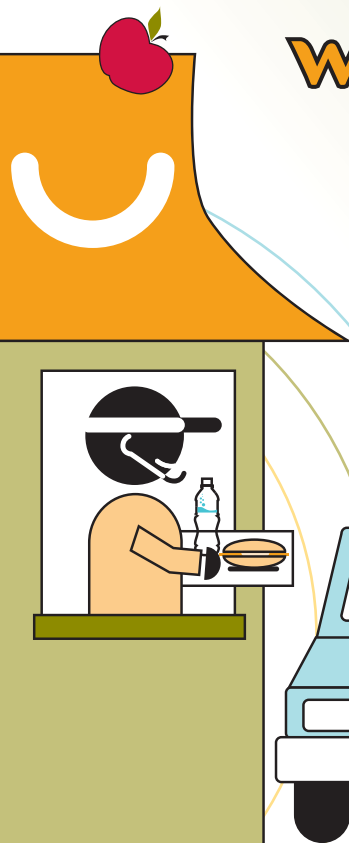




Healthy Eating for Youth with a Disability



Youth Ambassadors Across Canada

Active Living Alliance
for Canadians with
a Disability

The Youth Ambassador Advocacy Kit is designed to enable young Canadians to become more active—both physically and as advocates for change in their communities.

Book 1, *Accent on Active Living*, focuses on what we mean by *active living*. It tells you what this approach to life involves, and how you can benefit from learning more about it.

Book 2, *Advocacy in Action*, shows how you can contribute to your goal of an active lifestyle by learning how to change or remove the barriers to active living that might keep you from realizing your dreams.

Book 3, *Taking the Path: Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope*, helps you plan your life and reach your goals. Although this process is designed to help you become an advocate for active living, you can also use it to help you plan your career, your education, and the rest of your life's goals.

Book 4, *An Advocate's Agenda*, is your personal advocacy manual. It is designed to help you track the people you contact, the activities you pursue, and the results you achieve as you move through your active life.

Book 5, *Healthy Eating for Youth with a Disability*, is a supplement to the Youth Ambassadors Across Canada Kit. It is written to help youth with a disability learn about the importance of healthy eating and the difference it can make in their lives.

The Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability would like to thank the following for their contributions to the writing of this document:

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Production of these materials have been made possible through a financial contribution from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Youth Ambassador Advocacy Kit.
3rd Ed.

ISBN 978-1-895823-55-4

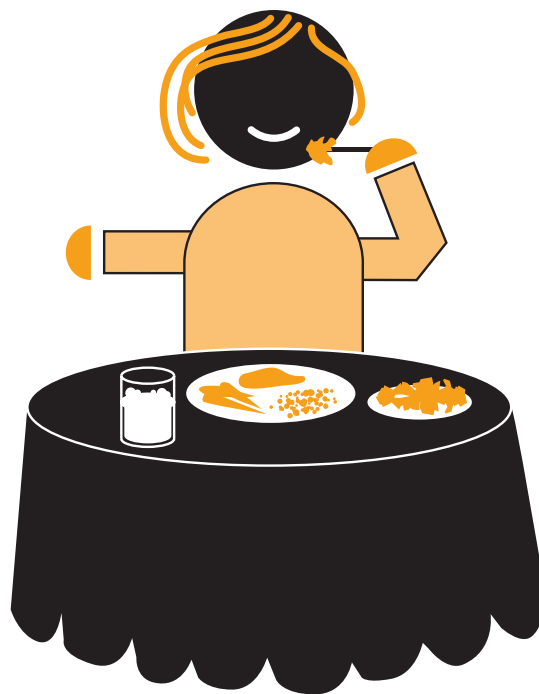
Printed: March 2009

Introduction

Welcome to ***Healthy Eating for Youth with a Disability***. Eating right is not always easy, but just like being physically active, getting adequate rest, managing stress and practising personal safety, it is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle.

So why do we not always eat like we should? There are many reasons, some relevant to all teens, others associated with disabilities. Hopefully, after learning about the importance of good nutrition, how to deal with some of the barriers to healthy eating and what makes up a good diet, you'll do what you can to make it a priority in your life.

Maintaining a healthy diet takes knowledge, planning and will power. Depending on your disability and your situation, you may need more information than offered here. If so, consult your doctor, a dietitian, an occupational therapist or someone else with expertise in nutrition and addressing disability-related barriers.



