Guidelines for Making Healthy Food Choices in Your School

Serve Most Often
These foods contain many nutrients.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guidelines</th>
<th>Vegetables and Fruit</th>
<th>Grain Products</th>
<th>Milk and Alternatives</th>
<th>Meat and Alternatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prepared with no added fat, sugar or salt</td>
<td>Whole grains or are made with whole grains</td>
<td>Plain, no flavor added milk(^4) or fortified soy beverage(^5)</td>
<td>Prepared with little or no added fat, sugar or salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not deep fried or parboiled in oil</td>
<td>Lower in fat, sugar and salt</td>
<td>Lower in fat, sugar, and salt cheeses(^3) and yogurts(^6)</td>
<td>Lean cuts of meat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples
- Fresh, frozen, or canned fruit in juice or water
- Fresh, frozen, cooked or canned vegetables
- Fruit sauces
  Example: applesauce

- Whole grain or whole wheat flour products
  Examples: bread, buns, bannock, English muffins, tortillas, crackers, roti
- Whole grain: pasta, rice, couscous, cereals\(^2\)
- Quinoa, barley, oats

Serve Sometimes
These foods have some nutrients, but may not be whole grain and may have added sugar, salt and fat.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Vegetables and Fruit</th>
<th>Grain Products</th>
<th>Milk and Alternatives</th>
<th>Meat and Alternatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100% fruit or vegetable juice(^3)</td>
<td>Cereals(^5)</td>
<td>Flavoured cow’s milk(^4) or fortified soy beverage(^4)</td>
<td>Canned, dried, or breaded meats or fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fresh, canned or frozen vegetables/fruit with added salt or sugar</td>
<td>Crackers(^6)</td>
<td>Flavoured yogurt(^2)</td>
<td>Deli meat(^2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Granola/granola bars(^5)</td>
<td>Frozen yogurt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Muffins(^5)</td>
<td>Milk-based puddings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plain cookies(^5)</td>
<td>Processed cheese slices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>White breads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Serve Least Often

These foods are higher in sugar, fat and/or salt. If served, provide in small portions.

- Bakery items including, but not limited to: pastries and doughnuts
- Candy, fruit gummies/snacks
- Chips/flavored popcorn, cheese puffs or pretzels
- Condiments/sweeteners, i.e. Processed cheese spreads, ketchup, gravy, syrup, honey, whipped cream
- Cookies (with icing)
- Coffee drinks or caffeinated beverages
- Chocolate/chocolate bars
- Fried foods, i.e. French fries
- Frozen desserts including, but not limited to: ice cream, popsicles, freezies, milkshakes
- Instant dried noodles
- Jello or pudding
- Sugar sweetened beverages including, but not limited to: fruit drinks/punches, vitamin/specialty waters, sports drinks, soda pop, ice slushes
- Sour cream

Legend

1 No sugar added
2 Less than or equal to 8 grams sugar per 30 grams of the food
3 Less than 20% milk fat (M.F.)
4 2% or less milk fat (M.F.)
5 Less than or equal to 16 grams sugar per 30 grams of the food
6 Less than or equal to 300 mg sodium per 20-25 grams crackers
7 Less than or equal to 500 mg sodium, and 10 grams of fat

Recommendations

***While there are no specific guidelines on how often “Serve Sometimes”, or “Serve Least Often” foods could be available, it is important that schools, and individual teachers consider all aspects of the food environment, and therefore all possible situations where a child has access to lower nutrient, higher sugar, fat and/or sodium foods at school. This includes school settings such as the school cafeteria, vending machines, school fundraisers, classroom celebrations, school events, and any ‘special’ lunch days. These can add up over time***

- Meeting these recommendations may be challenging based on the type of foods and beverages available in the marketplace, however, it is recommended that schools align as closely as possible to the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth and Canada’s Food Guide for foods provided in the school setting.
- Please see table footnotes for product-specific recommendations.
- The Nutrition Facts table on food labels gives information on serving size, calories, and different nutrients. Use the Nutrition Facts table to compare similar foods. Check the serving size. The serving size is listed at the top of the Nutrition Facts table. All the information in the table is based on this amount of food. If the food portion served is more or less than the listed serving size, that portion will have more or less of the nutrient amounts listed. For example, if the serving size of a cereal is ½ cup (125 mL), and the student ate 1 cup (250 mL) portion, they would get double of all the nutrients listed in the table.

- Choose foods with: 5% or less Daily Value for saturated and trans fat and sodium, whenever possible.

- Choose foods with: 15% or more Daily Value for fibre, vitamins, calcium and iron, whenever possible.

- Sugar comes in many forms. It can be found naturally in fruit, milk, yogurt, grain products, and some vegetables. It can also be added to foods such as baked goods, candy, cereals, granola bars, and soft drinks. It is recommended to limit the availability of foods with added sugars. Added sugars are listed in the ingredient list.

- When making mixed dishes, it is recommended to choose foods from the Choose Most Often category.

- Serve vegetables and fruit to eat instead of juice because vegetables and fruit contain fibre, 100% vegetable juice may contain added salt, and 100% fruit juice is high in natural sugars. It is recommended that individuals limit 100% juice intake to 125 mL, or ½ cup per day.

- Energy drinks are not recommended for children and youth because of their high levels of caffeine and sugar, as well as other added ingredients, such as vitamins and herbs.

These recommendations were developed using information from the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth as a guideline, along with principles from Canada's Food Guide and Health Canada. This document may be updated as provincial and federal nutrition guidance documents are revised.

References and Useful Links/Handouts

1. Healthy Eating Starts Here website: contains all handouts listed, as well as information about healthy eating in schools, at home, and in the community. You may find the search function at the top of the page to be useful in locating resources.  
   https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page12598.aspx
3. Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide
4. Healthy Drinks, Healthy Kids handout
5. Label Reading the Healthy Way handout