



QUICK FACTS FOR PARENTS

Learning about Healthy Eating

Healthy eating, along with physical activity, is essential for maintaining good health.



Children who eat well are more likely to learn better, be more active, and make healthier choices as they grow up. Since about one third of what children eat and drink every day is consumed at school, the school plays an important role in helping students learn about healthy eating and also in helping them practise it. By requiring that all food and beverages sold in publicly funded schools meet specified nutrition standards, Ontario's school food and beverage policy ensures that the healthiest choices available at school are also the easiest choices for children to make.

Children can learn about healthy eating at home, school and in the community. Children who learn about healthy eating in the classroom take that knowledge home and pass it on to their families. By applying what they learn in a variety of other settings, such as community centres, child care settings, rinks, grocery stores, and restaurants, students can also influence the attitudes of others far beyond the school. In this way, the curriculum can help strengthen connections between the home, the school, and the broader community.

WHAT DO STUDENTS LEARN AT SCHOOL ABOUT HEALTHY EATING?

The Health and Physical Education curriculum helps students develop the knowledge and skills they need to make the healthiest eating choices they can under a wide variety of circumstances. Students learn to examine their own food choices and the things that affect those choices. Students, however, can't always control all of the factors that influence what they eat. For that reason the curriculum also focuses on how students can make healthy eating decisions and set appropriate goals by considering those factors that they can control.

Major areas of learning related to healthy eating include:

- nutrition
- food choices, and using Canada's Food Guide (and specialized versions of it, such as *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide: First Nations, Inuit and Métis*) to plan healthy meals and snacks
- factors influencing eating habits
- skills for making healthy choices
- food trends
- food safety issues, including allergies and sensitivities
- oral and dental health
- connections between eating choices, disease prevention, and the health of the environment

Meal preparation is a good opportunity to talk about what makes a healthy meal and to pass on family traditions, encourage children to try a wide range of food, and spend quality time together. When children are involved in meal preparation, they are more likely to eat and enjoy what they have prepared.

“Healthy children learn better. When children eat right, they can improve their memory and their ability to concentrate. In addition, eating well supports healthy growth and development.”
EatRightOntario, 2015

The curriculum encourages students to make connections between classroom learning and everyday life and to take increasing responsibility for looking after themselves and others. Since making healthy food decisions is an important part of that responsibility, the curriculum emphasizes hands-on involvement, whenever possible, in making food choices and preparing meals and snacks.

WHAT DO YOUNGER STUDENTS LEARN?

In Grades 1–3, students learn about local foods and foods of different cultures, food groups, and the significance of where food is grown. They also examine how these factors are related to healthy food choices. The ability of students to make healthy eating decisions is further developed in Grades 4–6, as they acquire additional knowledge about nutrition and nutritional labelling and learn how to manage their food choices and set healthy eating goals.

WHAT DO OLDER STUDENTS LEARN?

Grade 7 and 8 students learn more about nutrition and the relationship between nutrition and disease. They explore more targeted approaches to managing their own food intake, consider factors that can influence food choices, and learn about promoting healthy eating to others. Students in Grades 9–12 continue to build their understanding of the connections between healthy eating and personal well-being. They also expand their ability to make healthy eating decisions in different situations, such as at school, in a restaurant, and when planning meals themselves.

MORE INFORMATION

School Food and Beverage Policy:

www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/healthyschools/policy.html

Canada's Food Guide:

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php

Tips for Healthy Eating:

www.mhp.gov.on.ca/en/healthy-ontario/healthy-eating

www.eatrightontario.ca

Local and Seasonal Foods:

www.ontario.ca/foodland/foodland-ontario

Safe Food Handling:

www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/publichealth/foodsafety/

Public Health Units in Ontario:

www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx

Secondary school students have further opportunities to learn about healthy eating and related topics such as food and nutrition, food safety, and agriculture in other subjects, including Family Studies, Hospitality and Tourism, Social Sciences, Geography, Science, and Green Industries.

SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF HEALTHY EATING HABITS

Parents and schools can work together to support the development of healthy eating habits and promote the general well-being of our children. Consider these ideas:

- Wherever possible, involve your child in selecting healthy food and beverages for your family. For example, compare food labels with your child when making choices between different products. Or identify seasonal or local foods, or foods from different cultures, and talk about the health and other benefits of these foods.
- Involve your child in planning and preparing meals and snacks at home.
- Talk about portion size, serving size and healthy snacks. Work together as a family to be aware of making the healthiest choices possible.
- Help your child develop the habit of washing hands before preparing, handling, serving, or eating food.
- Volunteer to lead, or be involved in, the development or implementation of healthy eating initiatives in your school.
- Contact your local public health unit to learn more about healthy eating resources and programs in your area.

When you choose local foods at markets, grocery stores, restaurants, and cafeterias, you're getting delicious food that is good for you and your family. You are also helping local farmers and the local economy.
