

Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth – An Overview

The *Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth* are designed to help assist Albertans to create an environment which provides healthy food choices and promotes healthy eating habits. These guidelines can be used wherever food is offered to children and youth in childcare facilities, schools and recreation/community centres.

The Food Rating System

The food rating system is a simple way to separate healthy foods from less healthy foods. This rating system puts all foods into three categories, based on specific nutrition criteria. The three categories are: Choose Most Often, Choose Sometimes and Choose Least Often.



Choose Most Often

High nutrient foods

These foods should be **consumed daily**, in appropriate amounts and portion sizes, based on age category. These foods are all recommended as healthy choices in *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*.



Choose Sometimes

Moderate nutrient foods

No more than three servings from the Choose Sometimes category are recommended for consumption per week. While these foods may still provide beneficial nutrients, they tend to be higher in added sugar, unhealthy fat and sodium (salt).



Choose Least Often

Low nutrient foods

Eating these foods is **not recommended**. One serving could be eaten once a week. Foods from this category are very low in nutrients and higher in calories, fat, sugar and salt.

Using the Food Rating System

The food nutrient criteria are based on **one Canada's Food Guide serving**. Be sure to read the Nutrition Facts Label on prepackaged foods and note the serving size, as it may be different than the serving size in the Food Guide.

A food must meet **all** criteria to fit into a specific category. For example:

- Most plain yogurts meet all nutrient criteria per serving for total fat, saturated fat, sugar, protein, sodium (salt) and calcium. This is why it is classified as **Choose Most Often**.
- If additional ingredients are added, the fat and sugar content may be higher. This is why flavoured yogurt is usually classified as **Choose Sometimes**.

Tips for Implementing the Guidelines

- Children and youth, parents, and staff need to understand the food rating categories to be able to select healthy foods.
- For younger children, the rating categories can be simplified to familiar symbols such as “Go”, “Yield” and “Stop”.
- Adults are important role models for children and youth. Be consistent with the healthy eating messages in your facility and at home.
- Use only non-food items for rewarding children.
- Involve children and youth in taste testing and new food/menu item selections.

The information and graphics in this handout are taken from the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth (2010).

Facility Recommendations

Schools:

- **Elementary Schools** – 100% of the foods available for regular consumption should be from the Choose Most Often category.
- **Junior High Schools** – 100% of foods available for regular consumption should be from the Choose Most Often (60%) and Choose Sometimes (40%) categories.
- **High Schools** – 100% of foods available for regular consumption should be from the Choose Most Often (50%) and Choose Sometimes (50%) categories.
- **Multi-Grade Schools** should adhere to the most conservative recommendation.

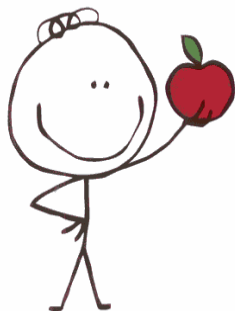
Recreation/Community Centres:

The following foods should always be available:

- Vegetables and fruit (raw or prepared with little to no added fat, sugar or salt)
- Whole grain foods
- Water, milk and 100% vegetable or fruit juice
- Lean meat and poultry products

Childcare Facilities:

- 100% of foods available for regular consumption should be from the Choose Most Often category.
- Provide an appropriate time and space to eat.
- Individual portion sizes and the number of servings provided should be consistent with Canada's Food Guide.



Beverage Recommendations

- Promote the consumption of water to quench thirst and provide adequate hydration. Provide water fountains that are clean, accessible and in good working condition.
- Provide access to refrigerated milk, fortified soy beverages and 100% vegetable and fruit juices.
- Avoid beverages such as pop, iced tea, sports drinks, diet beverages, fruit punches, fruit drinks and fruit 'ades' (such as lemonade).
- Avoid provision of caffeinated beverages (such as pop, coffee and tea) to children and youth.

Additional Resources that complement the *Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth*:

From Alberta Health and Wellness:

<http://www.healthyalberta.ca/AboutHealthyU/280.htm>

- *Healthy Eating and Active Living For your 1 to 5 year old*
- *Healthy Eating and Active Living For your 6 to 12 year old*
- *Healthy Eating and Active Living For Ages 13 to 18 years*
- *Food Guide Serving Sizes for 1 to 5 years*
- *Food Guide Serving Sizes for 6 to 12 Years*
- *Food Guide Serving Sizes for 13 to 18 Years*
- *Portion Size Kit Lunch Bag*

From Alberta Health Services:

<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca>

- *Portion Size Activities for the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth Portion Size Kit*
- *Single Serving Packaged Food List*
- *Steps to a Healthy School Environment: School Nutrition Handbook*
- *Snack Shack – A Guide to Implementing a Healthy Snack Canteen in Schools*