



Child Care Menu Planning

Practical Guide

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SECTION 1: Introduction

Child Care Menu Planning was created to help child care providers ensure all meals, snacks, and beverages served in child care settings meet healthy eating recommendations for children one year of age or older. Parents and guardians should be consulted on feeding directions for children under one year of age.

This resource is:

- Based on the guidance of Canada's food guide (2019) and Nutrition for Healthy Term Infants (2014)
- Aligns with requirements set out by the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 (Section 42 of Ontario Regulation 137/15)
- Referenced in the Ministry of Education's Child Care Centre and Home Child Care Licensing Manuals

Based on ODPH capacity, this resource will be reviewed and updated when the foundational documents above are revised.

This resource does not include all requirements related to nutrition, such as posting of menus and bagged lunches. Child care providers should refer to Ontario's Ministry of Education Child Care Centre Licensing Manuals for additional requirements related to nutrition.

For information on food safety requirements and safe food handler certification, consult your local public health unit.



SECTION 2: Menu Planning

Feeding children in child care settings can be challenging and requires planning. There are multiple considerations, such as understanding and providing the appropriate amounts and types of foods, being aware of cultural diversity, allergies and intolerances, and balancing food costs. Furthermore, some foods may have limited availability or can be challenging to source for child care settings, particularly in rural or northern regions.

Menu planning supports:

- Providing nutritionally balanced meals and snacks from all food groupings in Canada's food guide:
 - Vegetables and Fruits
 - Whole Grain Foods
 - Protein Foods
- Offering a variety of foods, which helps children become familiar with different foods
- Organizing time to plan, purchase and prepare meals
- Managing food costs by minimizing waste

Snack Pattern

The snack pattern below should be offered daily, in any order.

Snack A:

- 1 choice from Vegetables and Fruits
- 1 choice from Protein Foods

Snack B:

- 1 choice from Vegetables and Fruits
- 1 choice from Whole Grain Foods





Meal Pattern

Each meal includes foods from all three food groupings as well as milk to drink.

Meals should include at least:

- 2 choices from Vegetables and Fruits
- 1 choice from Whole Grain Foods
- 1 choice from iron-rich Protein Foods
- Milk

Refer to Appendix A – Sample Menu to help create a menu that follows the Snack and Meal Pattern.



Beverages

- Water should always be available to drink.
- Serve homogenized (3.25% M.F.) milk to children 9 – 24 months of age. 1% or 2% milk can be offered to children older than 24 months. Offering milk at mealtime supports children's vitamin D intake.
- Offer fortified soy beverages (unsweetened) to children 2 years and older if an alternative to milk is required. Other plant-based beverages do not have adequate fat, protein, calcium, and vitamin D.
- Do not serve children more than 250 mL of milk or fortified soy beverage (unsweetened) at a meal or snack. These beverages can fill up small tummies and affect food intake.
- Do not serve fruit juice and sugar-sweetened beverages. These beverages increase risk of cavities and are low in nutrients.





Adding Variety to the Menu

Increase the variety of foods offered and help children learn about new foods by offering:

- A 4 to 6-week menu cycle
- A variety of different foods from Canada's food guide
- A variety of colours, shapes, temperatures, and textures
- At least one dark green vegetable daily
- At least one meal based on plant-based proteins weekly
- One egg or fish-based meal weekly
- New foods along with familiar foods
- Dishes that reflect various cultures and traditions

Timing of Meals and Snacks

Maintaining a consistent schedule of meal and snack times has many benefits. Regular meals and snacks help to meet nutritional needs of young children, encourages children to come to meals and snacks ready to eat, and establishes eating routines early in life.

When scheduling meals and snacks:

- Set regular meal and snack times
- Provide meals or snacks every 2 to 3 hours
- Serve 1 meal and at least 2 snacks to children in attendance for 6 hours or more
- Offer meals and snacks that reflect the varying lengths of time children attend child care





Amounts to Serve Young Children

Children's appetites vary from meal to meal and from day to day. Children need different amounts of food depending on age, activity level, stage of growth, appetite and illness or fatigue. Offering family-style meals allows toddlers and preschoolers to select their own amount by serving themselves with assistance from supervising adults. Encourage children to start with a small amount of food and ask for more if they are still hungry.

