

# A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD

Every child and adult has their own relationship with food. This looks different for everyone and can change, especially as children grow and develop.

Parents, caregivers, guardians, and other adults play an important role in helping children maintain a positive relationship with food.



## Some practical tips include:

- Introduce new foods often, with curiosity and excitement. Explore foods with different 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 following [Canada's Food Guide](#) and by avoiding diet talk
- Respond to your internal hunger cues, and encourage children to do the same
- Describe food using your senses (colour, texture, taste, smell), 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 for eating, conversation, and connection with family members

For additional nutrition information and resources visit [york.ca/nutrition](http://york.ca/nutrition) or [unlockfood.ca](http://unlockfood.ca).

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# NUTRITION FOR GROWING MINDS

Did you know what your child eats may impact their mood and mental health?

Nutrients from the foods we eat help build, repair and maintain brain health. Research also shows what we eat may impact our mood. This is because there is a link between the gut and brain, called the gut-brain axis. The gut is involved in producing chemical messengers, such as serotonin, which plays a key role in mood. What we eat, and how we eat, can greatly affect the production of these chemical messengers.

Following [Canada's Food Guide](#) and eating a variety of nutritious foods each day can help support gut, mood and brain health. It can also help students be better prepared to learn. 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.

The following foods contribute to a healthy pattern of eating:

- Fruit and vegetables, particularly leafy greens
- Whole grain foods such as whole oats, quinoa and brown or wild rice
- Unsweetened, lower fat milk and unsweetened fortified soy beverages
- Fermented foods such as yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, tempeh, and kimchi
- Plant-based proteins such as beans, legumes, nuts, and seeds. Try our quick [5-minute Hummus](#) for a wonderful snack!
- Fatty fish such as salmon, trout and mackerel
- Lean meats and poultry



Remember, it's not just about what you eat, it's also about **how** you eat! Cooking and sharing meals with family and friends can foster stronger relationships and help kids and adults connect. Slow down at mealtime —take time to sit, relax, and enjoy your meals.

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# MORE FRUITS AND VEGGIES, PLEASE!

Are you struggling to understand how to help your child eat more vegetables and fruit? [Canada's Food Guide](#) emphasizes vegetables and fruit, and for good reason! Vegetables and fruit provide a variety of nutrients that are important for growth, development, digestive health, disease prevention and much more!

## Here are some tips to help your child eat more vegetables and fruits:

- Include vegetables and fruits with all meals and snacks. For example, at breakfast try adding slices of banana or berries to cereal or yogurt
- Include vegetables and fruit in lunch bags daily
- Role model by eating lots of vegetables and fruits yourself and talking about how delicious they are!
- Visit a farmer's market, farm, grocery store, or grow a garden as an opportunity to learn and explore vegetables and fruit
- Get them involved in meal planning and preparing meals that include vegetables and fruit. Children are more likely to eat foods when they are involved in planning and preparing them. It also teaches them important life skills!
- Promote variety by trying different ways of preparing vegetables and fruit, and by including various colours, textures and shapes. Fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables and fruits can all be great options
- Keep washed fruit and vegetables that are ready-to-eat on hand
- Offer a snack after school that includes vegetables or fruit; try serving fresh fruit slices with cheese or yogurt
- Check out these recipes: [Bagel Crunch \(cookspiration.com\)](#) or [Banana Yogurt Jam Wrap Up \(cookspiration.com\)](#)



Remember, it may take time and ongoing exposure to develop certain eating habits. Make it a regular habit to expose children to a variety of options and never force them to eat vegetables and fruit.

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# MEAL PLANNING TIPS FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY

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

Here are some tips for planning family meals:

- Pack lunches that include 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 soups or chickpeas to salads
- Keep ready-to-eat foods on hand for after school, work, or bedtime snacks (e.g., cut up fruit, vegetables, yogurt, nuts, cheese)
- Include your children in planning meals and their lunches
- Teach your children to cook – it's a skill that allows them to make healthy choices later in life
- Looking for recipe inspiration? Visit [Cookspiration](#) for a collection of delicious recipes and an interactive menu planning tool!



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# SCHOOL LUNCHES KIDS WILL MUNCH

Children who are well-nourished may be able to concentrate longer and perform better in school. When it comes to lunch at school, everyone has a role. Parents and caregivers decide what to pack. The child decides whether and how much to eat from their lunch and in which order. The school decides when and where students eat. Below are some lunch ideas that children will enjoy!



