

5 Steps to Healthy Eating for Children Aged 4-11



An important part of being a parent is to help your children eat well and be physically active. When children eat well they have the nutrients and energy they need to grow. Healthy eating helps children concentrate and perform better in school, sports and other activities. Being physically active helps children be strong and fit and improves confidence.

It is normal for children to grow quickly and gain weight during growth spurts. At other times growth may be slower. Ask your doctor to measure your child's growth using a growth chart. Healthy bodies come in many shapes and sizes. Help your children focus on eating habits, physical activity and overall health rather than body weight.

The most important thing you can do to help your children develop healthy habits is to lead by example and be a good role model. Your children learn their health habits from you. If you eat a variety of healthy foods and stay active, chances are that your children will too.

Help your children to eat well and be active by following the 5 steps below.

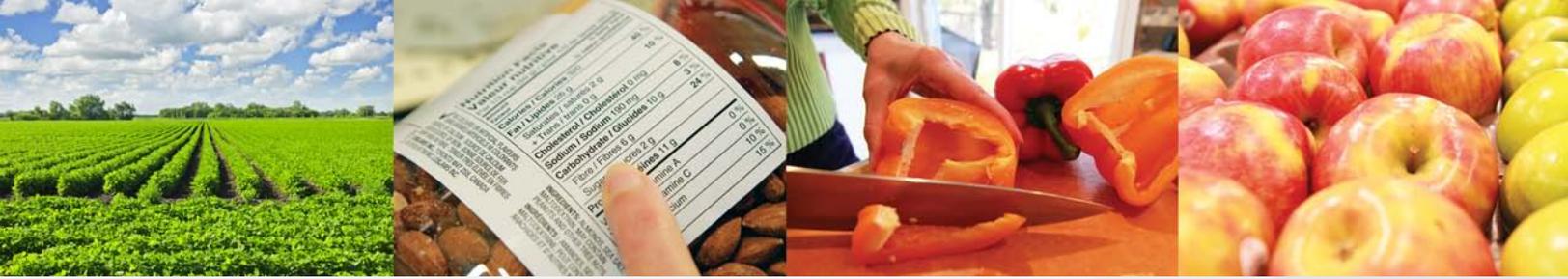
Steps You Can Take

1. Eat Meals With Your Family

Eat meals as a family whenever you can. Making mealtimes an important part of the day and enjoying meals together can help children make better food choices, stay at a healthier weight and have a more positive body image.

Get your children involved with meal planning and grocery shopping. Use Canada's Food Guide (CFG) to help you plan healthy meals that your family can eat together. Serve foods from at least three food groups at meals. Here are some healthy eating ideas from CFG that will help your whole family eat balanced meals.

- Offer vegetables and fruit at most meals. Serve at least one orange and one dark green vegetable each day, such as carrots, sweet potato, broccoli, asparagus and spinach. Use lower fat dips, sauces or dressings to make them more appealing.
- Give your children whole fruit instead of juice. Fruit is lower in sugar and has more fibre than juice. If you offer juice, serve only 100% fruit juice (with no added sugar) and give small amounts:
 - 4-6 year olds: no more than 125-175 mL (4-6 oz) juice per day
 - 7-11 year olds: no more than 250-375 mL (8-12 oz) juice per day



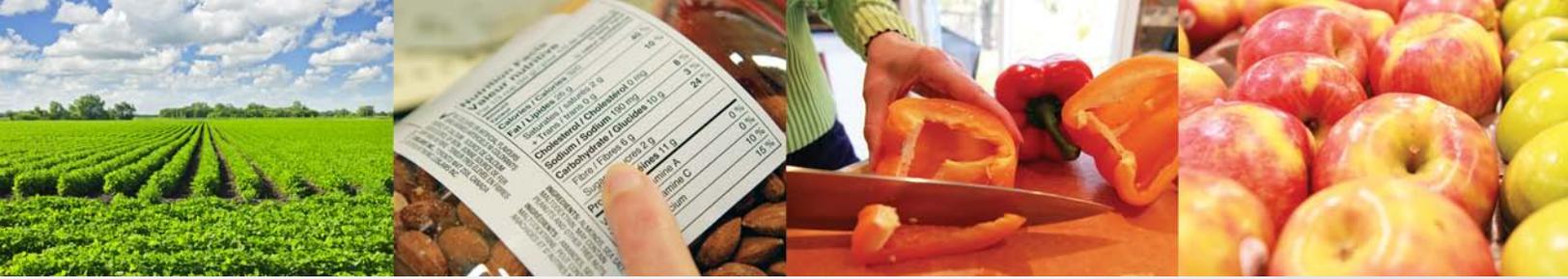
- Shop for whole grain products that are high in fibre and low in sugar, fat and salt. Good choices include large flake oats for oatmeal, whole wheat pasta, brown rice and whole grain breads. Read Nutrition Facts tables and look for breakfast cereals with 4 grams of fibre or more per 30 g serving. Compare the sugar content on Nutrition Fact tables and choose lower sugar cereals.
- Serve lower fat milk and milk alternatives like skim or 1% milk, low fat yogurt or fortified soy beverage each day. Milk products provide calcium and vitamin D for healthy bones. Offer smoothies with breakfast, yogurt for snacks and a glass of milk or fortified soy beverage at dinner.
- Plan and prepare meals with less fat. Trim the fat from meats and remove the skin from chicken. Limit breaded and deep-fried foods. Serve meals that include fish and meat alternatives such as beans, lentils and tofu more often.
- Include a small amount of unsaturated fat each day. These are healthier fats. Use soft margarine on bread or toast instead of butter. Use vegetable oil for cooking or baking instead of butter, shortening or lard. Add small amounts of salad dressing, avocado or a sprinkle of nuts and seeds on salads. Limit foods high in saturated or unhealthy fats such as chips, nachos, cookies, donuts, pastries, chocolate and deep fried foods.
- Offer water when your children are thirsty instead of sugary drinks like fruit cocktail, fruit punch, pop and sports drinks. Do not give children energy drinks or other drinks with caffeine. Caffeine can interfere with your child's sleep and cause anxiety.