Child care providers should respect the children's appetites. It is the child care provider's role to recognize and respond to the child's hunger and fullness cues in an appropriate manner:

- The child care provider decides when, where, and what food is offered
- The child decides which foods to eat from the foods offered, and how much to eat

Refer to **Appendix B – Amounts to Serve Young Children** for ideas of the range of amounts eaten by a toddler or preschooler at a meal or snack and to determine how much food to prepare.

Special Considerations

- Schedule morning snacks to consider children that may arrive without having had breakfast.
- Serve afternoon snacks to accommodate children that may not eat dinner until hours after leaving child care.
- Include dinner and an evening snack in menus of child care settings that offer extended or overnight hours.





SECTION 3: Food and Beverage Choice Tables

The following food and beverage choices are divided into tables based on Canada's food guide food groupings: **Vegetables and Fruits**, **Whole Grain Foods** and **Protein Foods**.

- Food choices are categorized as **Serve** or **Do Not Serve** in the tables below.
- Whole grain foods include an additional **Limit** category.
- Check the % Daily Value (DV) on the nutrition facts table when choosing products as some nutrition recommendations are based on % DV.
- There is also a list of **Minor Ingredients**, which are condiment-type foods that are eaten in small amounts which do not contribute to the nutrient needs of a child.

Understanding Serve, Limit and Do Not Serve

Serve ✓

Foods and beverages in this category:

- Have lower amounts of added sugar, salt, and saturated fat
- Are good sources of nutrients such as fibre, calcium, and iron
- Are minimally processed
- Can be served at all meals and snacks
- Align with recommendations in Canada's food guide

Limit ⦿

Grain products are the only food grouping with an additional **Limit** category and:

- Have lower amounts of added sugar, salt, and saturated fat
- May be served to be culturally inclusive (refer to Section 4 **Allergies and other Special Considerations**)
- May be served when there is limited availability of **Serve** foods

| Nutrition Facts Valeur nutritive | |
|---|---|
| Per 1/2 cup (30 g) pour 1/2 tasse (30 g) | |
| Calories 140 | % Daily Value* % valeur quotidienne* |
| Fat / Lipides 7 g | 10 % |
| Saturated / saturés 2.0 g | |
| + Trans / trans 0 g | |
| Carbohydrate / Glucides 19 g | |
| Fibre / Fibres 1 g | 4 % |
| Sugars / Sucres 2 g | 2 % |
| Protein / Protéines 2 g | |
| Cholesterol / Cholestérol 0 mg | 0 % |
| Sodium 290 mg | 13 % |
| Potassium 50 mg | 1 % |
| Calcium 40 mg | 3 % |
| Iron / Fer 1 mg | 6 % |
| *5% or less is a little, 15% or more is a lot *5 % ou moins c'est peu, 15 % ou plus c'est beaucoup | |



Important: All grain products in the Limit category are to be served no more than 3 times per week, for example: 1 meal with white rice, 1 snack with baguette, 1 meal with couscous.



Do Not Serve ❌

Foods and beverages in this category are:



- Higher in added sugar, salt, and saturated fat
- Not good sources of nutrients such as fibre, calcium, and iron
- Highly processed
- Not aligned with recommendations in Canada's food guide
- Not safe to consume (e.g., raw fish, sprouts, or unpasteurized milk products)

Legend:

- 🚫 Fish that contain higher levels of mercury.
Refer to **A Guide to Eating Fish** for more information.
- 0-4 🚫 Foods that are **choking hazards**.
Do not serve these foods to children under four years of age.
- 🚫 Foods that may contain bacteria which can cause **food poisoning**.



