



Healthy Choices

Start Now



When Your Child Does Not Eat Meat

Many young children have a hard time eating meat. Some children may not like the taste and some may find meat too dry and hard to chew.

Why meat and meat alternatives are important

Meat, eggs and plant-based protein foods such as legumes, and tofu are a source of protein, iron and other nutrients. The iron from meat sources is better absorbed by the body than iron from plant-based protein sources. Eating foods rich in vitamin C (such as tomatoes and bell peppers) with plant-based protein sources will help increase the absorption of iron from these foods.

- Protein helps build and repair body tissues
- Iron helps make healthy blood

If your child is a vegetarian or does not like to eat meat such as beef, pork, lamb, goat, chicken, turkey, or fish; offer alternatives such as:

- Eggs
- Peanut or nut butter
- Tofu
- Legumes (beans, lentils, chickpeas, edamame*)
- Nuts and seeds*
- Soy-based meat substitutes

These foods have similar nutrients and will help your child meet their nutritional needs.

**Whole nuts, seeds and edamame may be a choking risk for children under four years old.*

Meat, eggs and plant-based protein foods are in the protein food grouping of Canada's food guide.

Canada's food guide recommends that a quarter of the foods we eat each day should be from the protein food grouping.



- Choose protein foods that come from plants more often.
- Offer a protein food at every meal and some snacks.

Tips to help make meat easier to chew

- Serve tender, juicy meats.
- Cut meat into small ($\frac{1}{2}$ - 1 cm or $\frac{1}{4}$ inch) bite-sized pieces.
- Simmer meats in low-sodium broth for added flavour and moisture.
- Chop, grind or purée meat and add to soups, chili and sauces.

Ideas for serving meat

- Make mini meat patties out of lean ground meat and serve in a small whole grain bun.
- Make tacos using ground or shredded meat and let your child add their own toppings.
- Roll up small pieces of meat in a soft whole grain tortilla or stuff into a whole grain pita.



Ideas for serving eggs, fish, legumes, tofu and nut butter

<p>Eggs*</p> 	<p>Scrambled eggs Roll up scrambled eggs in a soft whole grain tortilla.</p>	<p>Fried egg sandwich Place a fried egg and a slice of low-fat, low-sodium cheese in a whole grain English muffin.</p>	<p>French toast Soak sliced whole grain bread in mixture of egg with a small amount of milk and cinnamon. Cook on stovetop until golden brown. Cut into pieces; serve with unsweetened applesauce or plain yogurt to dip.</p>	<p>Hard-boiled egg Serve warm or cold. Slice a hard cooked egg and put slices on whole grain toast.</p>	<p>Egg salad Make with chopped hard-boiled egg and small amount of plain yogurt. Spread on whole grain bread, bagel, English muffin, tortilla or pita.</p>
<p>Fish*</p> 	<p>Fish melt Mix a can of drained salmon or tuna with a small amount of plain yogurt and grated low-fat, low-sodium cheese. Spread on a half whole grain bagel, English muffin or toast. Broil in the oven 1-2 minutes.</p>	<p>Fish burger Mix a can of drained salmon or tuna with a small amount of plain yogurt. Spread on a whole grain hamburger bun. Top with lettuce and a slice of tomato.</p>	<p>Fish fingers Dip pieces of white fish (e.g. sole, tilapia) in milk, then roll in whole grain bread crumbs (seasonings can be added for more flavour). Place on a baking sheet and bake in the oven at 450° F (230° C) for about 10-12 minutes. Serve with homemade salsa dip.</p>	<p>Fish Cakes Mix together 1 can of drained salmon, ¾ cup mashed potato and one egg yolk. Form mixture into 8 flat cakes. Using 1 Tbsp. of flour, sprinkle each cake with flour and brush with one egg white (that has been beaten). Roll cakes in breadcrumbs and place on greased baking sheet. Bake at 375° F (190° C) for about 15 minutes or until golden brown. Serve with homemade salsa to dip.</p>	
<p>Legumes* (Such as kidney beans, lentils and chickpeas.)</p> 	<p>Legume Sauce Blend, purée or mash cooked or canned legumes. Add to tomato or cheese sauces. Use sauces on whole grain noodles and cooked vegetables or as a dip for whole grain breads.</p>	<p>Hummus Serve hummus as a dip for whole grain pita or vegetables, or spread inside a sandwich.</p>	<p>Add cooked or canned kidney beans, black beans or lentils to homemade or store-bought chili, stews, soups, casseroles or pasta dishes.</p> <p>Edamame** (young, green soybeans) Add shelled edamame to stir fries, soups, casseroles and salads. Or sprinkle boiled or steamed edamame with low-fat, low-sodium Parmesan cheese.</p> <p>Note: Edamame can be found shelled or unshelled in the frozen foods section of the grocery store.</p>		
<p>Tofu*</p> 	<p>Add crumbled firm tofu to soup, pasta sauce, stir fries, stew, scrambled eggs, lasagna or chili.</p>	<p>Tofu smoothie In a blender, mix soft tofu, milk or fortified unsweetened soy beverage and fruit. Blend until smooth.</p>	<p>Breaded tofu cubes Combine ¼ cup whole grain breadcrumbs and salt and pepper on a plate. In a bowl mix 2 Tbsp. milk and 1 egg. Dip cubed pieces of firm tofu in milk mixture and then roll in breadcrumbs. Place on greased baking sheet and bake at 400° F (205° C) for 20-30 minutes. Turn halfway through cooking. Serve with homemade salsa to dip.</p>		
<p>Nut Butter* (Such as peanut, almond or soy)</p>	<p>Banana dog Thinly spread nut butter on a whole grain hot dog bun and top with a banana.</p>	<p>Ants on a log Thinly spread nut butter on celery sticks and top with raisins**.</p>	<p>Banana bites Thinly spread nut butter on a whole grain tortilla and roll up a banana in the tortilla. Cut the roll into round slices.</p>		

*If your child shows signs of allergy to a food, stop offering the food and talk to your health care provider.

**Whole raisins and edamame may be a choking risk for children under four years old.

For nutrition information and to find out if your child (18 months to five years) is a healthy eater using Nutri-eSTEP, go to www.nutritionscreen.ca.

If you have questions about Nutri-eSTEP or about your child's eating, call Telehealth Ontario to talk to a Registered Dietitian at 1-866-797-0000 (TTY: 1-866-797-0007).



Region of Waterloo
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