

## Nutrition

All children require a variety of foods to provide the necessary energy to sustain their high levels of activity. Caregivers must understand the importance of good nutrition as many children receive the majority of their daily nutritional requirements in the Caregiver's home.

Parents and Caregivers should work together to ensure that children are receiving a balanced diet everyday. Posting your menu will assist parents with planning their meals at home.

### Requirements specific to Home Child Care

- Caregivers will plan meals and snacks that are appropriate for the children's ages and developmental levels.
- A menu will be posted for parents to view daily.
- Children who require special food for religious or health reasons will have the special foods provided by the parent. Any food and drinks that come from a parent needs to be labelled with the child's name.
- Children who are on a specialized diet because of food allergies or food restrictions will have clear written instructions that include:
  - foods that are permissible for the child to eat
  - foods that are restricted

### What is a food allergy?

Click [here](#) for an in-depth description of what a food allergy is and some of the most common food allergies in children.



**Children who attend care during meal times should always be offered a seat at the table.**

If you have children in your care during any family meal time – caregivers are required to have the child care children join the meal. Child care children should not be excluded from joining the meal.

Remember you set the menu and the children decide on how much they will eat. What individual children will eat is highly variable. When serving young children keep in mind serving sizes – with new foods offer a smaller portion for them to try.

Infants under the age of 12 months will have a written schedule for food and drink that will be updated regularly by the child's parents.

The parent will provide infant food and drink until the child is able to eat table foods. Any bottles and jars of food need to be labelled with the child's name.



Click [here](#) for infant feeding schedule.

A Caregiver who understands Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating will not have any difficulty meeting these requirements.

Periodically, the Home Child Care program offers workshops or evening meetings to give new ideas for menu planning and up-to-date nutrition information. New menu ideas are always great to have. Providing variety in your menus is important as children's preferences change all the time!

Things to consider when planning meals and snacks:

- offer water consistently throughout the day
- if you want to offer juice, ensure it is 100% juice and limit the quantity
- refrain from offering sugary snacks and candy
- children love soups and stews - a great way to add vegetables!



Children receiving care for six hours or more must be given two snacks in addition to any meals.

All meals, snacks, and beverages provided must meet requirements set out in [Health Canada's Food guide](#). The Child Care Early Years Act specifies the amount of food which must be served to children in care for six hours or more.



## Snacks

Snacks should be served at times that will not interfere with the children's appetite for the main meal.

Morning snacks may be served quite early depending on when the children arrive and whether they have had an early breakfast or not eaten yet.

Afternoon snacks should take into consideration that many children may not eat dinner until 6:00 p.m. or later.

Try to serve a snack at least two hours before the next meal and make foods interesting by:

- serving buffet style so that children can choose between snacks (e.g., three or four raw vegetables or fruits); and
- inviting children to help with the preparation of snacks.

Certain foods that are high in sugar or salt content (e.g., candy, dried fruit, cookies, chips, pretzels, etc.) are not consistent with Canada's Food Guides as they offer little nutritional value and promote tooth decay. Caregivers should avoid or limit such foods to children.

## Things to Consider when Planning Snacks

### 1. Snack Nutritiously

Nutritious snacks are wholesome foods like eggs, fruits, vegetables, breads, cereals, meats or nuts.

### 2. Limit the Number of Snacks Each Day

Offer two small snacks per day. Water should be available at all times throughout the day as well to keep children hydrated and satisfied.

### 3. Change the Snacking Menu Daily

Variety can ensure that your child gets the nutrients he or she needs without too much sugar or fat.

Looking for fresh ideas that meet the nutritional guidelines? Check out these resources:

- [Caring for Kids – Healthy Snacks for Children](#)
- [Paint your Plate with Vegetables & Fruit](#)



## Creating a Positive Meal Time Environment

Consider both the physical and emotional atmosphere that you are creating for meal times.

### Physical Setting

- Make the surroundings cheerful.
- Provide comfortable seating arrangements.
- Use child size dishes, and small tables and chairs or appropriate highchairs and booster seats.
- Have the children wash their hands before the meal is served.
- Let the children participate in the mealtime as much as possible. Children could plan the menu, set the table, serve the food and/or wash the table afterwards.
- Post the menus for parents to see (don't forget to keep menus or document in your log book all food served!).

**Weekly Menu Plan**

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Breakfast							
Snack							
Lunch							
Snack							
Dinner							

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Serve meals at regular meal times. Children eat approximately every two hours. For example,

- 7:00am - 8:30am: breakfast (if they haven't ate at home)
- 9:45am - 10:30am: snack
- 12:00pm – 1:00pm: lunch
- 3:00pm - 3:30pm: snack
- 5:30pm - 7pm: dinner
- 8:00pm: snack before bed

\*please note that meal scheduling should be done according to the hours children are in care – your Consultant can assist you with feeding guidelines.

**Emotional Atmosphere**

Meal times should be a pleasant experience. There may be problems that arise but here are some suggestions on how to handle them to make meal times enjoyable!

- Caregivers should eat with the children. You can set a good example by showing table manners as well as modeling positive interactions with others.
- Avoid conflict over food. Remember you provide healthy options and the children decide how much they will eat.
- Never force a child to finish what is on their plate. Encourage them to try new foods and provide them with small amounts in the beginning.
- Encourage interesting conversation at the table. This is a great opportunity to discuss what happened in the morning and what you want to do in the afternoon.
- Don't rush – be sure to have plenty of time to enjoy your meals together. This is as much of a learning opportunity as play.
- Avoid using sweets as a reward. All foods served should be part of a nutritious diet. Therefore, there is no reason to single it out.
- Children sometimes favour a single food. Be casual and allow children to have time to decide for themselves if they want other foods.
- Offer children a choice of foods (peas or carrots, apple or banana).

## Eating Concerns

### Picky Eaters

Below are some suggestions on how to best approach children who are picky eaters.

[Caring for Kids – When your Child is a Picky Eater](#)

[How to Build a Healthy Toddler](#)

[How to Build a Healthy Preschooler](#)



## Rejection of vegetables

“I don't like the texture or smell of cooked vegetables.”

“Daddy never eats them.”

“I'm bored with having the same one over and over again.”

It doesn't matter whether the vegetables are eaten cooked or raw. Just be sure they are not overcooked. Children often prefer the bright colours and crisp textures of raw vegetables.

Remember children are the world's best imitators. Your likes are quickly noticed - and copied. Sometimes having the child help prepare the vegetables for the meal can help!



## Dawdling, or playing with foods

When a child is playing with their food, they may be trying to tell you that:

- They want to explore the food
- They need time to learn how to use utensils
- They are not hungry, or
- They are too tired to eat

A child needs time to learn to use utensils. If you are a fast eater, take the time to eat slowly with the child. Children learn by touching - give them time to explore food.

## Overeating

Reduce portion sizes. Don't force your child to take "just one more bite" or "clean his plate". Learn to prepare foods without adding extra energy - avoid sauces, breading or frying. Use a few kind words, a hug, a game, a toy, etc., as rewards rather than food.



### Prevent Food Poisoning

Always be mindful of practicing safe food handling. Ensure food, milk cups/bottles are always put away in the fridge when not in use.

For more information, visit the [Region of Waterloo Food Safety webpage](#).