Vegetables and Fruits

| | Serve | Do Not Serve |
|---|---|---|
| Vegetables fresh, frozen or canned | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Dark green vegetables daily ✓ Orange vegetables a few times a week ✓ Frozen vegetables with no added salt or sauce ✓ Canned vegetables, drained and rinsed ✓ Canned tomatoes, tomato-based sauces, soup and salsas with sodium less than or equal to 10% DV ✓ Baked, boiled, steamed or stir-fried vegetables with no added salt | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Vegetable juice, including 100% juice ✗ Packaged potato products (e.g., French fries, hash browns, instant potatoes) ✗ Pre-packaged vegetables in sauce ✗ Battered or deep-fried vegetables ✗ Vegetable chips/straws/sticks (e.g., potato, carrot) ✗ Canned soup, canned tomatoes, tomato-based sauces and salsa with sodium more than 10% DV ✗ Raw sprouts (e.g., alfalfa sprouts, bean sprouts, clover, radish and mung beans)  ✗ Deli counter salads  |



Examples of Dark Green Vegetables:



- Asparagus
- Green beans
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Green peppers
- Fiddleheads
- Leafy greens: bok choy, kale, mixed greens, romaine, spinach, collards, Swiss chard
- Chinese broccoli, rapini
- Leeks
- Okra
- Peas, snow peas
- Seaweed: kelp, dulse, wakame

Vegetables and Fruits - Continued

| | Serve | Do Not Serve |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Fruits fresh, frozen or canned | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Frozen fruits with no added sugar ✓ Unsweetened applesauce or fruit purées ✓ Canned fruit in juice, drained ✓ Canned fruit in syrup, drained | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Fruit juice, including 100% juice ✗ Fruit flavoured drinks (e.g., fruit beverages, punches, cocktails) ✗ Unpasteurized juice or cider ✗ Dried fruit and fruit leathers (unless used in baking or as part of recipe) ✗ Sweetened applesauce or fruit purées ✗ Canned fruit containing artificial sweeteners (labeled as ‘canned in water’) ✗ Battered or deep-fried fruits ✗ Jellyed desserts that contain fruit ✗ Fruit flavoured candies (e.g., gummies, fruit rolls) including those made with juice ✗ Fruit chips (e.g., banana, plantain) |




Protein Foods





| Calcium-rich | Serve | Do Not Serve |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| Milk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Homogenized (3.25% M.F.) milk to children 9 – 24 months of age ✓ 1% or 2% milk can be offered to children older than 24 months ✓ In baking and cooking: cow milk, cow milk powder, canned evaporated milk, or buttermilk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Flavoured milk (e.g., chocolate milk, strawberry milk, eggnog) ✗ Hot chocolate ✗ Milkshakes ✗ Table cream, coffee cream, whipping cream, non-dairy whipped cream toppings ✗ Unpasteurized milk (e.g., raw milk)  |
| Plant-based beverages | <p>For children over 24-months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Unsweetened/unflavoured, fortified soy beverage ✓ Unsweetened/unflavoured fortified non-soy plant-based beverages fortified with calcium and vitamin D with at least 6 grams of protein per 250 ml | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Unfortified plant-based beverages with less than 6 grams of protein per 250 ml ✗ Flavoured/sweetened plant-based beverages <p>Note: Most unsweetened plant-based beverages other than fortified soy beverage do not meet protein criteria (e.g., oat, rice, almond).</p> |
| Cheese | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Hard and soft, non-processed cheese made from pasteurized milk (e.g., cheddar, mozzarella, parmesan, Monterey Jack, Havarti, Gouda, Swiss, paneer, feta, ricotta, cottage cheese, cheese strings, and cheese curds) <p>Note: refer to Minor Ingredients for information on cream cheese</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Processed cheese slices ✗ Fat-free cheese ✗ Cheese made from unpasteurized milk  ✗ Soft cheese made from unpasteurized milk (e.g., brie, camembert, and blue-veined cheese like Roquefort, and Gorgonzola) ✗ Breaded or fried cheese (sticks) |






Good to Know: Cream cheese is a fat. It is not a source of protein or calcium.