2. Plan and Pack Healthy Meals and Snacks

Busy schedules make it important to plan ahead for healthy eating. Plan your meals ahead of time so that you have all the foods you need on hand.

Serve breakfast daily - It is important to start the day off right by serving breakfast. Breakfast provides important nutrients and may help children perform better in school and stay at a healthier weight. Here are some winning ideas to start the day:

- whole grain cereal, milk, banana
- whole wheat toast, scrambled egg, orange
- plain oatmeal, yogurt, berries
- whole grain bagel, nut butter, apple
- whole grain tortilla with beans and cheese
- fruit and yogurt smoothie, homemade brain muffin



Pack a healthy lunch – Keep your kids’ energy levels high with a lunch that contains all four food groups. Get your children involved with packing their lunch.

- Think beyond sandwiches! Try:
 - last night’s leftovers packed in a thermos
 - pasta, rice or barley salad with vegetables
 - pizza bagels with cheese and vegetables
 - homemade soup and whole grain bread or roll
 - stew, dhal or chilli.
- Limit packaged and processed foods, including deli meat, pop, fruit drinks, canned soups, cookies and chips. Build lunches around fresh foods with little or no added salt or sugar.

Snack well – Children have smaller tummies than adults and may need to eat more often. Serve healthy snacks to keep your kids energized between meals. Include foods from at least two food groups:

- fruit with yogurt dip
- sliced vegetables with hummus
- whole grain crackers with cheese
- half of a sandwich and milk.

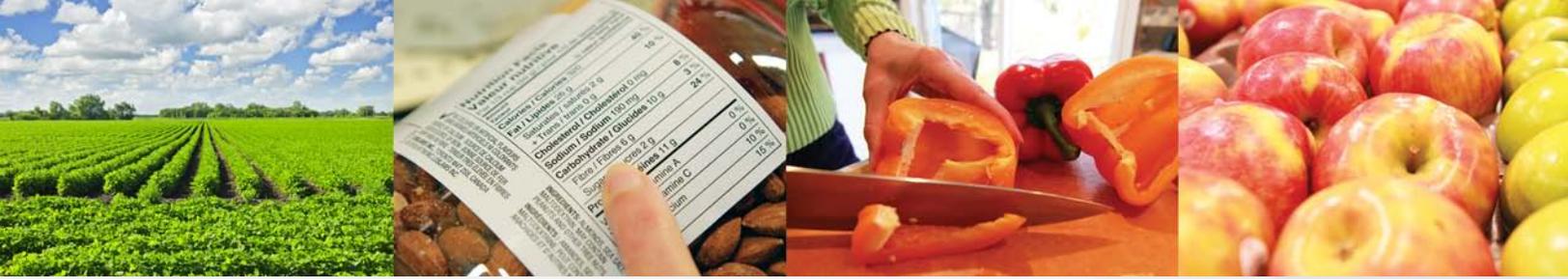
3. Trust Your Child’s Appetite

Trust that your children know how much they need to eat. Encourage children to listen and respond to their signals of hunger and fullness. As a parent, offer your children a variety of healthy foods at their meals and snack times. Your children can then decide which foods and how much food they want to eat. Let children serve themselves healthy foods until they are full.

When children are growing quickly, they may eat more. They may eat less when they are growing more slowly. It is okay if your children do not finish their meals.

Try these tips:

- Offer regular meals and snacks each day to help children with their hunger.
- Let children eat based on their hunger and fullness rather than set portion sizes. Do not pressure or force your children to eat everything on their plate.