Why is healthy eating important?

What you eat affects how you feel, how you look and how you act. Healthy eating is important to your physical, mental and emotional well being. You really are what you eat.

A healthy diet provides you with the protein, vitamins, minerals and other nutrients essential for good health. It gives you the energy you need to get through your day. It can also help reduce your risk for future health problems such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, certain types of cancer and osteoporosis.

If you have a disability, it is also important to maintaining proper weight, healthy skin, and bladder and bowel regularity. Eating right can help you avoid some of the complications that come along with having a disability.

Making good decisions about what you eat is a critical part of a healthy lifestyle. Sometimes you might feel that you don't have the choice or control that you wish you did. Maybe other people do the shopping and prepare your meals. Taking an active part in these tasks and providing input to what and how you eat will put you in a position where you do have some control and do make decisions about what foods are available to you.



Why Start Now?

This is an important time in your life. Your body is growing fast. You're making more important decisions on your own. You're dealing with a lot of changes. By starting healthy eating habits now, you are setting yourself up to make them lifelong behaviours.

The truth is, what you eat might already be causing health problems for you. A study of teens with disabilities found that they eat more junk food and high-fat foods and less fresh fruits and vegetables than other teenagers do. They are also less physically active.

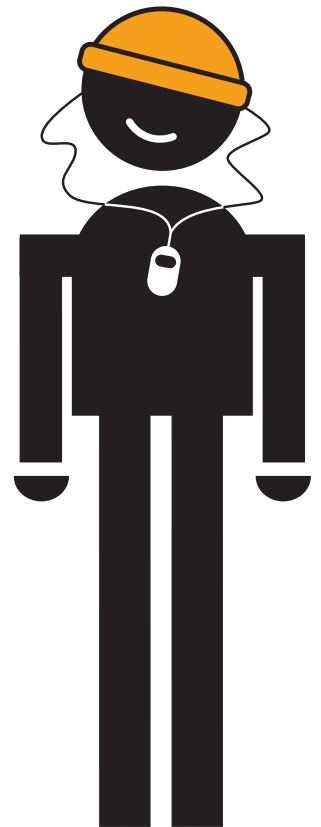
Healthy eating, along with regular physical activity, is the key to a healthy lifestyle — whether or not you have a disability. You are never too young (or too old) to start eating well.



Challenges to Healthy Eating

Challenges Faced by Young People

- **Growth spurt:** When you're growing quickly, it may seem that you are always hungry. To satisfy this hunger, stick to three regular meals a day and opt for healthy snacks in between instead of junk food. Make your snacks 'hold you over' until mealtime. After your growth spurt, make a conscious effort to cut back to more appropriate quantities to maintain a healthy weight for you.
- **Self image:** The way we look and feel — our weight, skin, hair, energy level — is very important to all of us. Being bombarded by images of beautiful, slim people in the media may make you self-conscious. However, fad diets and depriving yourself of food can be as unhealthy as overeating and indulging in junk food. What matters is that you are a healthy weight for your age and height. Eating controlled portions of good food and making physical activity part of your daily routine is the healthy, more effective way to achieve and maintain a healthy weight.
- **Healthy Skin:** While there is no such thing as a 'pimple-free' diet, keeping your skin clean and drinking plenty of fluids is very important to keeping it healthy. Remember that your body must be healthy for your skin to be healthy. In order to promote healthy skin, diets must have the proper amounts of vitamins and minerals. For more advice on controlling acne through diet, talk to your doctor or dietitian.
- **Routine/pace of life:** As your life gets busy, it can be harder to eat three healthy meals each day and easier to eat too much junk food. When you are on the run, make it healthy snacks that get you by until meal time. For example, pack a bag of cut-up veggies before you leave home.