Protein Foods - Continued

| Calcium-rich | Serve | Do Not Serve |
|---------------|---|---|
| Yogurt | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Yogurt, soy yogurt and kefir products with sugar less than or equal to 10% DV (greater than 2% M.F. for children up to 24-months) ✓ Homemade smoothies or popsicles made with milk/yogurt and fruit (including frozen) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Yogurt with added candy/chocolate or artificial sweeteners ✗ Frozen yogurt ✗ Flavoured drinkable yogurt ✗ Yogurt made from unpasteurized milk  ✗ Homemade smoothies made with fruit juice ✗ Fat-free yogurt is not recommended for any children |

| Iron-rich | Serve | Do Not Serve |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Eggs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Eggs purchased from an approved source (or 'graded' eggs) ✓ Plain pasteurized liquid whole egg or egg whites | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Eggs purchased from an unapproved source  ✗ Seasoned or flavoured liquid egg product ✗ Raw or lightly cooked eggs and egg dishes that contain undercooked eggs (e.g., mousse, dressings, and sauces made on-site)  |
| Nuts, seeds, and legumes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Smooth nut, seed and legume spreads (including peanut, almond, walnut, sesame, sunflower, pea, and soy spreads) ✓ Finely chopped nuts and seeds (dry roasted or unroasted, with no added salt, sugar, oil), no larger than sesame seeds | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Chunky peanut or nut butter  ✗ Nut, legume, or seed butters that have added flavourings (e.g., chocolate, hazelnut, honey, berry) ✗ Whole/chopped nuts or seeds  0-4 ✗ Salted or coated nuts or seeds |

Protein Foods - Continued

| Iron-rich | Serve | Do Not Serve |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Tofu, beans and lentils | <p>✓ Dried lentils, chickpeas, split peas and beans</p> <p>For the following foods, choose items with sodium less than or equal to 10% DV</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hummus or other bean dips • Lentil, chickpea, and other plant-based pastas • Canned beans, lentils, chickpeas, drained and rinsed • Tofu, tempeh, textured vegetable protein and other soy-based products • Simulated meat strips and products • Plant-based burgers, and meatballs • Baked beans in tomato sauce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Canned baked beans with pork, molasses, or maple syrup ✗ Store-bought breaded and fried meat alternatives ✗ Simulated meat strips and products with sodium greater than 10% DV ✗ Plant-based hot dogs, sausages, bacon, and bacon bits ✗ Frozen and prepared tacos/burritos ✗ Tofu dessert with sugar greater than 10% DV ✗ Roasted, whole chickpeas 0-4 |
| Fish | <p>✓ Fresh, frozen, or canned fish with sodium less than or equal to 10% DV, drained and rinsed, and low in mercury (e.g., cod, sole, haddock, salmon, tilapia, trout, canned light tuna, whitefish, walleye/pickrel)</p> <p>Refer to your local public health unit for more information if planning to serve Traditionally harvested foods.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Store-bought breaded or battered fried fish ✗ Fresh, frozen or canned fish high in mercury  (e.g., canned albacore tuna) ✗ Cold smoked fish  ✗ Raw fish  ✗ Fish with bones 0-4 ✗ Cured fish |

Protein Foods - Continued

| Iron-rich | Serve | Do Not Serve |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Meat and poultry | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Fresh, frozen, ground or pre-cooked with sodium less than or equal to 10% DV <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lean cuts of beef, pork loin • Traditional meats* such as venison, bison, elk, caribou, moose, duck, goose, rabbit, beaver • Ground meat / burger patties or meatballs • Skinless chicken and turkey ✓ Canned chicken/turkey with sodium less than or equal to 10% DV, drained <p>* Refer to your local public health unit for more information if planning to serve Traditionally harvested foods.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Prepared/cured meats (e.g., wieners/hot dogs, sausages, pepperoni sticks) 0-4 ✗ Deli meats (e.g., bologna, salami, summer sausage, deli roast beef/turkey/chicken) ✗ Store-bought breaded and fried meats ✗ Ham ✗ Side bacon, back bacon, turkey/chicken bacon, imitation bacon bits ✗ Meat pies ✗ Raw or undercooked meat or poultry ✗ Ground meat/burger patties or meatballs with sodium greater than 10% DV ✗ Wings, ribs, rotisserie-style chicken (store-bought) |

Whole Grain Foods

Canada's food guide encourages whole grain to be chosen most often and to choose foods that have little to no added sugars, sodium and saturated fat.

