



THINGS YOU CAN DO

To Improve Your School Food Environment

Improvements to the school food environment will make it easier for students to eat well and help to bring the curriculum on healthy eating to life. When veggies, fruit and water are easy to find (and less nutritious foods are harder to find), we all benefit! Check out this video that highlights the role of school food environment: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oynm-7CJJ0M>



1. Get students involved in food and growing. The more we get hands on exposure to foods the better. Growing and preparing food helps increase students' interest in eating vegetables and fruit and can also help to build confidence and self-esteem. Chat with your schools nurse to find out more about our You're the Chef cooking program.



2. Talk positively about food. Having a healthy relationship with food means being comfortable eating a variety of foods that support both nutrition and enjoyment. Labelling foods as "healthy" and "unhealthy" can lead to very black and white thinking about food. Instead of assigning labels to food, instead allow students the opportunity to explore foods from Canada's Food Guide in a positive and fun way.



3. Make cross-curricular connections with foods from Canada's Food Guide. The more students are exposed to vegetables, fruit, whole grains and protein foods the better! In addition to teaching about healthy eating, there are many opportunities to expose students to these foods in other lessons. For example, to learn procedural writing, have students write out steps to make a yogurt parfait. For math, have students poll classmates to learn their favourite fruit. Minimize use of food examples that are not found on Canada's Food Guide (e.g. sugary drinks, candy) in classroom activities. Check out www.brightbites.ca/badge/zesty-lessons for more ideas!



4. Rethink rewards. Rewards are commonly used to recognize achievements and often involve foods that aren't part of Canada's Food Guide. This practice is tempting because it results in short-term success; however, it can create lifetime habits of rewarding or comforting oneself with food, and places less nutritious "treat" foods up on a pedestal. Visit www.brightbites.ca/badge/its-an-honour for alternative ideas.





5. Fundraise with non-food fundraisers or with foods from Canada's Food Guide.

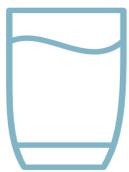
Schools are often on the look-out for creative ways to make money; however, selling chocolate bars and hotdogs sends the wrong message to students. If we aim to teach children about eating well, it's important to show how it's done too! Offering balanced meals as hot lunches and limiting sales of less nutritious foods to the school community is a great way to "walk the talk". Check out some alternative fundraising ideas at <https://brightbites.ca/badge/show-me-the-money/>.



6. Showcase foods from Canada's Food Guide at school events and celebrations. Food is often the centre of school events and celebrations, but do the foods and drinks offered show a commitment to eating well? Is food even necessary? Why not swap out your typical Valentine's Day cupcakes for a class dance party instead? There are many ways to celebrate without food. If you do need to serve food, serving tasty and nutritious food and drinks at meetings, events and celebrations is a great way to show the school community what eating well looks like.



7. Offer meals without distractions. Canada's Food Guide stresses the importance of eating mindfully, and to do this we need to be paying attention to our bodies while eating. Screens or smart boards during meal and snack times prevent us from noticing when we are hungry or full, and hinder great conversations among students. Turn off the screens and allow students to connect around the table. If you need help starting conversations, check out the conversation starters available at <http://www.powerup4kids.org/ConversationStarters>.



8. Make water easily available to all. Providing and promoting water, especially in place of sugary drinks, can help prevent dental cavities, promote overall health, and help students and staff feel better throughout the day. Promote water by ensuring water fountains are in good working condition, allowing students to keep water bottles at their desk, and providing only water as a drink at school events.



9. Avoid commenting on students' lunches. It's easy to get frustrated when we see less nutritious foods being packed in students' lunches, but we can get in the way of children's learning to eat a variety of foods when we make comments about what they are eating. Lunches students bring to school are influenced by many factors (i.e. family income, parent work schedules). Students have varying levels of involvement in packing their own lunches and little influence on what their parents/caregivers are buying (particularly in primary years). Instead, focus on modelling choices from Canada's Food Guide at every opportunity.



10. Respect all body sizes. Recognize that bodies come in all different shapes and sizes; tall, short, thin, wide and everywhere in between. A person's body size isn't an indicator of their health, and people of all body sizes can have good nutrition and activity habits. Avoid commenting negatively on your own body or others, keep the conversations free of "diet talk" and focus on what bodies can do, not what they look like. Some great books to promote positive body image in students include *Shapesville* by Andy Mills and Becky Osborn, *The Body Book* by Roz MacLean, and *Your Body is Awesome* by Sigrún Daníelsdóttir.

If you'd like support in helping to make a change to your school food environment, contact one of our school health dietitians by emailing: healthyeating@swpublichealth.ca

We are happy to help!