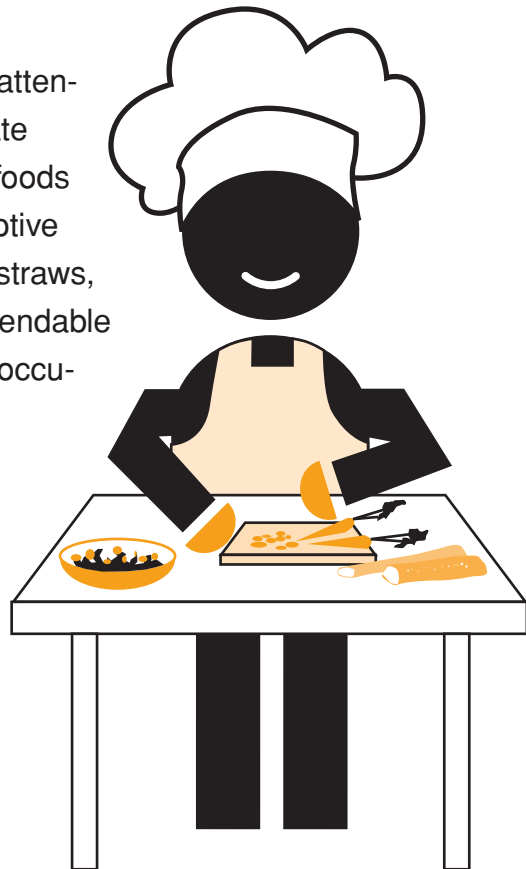
- **Fast food, take-out and eating out:** This is a great way to socialize and hang out with your friends. Unfortunately, it's also an easy way to miss balanced, healthy meals that are prepared at home. When eating at a restaurant, stick to healthy choices and appropriate portions. For example, ask for a salad or veggies on the side instead of fries, avoid deep fried meals and don't be afraid to ask about the ingredients in a meal to get a better idea of fat content.
- **Friends:** Sometimes hanging out with your friends can seem more important than sticking to a healthy diet. However, skipping meals is a very unhealthy pattern to get into. It deprives you of a regular supply of essential energy and essential nutrients, which in turn affects your health, mood, appearance and self-esteem. By practising good eating habits, you can teach your friends something and set an example for them to follow.
- **Independence:** As a teenager, it is very important to feel that you are in control of your own life. You may feel that 'it's my life, I'll eat what I want to eat'. Fair enough, but why not make your own decision to eat healthy foods? Eating right is another way that you can call the shots and establish your independence.



Challenges Faced by Young People with a Disability

In addition to issues faced by all teens, there are different ways your disability can affect what you can eat, how you eat and where you eat. But there are also ways of overcoming those difficulties.

- **Buying groceries:** This can be a real challenge, especially if you're using public transit. However, many grocery stores have shopping assistants to help you in the store and a delivery service to get your food home.
- **Making your own food:** If you have someone who helps make your meals, you can still provide input about what goes into your meals. Ask for a variety of foods from the four food groups (see next section) and have meals divided into smaller portions and frozen after they're made. Schedule your meal preparation for when you have the required energy. You can find many adaptive cooking and baking items, such as one-handed paring boards, rocker knives, bowl holders and jar lid removers at www.sammonspreston.com.
- **Eating on your own:** If you have a personal care attendant to help feed you, talk to them about appropriate portion sizes and how to balance your meals with foods from each food group. You can also find many adaptive equipment and kitchen gadgets, such as one-way straws, suction and scoop dishes, sandwich holders and bendable utensils, at www.sammonspreston.com. Talk to an occupational therapist about what might work for you.



- **Chewing and swallowing foods:** Cutting foods into smaller bite sizes might make them easier to chew. Substitute meats, raw vegetables and other very solid foods with fish, tenderized cooked vegetables or pureed alternatives.
- **Finding the time:** Sometimes the responsibilities and challenges of daily life make healthy eating a challenge for anyone. Your disability may make it even harder. With a bit of planning though, a healthy diet can be easy to fit into your busy lifestyle and in the end take no more time than unhealthy alternatives. For example, cook in bulk and freeze what you don't eat right away.
- **Dealing with altered metabolism:** Some medications or health conditions can change your appetite or affect your digestive system, making it difficult to maintain a healthy weight. Ask your doctor if there are alternative medications. While variety and balance in your diet are important, learn about what foods agree with your body and stick with those that work with your system.
- **Staying motivated:** Boredom, distress, depression or emotional conditions can make it difficult to keep motivated about eating properly and taking care of yourself. If you make healthy eating a priority and part of your routine, sticking to it will help you feel good about yourself when other things don't seem to be going your way. Don't relieve your tensions, frustrations and anxieties by eating. Be prepared with other alternatives such as reading, knitting, listening to music or a phone call to a friend. In a world where many things are beyond our control, we can control what we eat.