| | Should I serve this grain product? | | |
|---------------------------------|--|---|--|
| | Serve if: | Limit to 3 times total per week if: | Do not serve if: |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Sugar is less than or equal to 10% DV ✓ Product does not contain any Do Not Serve foods or ingredients ✓ The first ingredient IS whole grain, whole wheat or bran | <p>The grain product meets the Serve criteria EXCEPT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The first ingredient IS NOT whole grain, whole wheat or bran | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Sugar is greater than 10% DV OR ✗ Product contains any Do Not Serve foods or ingredients |
| Bread and flour products | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Whole grain or whole wheat breads, buns, bagels, English muffins, pitas, tortillas, flatbread, roti, naan, Bannock, chapatti, challah ✓ Whole grain or whole wheat pancakes or waffles ✓ Whole grain or whole wheat pizza crust or dough | <p>Some:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Enriched wheat (white) flour bread, buns, bagels, English muffins, raisin bread and raisin bagels, pitas, tortillas, flatbread, roti, naan, Bannock, chapatti, challah ○ Enriched wheat (white) flour pancakes and waffles ○ Enriched wheat (white) flour pizza crust or dough, including frozen/purchased pizza | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Sugar-coated breads ✗ Pancakes and waffles with chocolate chips |



Good to Know: When looking for whole wheat flour products, read ingredient lists carefully. Look for **whole wheat flour**. Wheat flour and white (enriched) flour are not whole wheat.

Whole Grain Foods - Continued

| | Serve: | Limit to 3 times total: | Do not serve: |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Cereals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Oatmeal (e.g., instant, quick cooking or large flake) ✓ Whole grain or whole wheat cereals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Some cereals. <p>Refer to yellow Limit information above.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Cereal with chocolate, candies, marshmallows or sugar-coated pieces ✗ Sweetened, flavoured oatmeal, instant packages |
| Baked goods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Baked goods made with whole grain or whole wheat flour (e.g., muffins, loaves, cookies, and scones) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Some baked goods made with enriched wheat (white) flour (e.g., muffins, loaves, cookies, and scones). <p>Refer to yellow Limit information above.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Toaster pastries, pastries, croissants ✗ Baked goods with chocolate, caramel, candy or sugar-glazed ✗ Cakes, cupcakes, donuts, pies ✗ Some cookies and squares ✗ Pie crusts made from butter, lard or shortening |
| Grain-based snacks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Whole grain granola or cereal-type bars ✓ Whole grain or whole wheat crackers and breadsticks ✓ Brown rice cakes, unflavoured and unsweetened | <p>Some:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Granola or cereal-type granola bars ○ Crackers made with enriched (white) wheat flour ○ Unflavoured and unsweetened rice cakes <p>Refer to yellow Limit information above.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Chocolate or yogurt dipped granola or cereal-type bars or those containing marshmallows, candy or chocolate pieces ✗ Any type of popcorn 0-4 ✗ Pretzels, tortilla and pita chips, and chip-like snack foods (including seasoned mini-rice cakes, nachos) ✗ Rice cakes, flavoured/sweetened |
| Noodles, rice and other grains | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Whole grains (e.g., quinoa, oats, bulgur, buckwheat, barley, farro, millet) ✓ Brown rice, wild rice ✓ Whole grain or whole wheat pasta, noodles, soba, udon, vermicelli, couscous ✓ Whole grain polenta and other cornmeal-based products | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Plain white rice (converted, parboiled, instant), rice noodles ○ Enriched white pasta ○ Polenta and some cornmeal-based products <p>Refer to yellow Limit information above.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Flavoured, pre-packaged grains, rice and pasta (e.g., garlic, herb, chicken, vegetable-flavoured rice and pasta, and macaroni and cheese) ✗ Instant noodle soup |



Miscellaneous Items Not to be Served

These foods and beverages contain few or no essential nutrients, and/or contain high amounts of added sugar, salt, or saturated fats.

