

A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD

Every child and adult have their own personal relationship with food. This looks different for everyone and can change over time, 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 practicing a balanced eating pattern that follows 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 to allow for eating, conversation, and connection as a way to strengthen relationships



For additional information on nutrition for schools visit york.ca/healthyschools.

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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 15-20 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 that food is kept cold at 4°C (40°F) or below. Refrigerate foods prepared ahead of time until packing the lunch.
- **Cook:** Keep cooked 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. For additional information on nutrition for schools visit york.ca/healthyschools.

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BLAST OFF WITH BREAKFAST!

Start the day off by giving yourself a few extra minutes in the morning to enjoy a healthy breakfast with your family. 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/healthyschools.

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CANADA'S FOOD GUIDE

Are you familiar with the current [food guide](#)? This guide acknowledges that 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 not only better for us, but also for our planet, 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 yourself and your family:

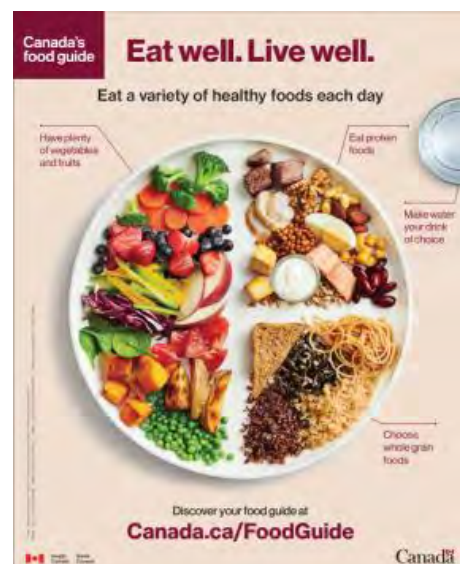
- [Be mindful of your eating habits](#)
- [Cook more often](#)
- [Enjoy your food](#)
- [Eat meals with others](#)

In addition, make it a habit to eat a variety of healthy 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 to access supporting resources such as recipes.

Visit www.unlockfood.ca for more information and additional nutrition resources. To speak to a registered dietitian at no cost, call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000. For additional information on nutrition for schools visit york.ca/healthyschools.



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COOKING TOGETHER - SO MUCH TO GAIN

Cooking is a great activity to involve all members of the family. Cooking can provide an opportunity for families to share food traditions, family favourite recipes and learn about cultural roots. Cooking with kids also provides many different learning opportunities. For example, language skills can be strengthened when reading recipes and writing grocery lists. Math skills can be incorporated when working with fractions to measure ingredients. Including kids while grocery shopping provides a learning opportunity on costing and money management.

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):

2–3-year old's: adding ingredients to a bowl, stirring to combine ingredients, helping to find ingredients

4–6-year old's: helping to measure ingredients, crack and beat egg, mash soft fruit or vegetables (e.g. banana)

7–8-year old's: use simple kitchen equipment (garlic press, cheese grater), use the microwave with adult supervision, write grocery list

9–11-year old's: use 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 (selecting items, cost)

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

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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, like fresh raspberries and cucumber, or chopped apples and a cinnamon stick. 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. For additional information on nutrition for schools visit york.ca/healthyschools.

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HEALTHY EATING, HEALTHY MINDS

We know that healthy eating is good for overall physical health, but did you know that 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

Healthy eating for mental health isn't just **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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HEALTHY EATING TIPS FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY

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

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

- Pack a healthy 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 healthy 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](https://www.cookspiration.com/) for a collection of delicious recipes.



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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:

- That all bodies come in different shapes and sizes
- How media images are not realistic and are often fabricated and use filters
- All the things that they do well
- The ways their body works for them
- How to take care of themselves and listen to their body (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 (go for a walk, talk to family or friend, write in a journal)



Be a positive role model: Be aware of the messages you convey about your own body and the comments you make about the appearance of others. If children hear adults express their 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 and improved mental health.

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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LUNCH'S KIDS WILL MUNCH

Well-nourished children are able to 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 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 healthy lunch and snack ideas
5. Involve your children in planning and preparing their lunches
6. Children have limited time to eat, usually around 20 minutes, to help them save time, peel fruit in advance or cut 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 healthy meals and snacks throughout the day.

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MAKE THE HEALTHY CHOICE THE EASY CHOICE

Where we live, learn, and play influences our eating habits. Environments that are supportive of healthy eating help make the healthy choice the easy choice.

Helping children practice healthy eating behaviours at a young age helps them to achieve positive physical and mental health, improves overall academic performance, and grow into healthy adults.

How to create a healthy food environment at home:

- Set aside time to eat together
- Offer water when playing sports
- Incorporate vegetables and fruit into meals, aiming to make half the plate vegetables and fruit
- Include children when packing lunches, planning and preparing meals



How to support a healthy school food environment

Did you know that Ontario schools are required to follow the Ontario School Food and Beverage Policy (P/PM 150) for foods and beverages sold in schools. Some schools are complementing this policy by ensuring healthier options are available wherever food and beverages are offered (not just sold):

- Offering healthier food and beverages for classroom celebrations and school events
- Ensuring teachers and volunteers role model healthy eating behaviours
- Planning school-wide events with the help of students to promote healthy breakfasts, lunches and snacks throughout the year

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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.

Choose different colours, textures and shapes to fit your taste. Fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables and fruits can all be healthy 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 vegetable sticks ready where children can easily reach them
- Serve a healthy snack after school that includes a fruit or vegetable; try serving fresh fruit slices with cheese or yogurt
- Set a good example by eating lots of vegetables and fruits yourself



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