

# Nutrition, Children and the School Environment

## Nutrition... the key to healthy children

Nutrition plays a key role in healthy child development. Well-nourished children are more likely to get the energy and essential nutrients they need to grow, be active, stay healthy and do well at school. Healthy eating habits formed in childhood will help children to grow into healthy adults.

## Nutrition... the key to classroom success

Healthy children are better learners. Well-nourished children have increased test scores, less lateness and absenteeism and better behaviour (eg, less anxiety and better coping skills).

## Did you know?

Many Canadian children are not eating well. Nutrition surveys show:

- 1/3 of children do not eat the minimum two daily servings of milk products
- 7 out of 10 children do not eat the minimum five daily servings of vegetables and fruit
- Children drink less milk, and more soft drinks and fruit drinks as they age. These sugar-sweetened drinks have been linked to unhealthy weights
- Most children's sodium intake is too high, increasing their health risks
- Young people are skipping breakfast, especially as they get older

## Nutrition Tools for Schools

10 = # of tsp of sugar in one 355 mL can of pop

1000 = Amount of sodium (mg) in one large slice of pizza

1200 = Adequate intake of sodium (mg) per day for children aged 4-8 (1500 mg for age 9 and up)

Our children are filling up on food and beverages high in fat, salt and sugar!

## Healthy schools... create a culture that values healthy eating

Healthy eating can be learned and influenced through education and social supports in schools. Not only do children learn about nutrition in the classroom, but the food and beverage choices offered or sold in schools give them many chances to practice their healthy eating skills. School community members play a key role in making the healthy choice the easy choice and creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment.



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# What can YOU do to create a Healthy School Nutrition Environment?

## School boards/trustees

- Arrange for a public health dietitian to present on nutrition in schools
- Partner with staff, students, parents, and community members to promote healthy eating
- Go beyond the School Food and Beverage Policy (P/PM 150) – develop a comprehensive nutrition policy (eg applies to wherever food is offered and sold)
- Work with food vendors to ensure healthy food and beverages are offered

## Schools

- Organize a daily student nutrition program (eg, snack) and a milk program
- Serve healthy catered lunches based on Canada's Food Guide
- Provide safe and pleasant eating areas
- Run a School Nutrition Action Committee (SNAC)
- Share healthy eating tips with parents (eg, school newsletter, website)
- Raise money using non-food options

## Teachers

- Ensure healthy food and beverages are provided for classroom celebrations
- Provide safe and pleasant eating areas
- Participate on the School Nutrition Action Committee (SNAC)
- Share healthy eating tips with parents (eg, school newsletter, website)
- Raise money using non-food options

## School meal providers

- Offer healthy and appropriate servings from Canada's Food Guide (eg, don't 'super-size')
- Decorate eating areas with nutrition posters, displays, table tents. Involve students in marketing healthy eating
- Form a student group to help taste-test new foods

## Parents

- Support your school's efforts to promote healthy eating (eg, pack healthy lunches)
- Send healthy food and beverages for classroom celebrations and events
- Help the student nutrition program with shopping, food prep or service, clean-up
- Assist with a milk program

## Together we can make the healthy choice the easy choice!

For more information about Nutrition Tools for Schools®, P/PM 150, or healthy eating, please contact your local public health unit:

York Region Community and Health Services  
Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653  
or visit  
[www.york.ca/nutrition](http://www.york.ca/nutrition)

For information on healthy schools go to the Ministry of Education Healthy Schools website:  
[www.ontario.ca/healthyschools](http://www.ontario.ca/healthyschools).

Nutrition Tools for Schools® is a program consisting of a Toolkit and public health support to help your school create a healthy nutrition environment.



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### Factsheet

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