Do not serve:

- ✗ Food and beverages containing caffeine (e.g., coffee, tea, iced tea)
- ✗ Diet and regular pop
- ✗ Energy drinks or sports drinks
- ✗ Fruit flavoured drinks (e.g., fruit beverages, punches, cocktails)
- ✗ Flavoured or vitamin water
- ✗ Protein powder, protein or meal replacement drinks and bars (except when indicated by a parent/caregiver for medical reasons)
- ✗ Candy (including yogurt covered, gummy-type, licorice, fruit flavoured, mints) 0-4
- ✗ Cough drops 0-4
- ✗ Gum 0-4
- ✗ Chocolate, chocolate bars
- ✗ Marshmallows 0-4
- ✗ Jellied type desserts
- ✗ Frozen treats (e.g., ice cream, freezie-type, popsicles, slushies, frozen juice snacks)
- ✗ Foods and beverages with sugar substitutes or sweeteners
- ✗ Instant and pre-packaged puddings
- ✗ Honey, and foods containing honey to children under one year of age



Minor Ingredients

The following items can be used in small amounts (1 tsp to 1 tbsp) and served on the side, when necessary, or used in the preparation of mixed dishes.

- Condiments (e.g., ketchup, relish, mustard)
- Gravies, sauces
- Dips (e.g., salad dressings, sour cream, baba ghanoush, spinach dip)
- Fats (e.g., butter, margarine, Traditional fats [whale, seal, goose, duck, etc.], cream cheese, mayonnaise, oil [canola, olive, safflower, soybean, sunflower])
- Toppings and extras (e.g., coconut, parmesan cheese, sliced olives, chopped pickles)
- Honey (for children over 12 months of age), jam, jelly, marmalade, fruit butter, or syrup

Choking Hazards

You can make some foods safer for children under four years of age by:

- Finely chopping foods with fibrous or stringy textures (e.g., celery, pineapple)
- Chopping nuts and seeds to be no larger than sesame seeds
- Grating, thinly slicing, or cooking raw vegetables or hard fruit
- Spreading nut or seed butters thinly on crackers or toast (not soft bread)
- Cutting round vegetables and fruits into quarters or lengthwise (e.g., cherry tomatoes or grapes)
- Serving boneless fish or removing bones from fish before serving



SECTION 4: Allergies and Other Special Considerations

Faith-Based Diets

Many religions include guidance on what is appropriate to eat in order to demonstrate faith. Child care menu planners should make every effort to offer foods and beverages that are consistent with a child's faith, while still meeting the Child Care Menu Planning Guidelines.

Culturally Appropriate Diets

A child's ethnic and cultural background may have a significant impact on their food choices and eating practices. Menu planners should make every effort to reflect the diversity of the child care community with its food and beverage choices, while still meeting the Guidelines.

Original Indigenous Foods and Gifts from Turtle Island

Traditional food has been central to the livelihoods, health, and culture of Indigenous Peoples for time immemorial. Traditional food access, use and Indigenous Food Sovereignty has diminished significantly due to historical and ongoing colonial impacts. Factors include: forced relocation of Indigenous Peoples, decreased access to land, environmental contaminants, climate change, depletion of wild game/fishing, restrictions on and prohibitive costs of hunting, as well as other various socio-economic factors.

Child care settings have a unique opportunity to support connections between children and the Traditional food system. Menu planners should make every effort to incorporate Traditional foods, while still meeting these menu planning recommendations. If looking for information regarding offering Traditional foods, refer to [Traditional Foods Guide](#) or consider connecting with local Indigenous organizations.



Plant-Based and Vegetarian Diets

Children following a plant-based or **vegetarian diet** can be offered fortified soy beverages and a variety of plant-based protein foods such as beans, lentils, and tofu.

If a child care provider offers a vegan menu then menu planners should consult with a registered dietitian. There is a risk of nutrient deficiencies for young children on a vegan diet.

To be inclusive, plant-based substitutions should resemble the foods offered to other children.

Examples:

Moroccan chicken → Moroccan chickpeas

Baked fish → Grilled or baked tofu

Pork tenderloin with apple sauce → Tempeh with apple sauce

Beef tacos → Black bean tacos

Chicken Curry → Lentil curry

Scrambled eggs → Scrambled soft tofu

Pasta sauce with meat → Pasta sauce with lentils

Meatball → Falafel

Medically Directed and Individualized Diets

Particular attention is required when providing food to infants and young children with medical conditions or individualized diet plans. Parents and caregivers are the best source of information for their child's specific needs.



Food Allergies and Intolerances

Allergies and intolerances should be treated with the same level of precaution. Always speak to a child's parent or caregiver to determine what allergen or ingredient to look for on an ingredient list. Parents may suggest alternative ingredients or foods to offer to replace an allergen or ingredient.