- **Living in communal or group homes:** If your meals are prepared in large quantities for you and others, you can still have some control over what you eat. Speak with the kitchen staff about your needs and concerns, offer to help plan and prepare meals, or make suggestions for healthier meals. Encourage the people who you live with to advocate for healthy food choices. Beyond this setting, be an advocate for healthy food choices in schools, recreation centres, restaurants and other places that you go to eat.
- **Communicating with others:** Your disability may make it difficult to communicate with others about your desire for healthy eating or to find information on healthy foods. Try to find someone else who shares your needs and interests to read nutritional labels on products, review your shopping list and find items in a grocery store. Plan and prepare your meals together.
- **Dietary restrictions:** There are now many different food products that cater to specific dietary restrictions — such as food allergies, food sensitivities; gluten free, casein free, lactose free/non-dairy, yeast free or sugar free diets. You may also avoid certain foods by choice, as a result of medical/health conditions or due to religious and/or social concerns. Talk with a doctor or dietitian for appropriate recommendations.
- **Cost:** You may well be on a limited budget, but a healthy diet does not have to cost a lot of money. If possible, shop in large supermarkets, which are generally cheaper than corner stores. When you get a chance, stock up on essential items. Check for sales in your grocery store's weekly flyer. Buy in bulk (larger packages) and go shopping with friends and split your groceries. Buy less expensive store brands or 'no-name' items. Compare costs using unit-prices (you'll find these posted on the shelves). Use coupons. Also, substitute some of your less healthy foods with nutritious alternatives — you'll find that you don't really spend any more. And remember, eating out costs way more than eating at home.



- **Isolation:** Bad weather, inaccessible transportation and long distances can make outings to get food more difficult. Stocking up on non-perishables and having others pick up fresh foods for you when they go shopping might be essential. Lack of contact with other people, or social isolation, can also result in unhealthy food choices and eating habits. It is up to you to take responsibility for what and how you eat.
- **Pressure sores:** With any disability affecting your mobility and requiring the use of a wheelchair, you must take extra precautions to prevent the formation of pressure sores. Consult your doctor or a dietitian to ensure that you have adequate amounts of protein, folic acid, zinc, vitamins A, B and C, and water to keep your skin healthy. Bring any sign of pressure sores to the attention of a doctor immediately.

For great tips, solutions and recipes specific to disability-related or choice-related needs — such as cystic fibrosis, diabetes, lactose intolerance, vegetarian, celiac disease, etc. — see

<http://kidshealth.org/kid/recipes/>.



What Should I Eat?

A variety and balance of foods is important to supply you with the carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals and water you need each day.

You Are What You Eat

So, how do you know which foods are good for you? Canada's Food Guide is a good place to start. It breaks food down into four groups: vegetables & fruit, grain products, milk & alternatives, and meat & alternatives. These groups ensure a variety and balance of essential nutrients.

Vegetables and Fruit

- Eat at least one dark green and one orange vegetable each day.
- Choose vegetable and fruit products with little or no added fat, sugar or salt.

Grain Products

- For increased fibre and mineral content, make at least half of your grain products whole grain each day.
- Choose grain products that are lower in fat, sugar or salt.

Milk and Alternatives

- Drink skim, 1% or 2% milk each day, or fortified soy/rice beverage if you do not drink milk.
- Select lower fat milk alternatives.



Meat and Alternatives

- Have meat alternatives such as beans, lentils and tofu often.
- Choose at least two Food Guide Servings of fish each week.
- Select lean meat and alternatives prepared with little or no added fat or salt.

Other

- Include a small amount of unsaturated fat each day, such as canola, olive and soybean oils. Limit butter, hard margarine, lard and shortening (high in saturated and trans fats).
- Drink water regularly to satisfy your thirst and stay hydrated without adding calories. Drink more water in hot weather or when you are very active.
- Limit foods and beverages high in calories, fat, sugar or salt.
- Get your nutrition from food first and foremost. Don't spend money on "dietary" supplements (multivitamins, echinacea blue green algae, etc.) that you may not need. Consult your physician, dietitian or pharmacist for information.



Plan Ahead

Planning your meals ahead will help you ensure healthier, and more cost effective, choices. It will also help put variety in your meals.

Be sure to eat:

- Breakfast every day.
- Three meals a day.
- One to three snacks a day
- Three food groups at each meal.
- Limited saturated and trans fats, salt and sugar.

