

Nutrition

Healthy Eating Tips for Children and the Whole Family

Healthy eating and physical activity help children grow, learn and build strong bones and muscles. As a parent or caregiver, you have a great opportunity to be a role model of positive behaviour and promote a healthy lifestyle.

Healthy food choices and regular physical activity may help children maintain a healthy weight and prevent health problems, including type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes usually develops in adulthood, but with the increasing numbers of overweight children and teens there have been more diagnosed with this chronic disease.

There are several benefits to eating well including:

- Good health
- More energy
- Healthy body weight
- Lower risk of disease
- Improved concentration
- Strong heart, muscles and bones

Healthy eating:

Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide suggests that everyone eat a wide variety of foods, including vegetables and fruit, whole grains, lower fat dairy products, and lean meats, beans or lentils daily. Eat healthy meals and snacks with your children and participate in fun activities together. Use the following tips to encourage healthy habits.

Good Nutrition Habits

Helping children learn about healthy eating and healthy choices can lead to a lifetime of good nutrition habits.

- Eat when you are physiologically hungry and stop when you are full
- Plan regular family meals – healthy eating habits begin at home
- Focus on small, gradual changes in eating to create healthy habits that will last a lifetime
- Encourage healthy, balanced eating and avoid diets (they are not sustainable)
- Enjoy a favourite high fat/sugar food occasionally, in limited portions
- Avoid using food as a reward or punishment
- Keep the TV off during meals and avoid snacking in front of the screen
- Talk to a Registered Dietitian if you are concerned about your eating habits or weight

Healthy eating tips for the whole family

- Start the day with a healthy breakfast
- Cook as a family (usually like to eat what you make)
- Have veggies, fruit or yogurt for snacks
- Choose water, lower fat milk (1 or 2%) instead of pop and other sugary drinks
- Choose whole fruit – it has more fibre. Limit 100% fruit juices to ½ cup (125 mL) per day
- Choose wisely when eating out – avoid meal deals and super-sizing
- Introduce one new food or a new vegetable each week
- Limit high-calorie snacks such as candy, chocolate and chips

Artificial Sweeteners and Sugar Intake

Diabetes Canada recommends Canadians limit intake of sugar sweetened beverages and drink water in its place. Another alternative to sugar sweetened beverages can be choosing products that use artificial sweeteners in place of sugars. These can also be used when wanting to substitute sugars in at home cooking and baking.

Each artificial sweetener available in Canada has an ADI, or acceptable daily intake level. Artificial sweeteners are safe if you drink/eat less than this amount. Women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy should avoid certain artificial sweeteners. For more information on Health Canada approved sweeteners and the ADI amounts, visit [Sugars & Sweeteners](#).

Limit the salt shaker

Healthy eating plays an important role in managing hypertension (high blood pressure). Choose a variety of foods and include more vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. It is also important to watch the salt in foods which is mainly composed of sodium.

Foods naturally contain small amounts of sodium, but most of the sodium in our diet is added during food processing. Canned and packaged foods are high in sodium because it is added to maintain safety and freshness. People with diabetes are recommended to reduce sodium intake towards 2,000 mg per day. One teaspoon of salt is equal to 2,300 mg of sodium.

Reading food labels is important! Ingredients are listed in order from most to least. This means the ingredient used in the greatest amount is listed first. Therefore, if sodium or salt appears near the top of the ingredient list, avoid that product.