- Review ingredient lists or “contains” statement to identify possible allergens and ingredients to be avoided.
- The following allergens must always be declared on food product packaging: eggs, milk, peanuts, seafood, sesame seeds, soy, tree nuts, wheat, mustard, and added sulphites.
- Warnings such as “may contain” are voluntary statements and are not regulated. Products with these warnings may have enough of an allergen to cause an allergic reaction.
- Contact the company to discuss a specific ingredient if you are uncertain about a possible allergen.
- To be inclusive, substitutions due to allergies should resemble, as much as possible, the foods offered to the other children.

Label Reading Example

The example to the right contains food allergens being declared in the ingredient list as well as a “may contain” precautionary statement.

- This product should not be provided to children with wheat, milk, egg allergies, soy and/or sesame allergies.
- Parents should be consulted before serving this product to children with peanut or tree nut allergies.

Refer to **Section 5** for additional resources about allergies and other special diet considerations.

Ingredients:

Wheat flour, sugar, modified palm oils, cocoa, milk ingredients, vegetable oil, dried whole eggs, soy lecithin, simulated flavours, salt, polyglycerol polyricinoleic acid, sesame flour.

Contains:

wheat, milk, egg, soy and sesame ingredients.

May contain:

peanuts and tree nuts.

SECTION 5: Resources and Helpful Links

Refer to the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH) [Child Care Resources](#) for additional menu planning resources.

Feeding Young Children

[Canada's food guide](#) (Health Canada)

[Food Safety Information for Children](#) (Health Canada)

[Infant Nutrition](#) (Health Canada)

[Introducing Solid Foods to Your Baby: Safety Tips](#) (Dietitians of Canada)

Allergies and Other Special Considerations

[A Guide to Eating Fish](#) (Toronto Public Health)

[Anaphylaxis in Child Care Settings – Training](#) (Allergy Aware.ca)

[Anaphylaxis in Schools & Other Settings](#) (Food Allergy Canada)

[Common Food Allergen Substitutions for Child Care Settings](#) (Ontario Dietitians in Public Health)

[Food Allergy Canada - Childcare](#)

[Traditional Foods Guide](#) (National Indigenous Diabetes Association)

[Understanding Halal Foods](#) (Toronto Public Health)

[What You Need to Know to Raise a Healthy Vegetarian Child](#) (Unlock Food.ca)

Nutrition Labelling

[How to use food labels to make healthier choices](#) (Health Canada)

Child Care Legislation and Guidance

[Ontario Regulation 137/15](#) (Government of Ontario, Ministry of Education)

[Home Child Care Licensing Manual](#) (Government of Ontario, Ministry of Education)

[Child Care Centre Licensing Manual](#) (Government of Ontario, Ministry of Education)



Good to Know: Contact [Health811](#) to consult with a registered dietitian for information on a variety of topics, including meal planning tips and recipes.





















APPENDICES


APPENDIX A – Sample Menu

APPENDIX B – Amounts to Serve Young Children



APPENDIX A – Sample Menu

| Food Choice | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--|--|---|---|--|---|
| Snack – Include vegetable & fruit choice and at least one choice of protein (Snack A) or whole grain (Snack B) | | | | | |
| Vegetables and Fruits | Diced melon (watermelon, or cantaloupe, or honeydew) | Apple slices | Cucumbers, red peppers | Berries, strawberries, blueberries (fresh or frozen) | Banana |
| Whole Grains | Whole wheat carrot muffin | Whole wheat bagel slices | | Oatmeal or whole grain cereal | Whole wheat pumpkin loaf |
| Protein | | Yogurt or nut spread | Cottage cheese | Milk | |
| Meal/Lunch – include choices from all food groupings | | | | | |
| Entrée Name |  Baked vegetable frittata (crustless quiche) |  Vegetable Chana Masala (chickpea curry) | Beef Bolognese  Vegetarian Option: Lentil Bolognese |  Three Sisters Soup |  Fish Tacos  Vegetarian Option: Black Bean Tacos |
| Vegetables and Fruits (2 choices) |  Mixed greens salad  Broccoli |  Green beans Cauliflower |  Broccoli (fresh or frozen) |  Spinach salad Corn Squash | Pico de Gallo; Shredded  Romaine / Carrots/Red Cabbage |
| | Mandarin oranges (fresh or canned) | Kiwi | Pear slices (fresh or canned) | Peaches/Apricots (fresh or canned) | Fruit salad |
| Whole Grains | Whole grain roll | Quinoa | Whole grain pasta | Bannock or Roti | Whole grain tortillas |
| Iron-rich Protein |  Eggs |  Chickpeas | Beef/  Lentils |  Kidney beans |  Fish /  Black beans |
| Milk | Milk | Milk | Milk | Milk | Milk |