You can use Canada's Food Guide to help you plan your meals. It suggests how many Food Guide Servings you need from each group every day. See www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php.

You can also use the Dietitians of Canada online menu planner,

Let's Make a Meal!, at

www.dietitians.ca/english/menuplanner/overview.html.

Remember, balance and variety are key!



Water, water...

Making sure your body has enough fluids (“hydration”) is important at any age, considering that your body is approximately 75% water. Fluids help to aid in digestion, maintain healthy skin and gums, remove waste products from the body in urine, prevent urinary tract problems, maintain bowel regularity and prevent thickening saliva. Generally, you should drink six to eight cups per day. You may need to drink more in the summer due to heat, when you’re more active, with some medications, and during times of fever, vomiting and diarrhea.

Carry a water bottle with you. Drink water, juice (but water them down as they contain lots of sugar), milk, milk beverages and nutritional supplements. Fresh fruits and vegetables, smoothies, low-sugar popsicles or jello and soup are also good sources of fluids. Minimize coffee, tea, pop, sugary and fizzy beverages and alcoholic drinks.



Why you may not be getting enough fluids...

Difficulty swallowing or fear of choking on thin liquids such as water or juice

Decreased hand or arm function causing difficulty opening containers, pouring liquids or lifting a glass to drink

Difficulty toileting, including managing clothing, transfers and requiring help

...and how to deal with it

Try thicker juices (tomato juice, nectar juices), Add thickeners to beverages (ask your dietitian about different products)

Try a two-handled cup

Try a straw or sippy cup

Have someone pre-pour beverages into your cup/beverage bottle

Explore solutions such as attendant care, personal hygiene products



Snacking

Snacking can be smart. It can keep you going between regular meals and ensure you get all your Food Guide servings. Having healthy snacks easily available will also decrease the temptation to eat junk food.

Try fresh or dried fruit and vegetables; fruit or vegetable juice; crackers, pita bread or bagels; peanut butter or humus or soft cheese; nuts, seeds or plain popcorn; and cereal and milk. Avoid snacks high in sugar, fat or salt such as soft drinks, potato chips, candy and chocolate bars.

What Goes In Must Come Out

If you have a physical disability and/or aren't active enough, you may have to deal with constipation. Not getting enough fluids or fibre and having to take certain medications may also lead to constipation.

Getting enough fibre in your diet can help prevent constipation. It will also help control your cholesterol and blood sugar and it may reduce the risk of certain cancers.

Unfortunately, most people only get about half the fibre they need each day! However, increasing your fibre intake is easy and tasty. Every day, eat a variety of legumes (beans, split peas, lentils), fruits, vegetables, oat bran, wheat bran, whole grain cereals and breads.

For the fibre to be effective, you should also get enough fluid (at least six to eight cups a day). In addition, eat at regular intervals (no skipping meals!) and get adequate activity (within your abilities). To avoid gas and abdominal pain, slowly increase your fibre intake over several weeks.

If you do become constipated and a high-fibre, high-fluid diet does not relieve it, try eating prunes occasionally. Prunes are a good source of fibre and they also contain a substance that is a natural laxative.

For more information, see

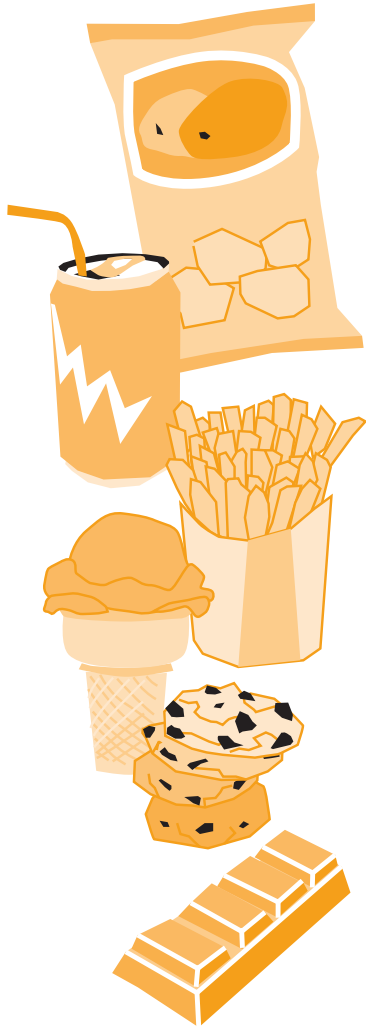
www.dialadietitian.org/resources/handouts/foodfibre_new.html.



