Whole wheat pasta, couscous
- Brown and wild rice
- Flour (white and whole wheat)
- Quick rolled oats
- Whole grain crackers
- Peanut or other nut butters
- Nuts and seeds
- Canned fish (e.g., salmon, tuna)
- Vegetable oils (e.g., canola, olive)
- Vinegar
- Herbs and spices
- Low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth

In the fridge:

- A variety of fresh vegetables and fruit
- 100% fruit and vegetable juices
- Low-fat milk, cheeses and yogurt
- Eggs
- Tofu
- Low-fat salad dressings, mayonnaise, mustard, salsa and ketchup

In the freezer:

- Frozen vegetables (e.g., broccoli, peas, carrots, corn)
- Frozen fruit
- 100% fruit juice concentrates
- Whole grain breads, pita
- Frozen fish and seafood
- Frozen poultry and lean meats

Cool, dark storage:

- Root vegetables (e.g., potatoes, yams)
- Fresh garlic and onions



Fast and easy meal ideas

- Presto pasta! Brown some onions and garlic in a skillet. Add canned or bottled tomato sauce and canned, drained lentils. Serve over whole wheat pasta or couscous with a side salad and a glass of milk or fortified soy beverage
- Personalized omelettes! Family members can choose their own fillings. Some ideas include ham, cheese, peppers, green onions or tomatoes. Spice it up with salsa or hot sauce. Serve with whole grain bagel or toast. Have fruit for dessert
- Beautiful beans! Enjoy a bean and rice dish. Heat up canned, drained black or kidney beans with corn, chopped tomatoes, onions, red and yellow peppers, cooked brown rice, grated low-fat cheese
- Wrap it up! Wraps are a great way to use your leftovers. Place some cooked ground beef, leftover chicken, canned tuna or scrambled egg in a whole grain tortilla. Top with lettuce, tomato, low-fat cheese, sour cream and salsa
- Fabulous fish cakes! Using canned salmon or cooked salmon fillet, add to it minced celery, green onion, red peppers, an egg and breadcrumbs. Form into patties and bake on a lightly oiled pan until golden brown. Serve with brown rice and steamed broccoli