| Food Choice | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--|---------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Snack – include vegetable & fruit choice and at least one choice of protein (Snack A) or whole grain (Snack B) | | | | | |
| Vegetables and Fruits | Zucchini spears, grape tomatoes | Salsa – tomato, strawberry or mango | Peaches, fresh, frozen or canned | Coloured pepper strips ( green , red, yellow, orange) | Cucumber and carrot sticks |
| Whole Grains | Whole grain naan | Whole wheat mini pitas or whole wheat pitas cut in triangles | Oatmeal muffin | Whole grain bread | Granola |
| Protein | Bean dip | Cheese cubes | | Tzatziki | Yogurt |

 **Dark green vegetable** daily

 **Fish or egg entrée** at least 1x/week

 **Plant-based entrée** at least 1x/week

Refer to the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH) [Child Care Resources](#) for additional sample menus.

APPENDIX B – Amounts to Serve Young Children

These charts will give you an idea of the range of amounts eaten by a toddler or preschooler at a meal or snack and can be used to determine how much food to prepare.

Regularly monitor the amounts children are eating and food waste to adjust the amount of food to prepare. It is important to make sure that there is enough food so that children's appetites are satisfied.

| Imperial Measurement | Vegetables and Fruits | Metric Measurement |
|----------------------|--|--------------------|
| ¼ - 1 | whole fresh fruit | ¼ - 1 |
| 2 tbsp - ½ cup | fresh, frozen, or pureed, canned vegetables or fruit | 30 – 125 mL |
| ¼ - 1 cup | leafy vegetables, raw | 60 – 250 mL |

| Imperial Measurement | Whole Grains | Metric Measurement |
|----------------------|---|--------------------|
| ¼ - 1 slice | bread | 7 – 35 g |
| ⅛ - ½ | bagel, small pita, tortilla, bun, muffin or English muffin | 9 – 35 g |
| ¼ - 1 cup | cold cereal | 7 – 30 g |
| ¼ - ¾ cup | hot cereal | 60 – 175 mL |
| ¼ - ½ cup | pasta, rice, bulgur, couscous, quinoa, barley, or other grain, cooked | 60 – 125 mL |
| | crackers | 7 - 30 g |

| Imperial Measurement | Protein Foods | Metric Measurement |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Iron-rich | | |
| ½ – 2 ½ oz | meat, poultry or fish, cooked | 15 – 75 g |
| 1 tsp – 2 tbsp | peanut or nut butter, soy butter | 5 – 30 mL |
| 3 tbsp - ¾ cup | hummus or bean spreads | 45 – 175 mL |
| ½ – 2 | eggs | ½ - 2 |
| 3 tbsp - ¾ cup | cooked legumes (e.g., beans, lentils) | 45 – 175 mL |
| 3 tbsp - ¾ cup | tofu | 45 – 175 mL |
| Calcium-rich | | |
| ¼ - 1 cup | cow's milk or fortified soy beverage | 60 – 250 mL |
| ¼ - ¾ cup | yogurt | 60 – 175 mL |
| ½ - 1 ½ oz | cheese, block | 15 – 50 g |
| 2 tbsp – ½ cup | cottage cheese | 30 – 125 mL |

Amounts to Serve Young Children was adapted with the permission of Ottawa Public Health.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guidance document was written by members of the Child Care Working Group (CCWG), a working group of the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH). ODPH is the official voice of public health nutrition professionals in Ontario and represents registered dietitians working in public health units across the province.

For more information visit our website at odph.ca/child-care-resources or contact us at odph.ca/contact-us.

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