There's a Reason It's Called Junk Food

Most teenagers eat junk food every day, often a few times a day, whether at a fast food restaurant or at home. Junk food is almost always higher in sugar and salt; lower in fibre, nutrients, vitamins and minerals; and served in larger portions.

By eating junk food regularly, you're more likely to put on weight, be low on energy, have poor concentration and be at an increased risk of health conditions (heart disease, high cholesterol, high blood pressure for example) than if you eat it only once in a while. The choice is yours.



Vegetarian Vitals

Many young people chose to take meat out of their diet. Dietitians of Canada agrees that appropriately planned vegetarian diets are healthful and nutritionally adequate, and can help in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases.

However, there is more to being a vegetarian than simply not eating meat. If you've decided to become a vegetarian, make sure you get proper substitutes in order to provide your body with the necessary protein, vitamins and minerals. You can still use Canada's Food Guide. Simply choose milk or fortified soy beverages as part of the Milk and Alternatives food group, and a variety of meat alternatives such as beans, lentils, eggs, tofu, soy-based meat substitutes, nuts, nut butters and seeds from the Meat and Alternatives food group. Also, eat more whole grains and a variety of fruits and vegetables.

You may want to consult a nutritionist or dietitian experienced in working with young people to ensure that you're still getting what you need from your vegetarian diet.

See www.dietitians.ca/public/content/eat_well_live_well



You Are How You Eat

Now that you know about nutritious foods, let's talk about how to maintain a healthy diet. How much food do you need? This depends on your body size, age and gender, and on how physically active you are.

Daily physical activity is an important factor in addressing your overweight and obesity concerns. If, however, you are not physically active (for whatever reason), eat the number of servings from the lower end of the Canada Food Guide recommended ranges.

If you do need to lose some weight, take a common sense approach and eat a variety from all food groups. You should also:

- Eat fewer “empty calories” (i.e. junk food, fast food,).
- Reduce your overall fat and salt intake.
- Eat smaller portion sizes and/or skip second helpings (be reasonable and ask yourself, “Am I still hungry?”).
- Eat three meals a day, including a nutritious, energizing breakfast.
- Consult your doctor or dietitian.

You may be tempted to ‘starve’ yourself or try a fad diet. While these approaches can result in weight loss, they are generally unsafe and unhealthy because you are probably not meeting your nutritional needs. This in turn can affect your health now and in the long term. In addition, you will probably put the weight back on.

For more information, see www.healthcastle.com/faddiets.shtml.

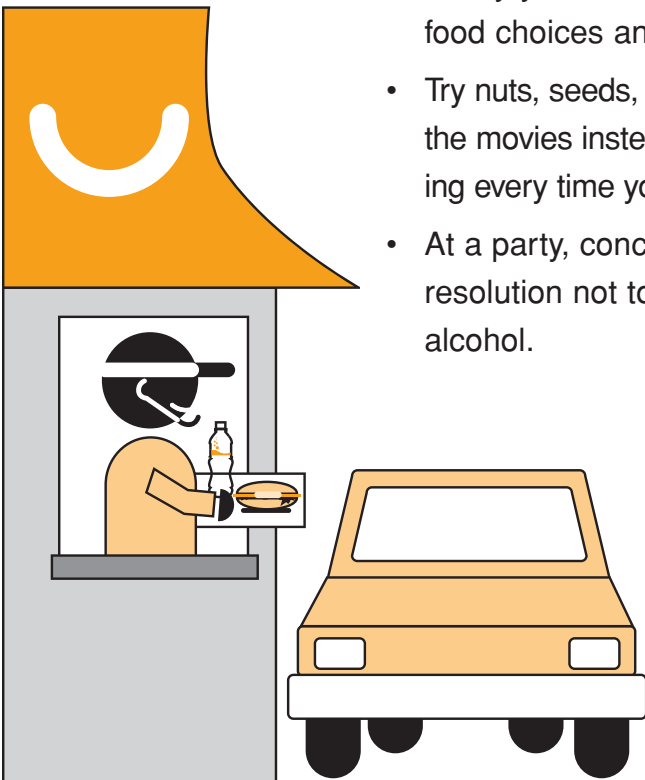


You Are Where You Eat

When you prepare your meals and eat at home, you have more control over what you eat and how it's made. When you eat somewhere else, however, you can still make healthy choices. Try to select restaurants that offer the nutritional choices you want and choose your meal wisely. If you have allergies or other food issues, call ahead to make sure the restaurant can accommodate your needs and bring a list of foods you cannot eat to provide to the chef.

