

## Grades 6-8 TEACHER NOTES Healthy Eating

### What is Healthy Eating?

Healthy eating means enjoying a variety of foods from each food group in *Canada's Food Guide* every day. It's important that children eat sufficient foods to meet their needs for energy and essential nutrients. Healthy eating also involves listening to and respecting their body's natural cues for hunger and fullness. The amount of food we need every day from the four food groups in *Canada's Food Guide* and other foods depends on factors such as age, gender, body size and activity level.

### Influences on Food Choices

Children make choices to address their immediate needs and wants. Their food choices are influenced by many factors. As children enter adolescence and become more independent, they make more of their own food choices.

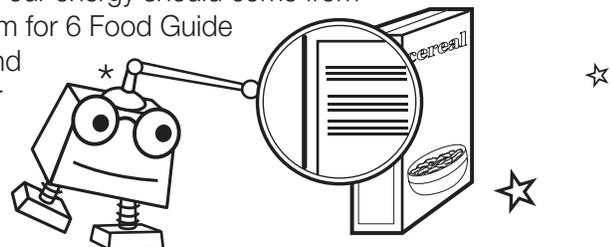
### Key influences:

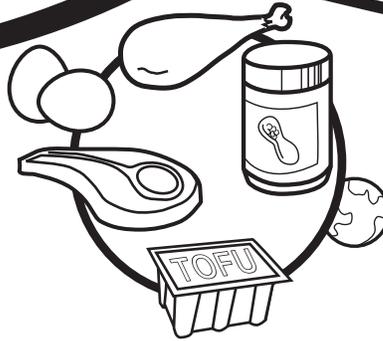
- ☆ Taste is the most important criteria for most people, including children, for choosing food.
- ☆ People choose foods because they taste good and they make us feel good.
- ☆ Family behaviours play a key role in influencing children's eating habits and attitudes toward food and eating. For example, children are more likely to eat breakfast if their parents do.
- ☆ Professionals and volunteers such as teachers, coaches, camp and group leaders who work with children can play an important role in supporting healthy choices.
- ☆ School policies, practices and nutrition education programs work together to provide a key source of nutrition information, and influence the availability of tasty, nutritious food choices at school.
- ☆ Media messages can have a significant impact on children's food preferences.
- ☆ Peer pressure influences children's choices at any age, but particularly during the pre- and early-adolescent years.

### Food Energy

Foods provide fuel for healthy growth and development, the many everyday body functions and physical activity. Following *Canada's Food Guide* can help provide the right balance of energy from carbohydrates, protein and fat for good health. Our bodies need all three of these macronutrients for energy and good health.

**Carbohydrates** are the body's preferred source of energy. About half of our energy should come from carbohydrate. Children (males and females) 9 to 13 years of age should aim for 6 Food Guide Servings of Grain Products per day such as cereals, breads, pasta, rice and other grains, as well as 6 Food Guide Servings of Vegetables and Fruit per day to meet their carbohydrate needs.





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**Proteins** are made up of amino acids that help to build, maintain and repair body tissues. Food sources of proteins include meat, poultry, fish, eggs, milk, cheese, yogourt, soy, legumes (dried beans and peas), seeds and nuts. Grain products and some vegetables also supply small amounts of protein.

**Fats** are a concentrated source of energy. They provide essential fatty acids and are needed for the absorption of fat soluble vitamins. Sources of fat include oils, butter, margarine, mayonnaise, salad dressings, fried foods, many snack foods, nuts, seeds, meats and milk products with the exception of skim milk and skim milk products.

*Note: Growing children need a higher percentage of energy from fat than adults. The ideal percentage of fat intake for infants is 50%. The ideal goal for children is a gradual decrease from the higher fat intake recommended in infancy to an intake of about 30% of calories from fat when teens have stopped growing (usually by the end of high school). Parents should not restrict nutritious foods because of their fat content. A variety of foods from the four food groups should be offered. Children should not be encouraged to count calories or fat intake.*

**Key Nutrients for Growth and Development**

Our bodies need over 50 nutrients for healthy growth and development. The following nutrients are especially important for growing children and adolescents.

**Minerals**

**Iron** helps carry oxygen in the blood and is important for energy metabolism. Iron is especially crucial in girls as they lose iron during menstruation. Sources: iron-fortified cereals, meat, legumes, dried fruits, nuts and seeds, egg yolk.

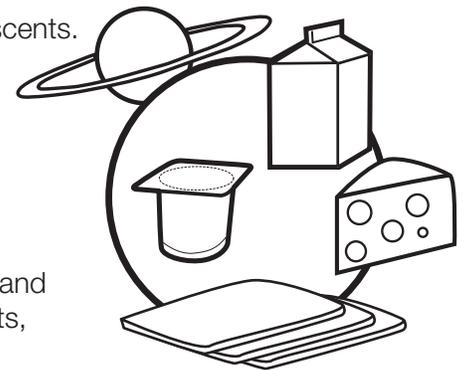
**Calcium** is important for the development and maintenance of strong bones and teeth. It helps muscles to contract and the heart to beat. Sources: milk products, calcium-fortified soy beverages, calcium-enriched orange juice.

