

## HEALTHY EATING

Healthy eating refers to eating a variety of nutritious foods from all four food groups that give us the nutrients we need to learn, grow, feel good and have energy.



Healthy eating is necessary for healthy development. Offering young children nutritious foods that nurture their bodies and fuel their development helps them form lifelong healthy eating habits. These habits are also influenced by the mealtime experience, as well as other food-related activities like gardening, cooking or visiting a local farm. As an early childhood educator, you can help foster healthy eating routines by offering a variety of nourishing choices for the children in your program, engaging them in food-related learning experiences and setting the stage for positive and mindful mealtimes.



**DID YOU KNOW?** Infants, toddlers and preschoolers all let us know when they are hungry. The way we respond to their cues will help them be comfortable with eating a variety of foods and respect their own feelings of hunger or fullness.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**NB PLAYS! Preschool recommends** that healthy eating be incorporated into early learning and child care programming as part of a holistic approach. Holistic programming that encourages healthy eating supports the healthy growth and development of children. There is no one way to promote healthy eating, but the following recommendations should be considered:

- Make water available for children at all times and serve it along with meals and snacks
- Include all four food groups in meals served to children
- Include vegetables or fruit and at least one other food group in snacks served to children
- Eliminate sugar sweetened drinks (pop, juice cocktails, sports drinks, etc.)
- Limit processed foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt, such as cookies, chips and candy
- Avoid using food as a reward or punishment
- As an early childhood educator, model healthy eating by making nutritious food choices
- Offer children a variety of nutritious food choices
- Give children a choice of which healthy foods they want to eat, and how much of them

## RESOURCES

For more information about promoting healthy eating in your program, check out:

- » Dietitians of Canada. *Children*. [www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health/Nutrition-A-Z/Children.aspx](http://www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health/Nutrition-A-Z/Children.aspx)
- » EatRight Ontario. *How to Build a Healthy Preschooler*. [www.eatrightontario.ca/en/articles/child-toddler-nutrition/how-to-build-a-healthy-preschooler#V3vAgLgrKUK](http://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/articles/child-toddler-nutrition/how-to-build-a-healthy-preschooler#V3vAgLgrKUK)
- » GNB Education and Early Childhood Development. *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care*. [www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/education/elcc/content/curriculum/curriculum\\_framework.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/education/elcc/content/curriculum/curriculum_framework.html)
- » GNB Social Development. *CHEFS!* [www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/social\\_development/wellness/content/chefs.html](http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/social_development/wellness/content/chefs.html)
- » Growing Minds. *Cooking with Preschool Children*. [www.growing-minds.org/documents/cooking-with-children-in-licensed-child-care.pdf](http://www.growing-minds.org/documents/cooking-with-children-in-licensed-child-care.pdf)
- » Healthy Beginnings for Preschoolers 2-5. *Healthy Eating & Sugar Sweetened Beverages*. [www.healthybeginningspreschoolers.ca](http://www.healthybeginningspreschoolers.ca)
- » Healthy Start. [www.healthystartkids.ca](http://www.healthystartkids.ca)

## Chef's Choice

### **Materials:**

- None

### **Objective:**

- Encourage healthy eating choices

### **Instructions:**

1. Open a discussion with children about some of their favourite healthy dishes or individual foods.
2. Select one or two children to start in the middle of the play space as the *Chefs*. Have the remaining children line up at one end of the area.
3. Have the *Chefs* call out one of their favourite healthy foods. If there are two *Chefs*, they can decide on one together or take turns calling.
4. If any of the other children also like this food, they have to run to the other end of the play space without getting tagged by a *Chef*. If they get tagged, they become a *Chef*.
5. Play until almost everyone is tagged and has had a turn being the *Chef*.


### **Variations:**

- If space is limited, set this game up like musical chairs. When the *Chef* calls out a food, everyone who likes it stands up and finds a new place to sit. The last child to find a seat becomes the *Chef*.

### **Reflection:**

- If there were any unhealthy foods called, discuss why they are not healthy choices and why they might be only *sometimes* foods.
- Were any foods called that you have never tried before?
- What is the group's favourite healthy food?

Adapted from *Healthy Eating & Sugary Drinks* by Healthy Beginnings for Preschoolers 2-5, 2014.

 **TIP:** Use food-free rewards for positive behaviour. These might include high fives, extra time for free play or choice of the next activity.



- FUN IDEAS FOR HEALTHY SNACKS:**
- Quartered grapes and whole wheat crackers
  - Cooked and chilled carrot sticks with hummus
  - Fruit and yogurt parfaits
  - Cucumber slices with cheese cubes
  - Frozen bananas dipped in yogurt
  - Orange wedges and multigrain cereal
  - Fruit smoothies
  - Hard boiled eggs and cucumber slices



**FUN IDEA:** Offer healthy food or food alternatives at birthdays and group celebrations. On their birthday, let children choose to act as the leader of the day, wear a birthday crown, be a special helper, choose a game for everyone to play or select background music for the group. For group celebrations, instead of feasting on snacks high in sugar, salt or fat, consider creating a vegetable and fruit mosaic, fruit and yogurt parfaits or mini whole grain muffins.



**TIP:** Encourage children (and their families) to pack a reusable water bottle each day.



**TIP:** Focus on the positive. Avoid using language like good and bad when describing different foods. Instead, talk about healthy foods that we should eat often, and other foods that we should only eat sometimes.