Whether at a restaurant or fast food outlet, a cafeteria, at the movies or at a party, you still have healthy options:

- Ask your server about ingredients, cooking methods and portion sizes.
- Choose salads, lean meats, soup and vegetables.
- Choose food that has been steamed, broiled, boiled, roasted or baked instead of breaded, fried, deep-fried, sautéed or served with a sauce or gravy.
- Skip deserts or have some fruit to finish off your meal.
- Lobby your school cafeteria to include a range of low-price healthy food choices and to stock the vending machines with healthy foods.
- Try nuts, seeds, raisins, an apple or popcorn with no salt or butter at the movies instead of pop and candy. Better still, break the habit of eating every time you watch a movie or sit down in front of the television.
- At a party, concentrate on the company, not the food. Keep your resolution not to over-indulge. Drink water or juice instead of pop or alcohol.



Other Strategies for Healthy Eating

Use Your Leftovers

Throwing out food that is not eaten is food and money wasted, so cook once and eat twice!

- Combine leftover portions with other leftovers or newly cooked food to create new meals.
- Store in plastic or glass airtight containers. Label and date, and store them within two hours of cooking.
- Use only microwave containers for heating leftovers in the microwave. Do not use margarine or yogurt containers.

For more information, see

http://ottawa.ca/residents/health/living/nutrition/healthy_eating/on_budget_en.htm.

Tips for Smart Shopping

Check out the following ‘best buy’ suggestions for the different food groups.

Vegetables and Fruit

- Fresh local vegetables and fruits in season — freeze them for later
- Apples, oranges and potatoes in pre-packaged bags instead of individually
- ‘No name’ frozen and canned products or lower-priced brand name products



Grain Products

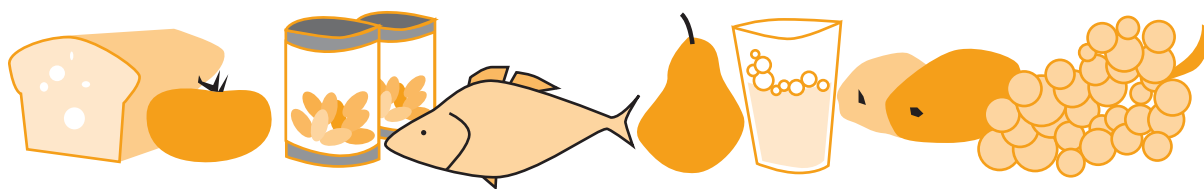
- Day-old whole grain breads and buns — freeze them for up to two months
- Cereals, pasta, rice, couscous and bulgur in bulk
- Pasta and long-grain rice without sauce or flavourings (which are more expensive and higher in salt, preservatives and fats)

Milk and Alternatives

- Skim milk powder
- Bagged milk — freeze and store
- Mild and medium cheese (cheaper than old cheese)
- Yogurt in large containers instead of more expensive single servings — freeze it for later

Meat and Alternatives

- Dried or canned beans, peas or lentils (high-fibre, low-fat)
- Whole chickens cut into serving-size pieces
- Frozen fish, especially smelts, haddock, orange roughy, ocean perch and Boston bluefish.
- Peanut butter, dried beans, eggs, tofu and tuna for cheaper sources of protein



Want to Know More?

- Registered dietitians can help you better understand your nutrition requirements and translate them into practical, everyday choices and eating strategies.
- Dietitians work closely with other professionals such as public health nurses, health promotion specialists and fitness leaders and other lifestyle practitioners. They can connect you with these people.
- Helpful websites include:
 - Dietitians of Canada at www.dietitians.ca
 - Healthy Eating Centre of the Canadian Health Network at www.canadian-health-network.ca
 - Canada Food Guide at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php
- Use cookbooks that give you healthy, low-cost recipes.
- Read the 'Nutrition Facts' on food cans and packages to understand what is in them.