**Zinc** is essential for growth and energy metabolism. It is involved in appetite regulation, the ability to taste and smell and healthy immune systems. Sources: beef, turkey, shrimp, crab, eggs, milk, whole grains, cereals, beans.

**Vitamins**

**Vitamin A** helps with night vision and helps keep the skin healthy. Sources: eggs, liver, colourful fruits and vegetables, milk.

**B Vitamins** are important to help the body release energy from food. A number of different B vitamins are involved in healthy growth and development. Sources: enriched cereals, breads, whole grains, meats, dark green leafy vegetables.



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**Vitamin C** helps keep gums and teeth healthy and promotes normal wound healing. As an antioxidant it helps maintain healthy cells. Sources: citrus fruits, tomatoes, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, potatoes, bell peppers, strawberries, kiwi.

**Vitamin D** helps the body absorb the calcium and phosphorus needed for strong bones and teeth. Also known as the “sunshine” vitamin, it is produced by the body when exposed to ultra-violet light from the sun. Sources: milk, soy beverages and margarine fortified with vitamin D, and fatty fish (e.g. salmon).

#### **Dietary Fibre**

**Fibre** helps keep the digestive system healthy. Choose whole grain products and vegetables and fruit frequently. Sources of fibre: whole grain breads, whole grain and bran cereals, whole wheat pasta, brown or wild rice, oats, and other grains, vegetables, fruit, dried peas and beans, nuts, seeds.

#### **Aim for Regular Meals and Snacks**

Eating a healthy variety of foods at regular meals and snacks each day can help children going through the transition to adolescence feel their best. Nutritious choices for breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks provide fuel for their minds to work and for their muscles to play and perform. Establishing healthy eating habits at a young age helps children feel good and lays a foundation for healthy eating habits throughout life.

#### **Make Each Food Guide Serving Count**

*Canada's Food Guide* recommends making each Food Guide Serving count, wherever you are - at home, at school, at work or when eating out. Some of the key messages include:

**Vegetables and Fruit:** eat at least one dark green and one orange vegetable each day; choose vegetables and fruit prepared with little or no added fat, sugar or salt; and, have vegetables and fruit more often than juice.

**Grain Products:** make at least half of your grain products whole grain each day; and, choose grain products that are lower in fat, sugar or salt.

**Milk and Alternatives:** drink skim, 1%, or 2% milk each day; have 500 mL (2 cups) of milk everyday for adequate vitamin D (or fortified soy beverages if you do not drink milk); and, select lower fat milk alternatives like yogurts or cheeses.

**Meat and Alternatives:** have meat alternatives such as beans, lentils and tofu often, eat at least two Food Guide Servings of fish each week; and, select lean meat and alternatives prepared with little or no added fat or salt.

#### **Less Healthy Food Choices**

*Canada's Food Guide* encourages people to limit less healthy food and beverage choices that are high in calories, fat, sugar and salt (sodium). These include cakes and pastries, chocolate and candies, cookies and granola bars, doughnuts and muffins, ice cream and frozen desserts, french fries, potato chips, nachos and other salty snacks, alcohol, fruit flavoured drinks, soft drinks, sports drinks, and sweetened hot or cold drinks.

These foods should be limited but can be enjoyed at times.



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#### The Benefits of Breakfast

Although breakfast is often referred to as the most important meal of the day, many children start their day without the benefits of a nutritious breakfast. By morning, most people have fasted for about 8 to 12 hours. It's important to "break" the "fast" by starting the day with a nutritious breakfast each morning, one that includes foods from at least three of the four food groups in *Canada's Food Guide* - Vegetables and Fruit, Grain Products, Milk and Alternatives and Meat and Alternatives.

- ☆ Breakfast gives you energy to get you going in the morning.
- ☆ Breakfast can help with concentration and learning.
- ☆ Breakfast provides essential nutrients for growth and development.
- ☆ Regular breakfast eating is associated with a healthy body weight.

#### Children Who Skip Breakfast:

- ☆ Have less energy to participate in morning activities.
- ☆ May feel tired and hungry, and find it difficult to concentrate and learn.
- ☆ Are unlikely to make up for nutrients missed at breakfast later in the day.
- ☆ May end up over-eating later in the day.



#### Learning to Trust Body Signals

Encourage students to trust their body signals to tell them when they are hungry or full. Infants and animals eat in response to body hunger cues and stop eating in response to feeling full. As children age, external cues often interfere with the natural ability to regulate food intake according to body needs.

For example:

- ☆ Children who get used to eating in front of the television may automatically want to eat when watching TV (the TV becomes the cue to eat).
- ☆ Adults who try to take control of the amount of food children eat can limit children's trust in their own ability to regulate their own food intake. Adults are responsible for providing a variety of nutritious choices, but children should be responsible for deciding how much they will eat according to their own hunger and satiety cues.
- ☆ Children who ignore their hunger signals and restrict their food intake in an attempt to control their body weight may eventually become out of touch with their true hunger cues.



#### The Pitfalls of Skipping Meals

Children who skip meals miss out on nutrients and energy to fuel their activities. They're also apt to overeat at the next meal because they are so hungry. With today's cultural obsession with thinness, studies have found that even young children often restrict their food intake due to unhealthy weight preoccupation. Healthy eating habits and regular physical activity are the way to go.