- Offer a variety of foods. Allow children to eat higher sugar, higher fat foods in small amounts along with healthy foods. Avoid labelling foods as good and bad. Do not use food to reward or punish children.
- Turn off the TV, computer and phone to allow children to focus on eating. Children can listen better to their bodies if they are not distracted.

4. Create an Environment that Supports Healthy Eating

Help make it easier for your children to eat well and be active wherever they live, learn, and play.

Here are some ideas:

- Use the suggestions in this handout to talk to your children about healthy choices that your family can make together at home.
- If your children have a school cafeteria or a lunch program, check out the options and help them make healthier choices. Try to offer a home-packed lunch on most days and use the cafeteria once in a while.
- Get involved with your child's school or Parent Advisory Council to help promote healthier foods for fundraising events or school lunches.
- Speak with your child's daycare provider or other caregivers to ensure healthy food choices are offered.
- Bring healthy foods when you take food to sports or school activities to share. Encourage other parents and teachers to do the same.

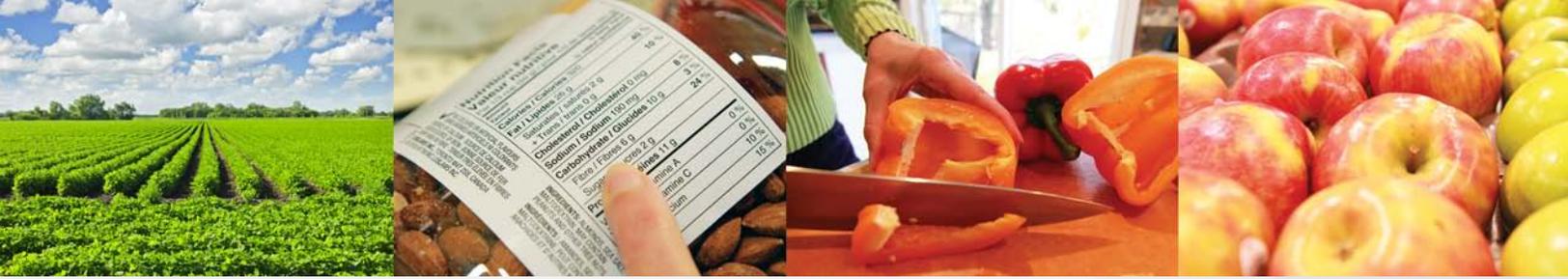
5. Stay Fit With Fun Activities

Being active every day is important for healthy growth and development. Physical activity can help increase your child's self-esteem and promote a healthy body weight.

Preschoolers under age five should be active for at least 180 minutes each day. This can include any intensity of activity spread throughout the day.

Children ages five to 11 should aim for 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity each day.

Activity does not have to take place all at one time. Every 10 minutes of activity counts towards the activity goals. The key is to keep it fun and be involved! Here are some ideas:



Moderate-intensity physical activities (these activities make kids sweat a little and breathe harder)

- Walking or bike riding
- Playing ball or frisbee
- Swimming in the summer and skating or tobogganing in the winter

Vigorous-intensity physical activities (these activities make kids sweat and be 'out of breath')

- Hockey, basketball or soccer
- Dancing to their favourite upbeat songs
- Shovelling snow or raking leaves

Limit the amount of time your children spend watching TV, playing video games or computer games to no more than two hours per day.

Steps for Special Consideration

Most children do not need a vitamin/mineral supplement if they are eating a variety of foods. It is best for children to get the nutrients they need from food. Talk to your doctor or health professional before giving your child supplements.

Weight loss is not usually recommended for children. This is because children are actively growing. If you are concerned about your child's weight, speak to a health professional. An unhealthy approach to weight loss can be very harmful to your child's physical health and well-being.

Additional Resources

Dietitians of Canada, Is My Child Growing Well? Questions and Answers for Parents <http://www.dietitians.ca/Nutrition-Resources-A-Z/Factsheets/Toddlers-and-School-Age/Child-growing-well.aspx>

EatRight Ontario, Feeding Your 6-12 Year Old Picky Eater www.onpen.ca/Docviewer.aspx?id=8486

Health Canada:

Canada's Food Guide www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide

Choosing Foods www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/choose-choix/index_e.html

Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology:

Canadian Sedentary Guidelines for the Early Years (0-4) www.csep.ca/CMFiles/Guidelines/CSEP-InfoSheets-ENG-Early-Years-FINAL.pdf

Canadian Sedentary Guidelines for Children (ages 5-11) www.csep.ca/CMFiles/Guidelines/CSEP-InfoSheets-ENG-Children%20FINAL.pdf

Public Health Agency of Canada, Physical Activity Tips for Children (5-11 years) www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pa-ap/05paap-eng.php



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