## When packing lunch, here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Pack plenty of vegetables and fruit such as broccoli florets, carrot sticks or melon cubes
- Include a protein food such as lentils, chickpeas, bean dip, a hard-boiled egg, cheese, yogurt, or lean meat
- Include whole grain foods such as pasta, brown rice, pita, bun or tortilla

## Additional helpful suggestions:

- Keep a list of lunch and snack ideas on hand that align with [Canada's Food Guide](#)
- Involve your children in planning and preparing their lunches
- Children have limited time to eat, usually around 20 minutes, help them save time by peeling fruit in advance or cutting food into smaller, bite-sized pieces
- Soup, leftovers, rice or pasta dishes can be heated in the morning and stored in pre-heated thermal containers
- Send a reusable water bottle

Children may not always eat their entire lunch. Be sure to offer other meals and snacks throughout the day.

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# NURTURING HEALTHY BODY IMAGE IN KIDS: STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Body image refers to our attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about how we look and what our body can do. 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:

- How all bodies come in different shapes and sizes and deserve respect
- How social media images are not realistic and most often use filters. Help your children set boundaries with social media
- All the things their body does well
- The ways their body supports them
- How to take care of themselves and listen to their body (e.g., sleep well, eat well, participate in activities they enjoy, spend time with family and friends)
- When they are upset, find positive ways to cope with their feelings (e.g., go for a walk, talk to family or friends, write in a journal)



**Be a positive role model:** Notice how you talk about your body and weight and the appearance of others. Body talk, which is any conversation about another person's appearance, can be harmful, even if it is meant as a compliment. An increased focus on appearance can devalue other qualities that make us interesting. Focus compliments to your child or others on their unique qualities, abilities, or effort instead of appearance.

**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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# FOR THIRST, CHOOSE WATER

Children lose water throughout the day by sweating and breathing, and it's important 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. Remember to include your child in choosing and preparing the ingredients. Try these combinations:
  - Fresh raspberries and cucumber
  - Chopped apples and a cinnamon stick
  - Strawberries and fresh basil



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# COOKING TOGETHER - THE BENEFITS ARE ENDLESS

Cooking is a great family activity! Families can share food traditions, favourite recipes and learn about cultural roots. Cooking with kids can also provide learning opportunities. Kids can:

- Strengthen language skills when reading recipes and writing grocery lists
- Incorporate math skills when working with fractions to measure ingredients
- Learn about costing and money management when grocery shopping



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 to 3 years:** Adding ingredients to a bowl, stirring to combine ingredients, helping to find ingredients
- **4 to 6 years:** Helping to measure ingredients, crack and beat egg, mash soft fruit or vegetables (e.g., banana)
- **7 to 8 years:** Use simple kitchen equipment (e.g., garlic press, cheese grater), use the microwave with adult supervision, write a grocery list
- **9 to 11 years:** Use a 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 (e.g., selecting items, cost)

For more age-appropriate ideas see [Kitchen Skills at Every Age](#). Check out this [video](#) to learn the benefits of cooking.

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# CANADA'S FOOD GUIDE

Are you familiar with [Canada's Food Guide](#)? This guide acknowledges 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 good for the planet and that provide us with the nutrients we need 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 you 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 foods each day:**

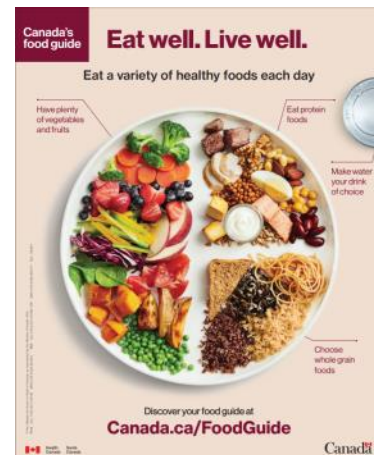
- [Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits, whole grain foods and protein foods.](#) Choose protein foods that come from plants more often
- [Limit highly processed foods.](#) If you choose these foods, eat them less often and in small amounts
- [Make water your drink of choice](#)
- [Use food labels](#)
- [Be aware that food marketing can influence your choices](#)

Visit [Canada.ca/Foodguide](https://Canada.ca/Foodguide) to access supporting resources such as recipes.

For additional nutrition information and resources, visit [york.ca/nutrition](https://york.ca/nutrition) or [unlockfood.ca](https://unlockfood.ca).

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# BLAST OFF WITH BREAKFAST!

Did you know eating breakfast may help improve concentration in the morning? For children and adults alike, having breakfast is an excellent way to get the day started right, but often breakfast routines can get disrupted by busy schedules.

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 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



Start the day by giving yourself a few extra minutes in the morning to enjoy breakfast with your family. It's a great way to connect and get the day started in a positive way!

Explore Cookspiration's [breakfast recipes](#) for ideas!

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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 to 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 food is kept cold at 4°C (40°F) or below. Refrigerate foods prepared ahead of time until packing the lunch.
- **Cook:** Keep cooked, hot 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](http://york.ca/foodsafety).

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