

Nurturing Healthy Eaters in Elementary Schools



Parents & Caregivers

decide what foods are available to pack.

School

decides when and where students eat.

Student

decides what and how much to eat from what's available.

Provide a Positive Eating Environment

- Ensure students have enough time to eat within the school's set meal and snack times.
- Limit distractions such as screen time.
- Talk with children in casual conversation. Save nutrition education for the classroom instead of at mealtimes.

Respect Natural Hunger & Fullness Cues

- Allow students to control their own intake – avoid telling them how much to eat or suggesting “one more bite.”
- Allow students to eat food in any order they choose – no need to finish one food before another.
- Trust and respect students when they say or signal they are full or still hungry.

Build Trust with Students & Families

- Respect that many factors influence what foods families provide and that children have different health needs.
- Allow students to eat food items sent from home unless the food relates to an allergy. Students need to trust that their caregivers can feed them properly and teachers need to trust this as well.
- Refer families to appropriate community resources and reliable nutrition information such as Telehealth Ontario (1-866-797-0000), Unlockfood.ca and Canada.ca/FoodGuide.

Healthy eating is more than the food you eat. It is also about where, when, why and how you eat.

Canada's Food Guide

Teach Nutrition in a Positive Way

- Focus on the benefits of fuelling the mind and body with a variety of food.
- Keep all messages positive. Avoid negative/fear-based statements like “that food is not healthy.”
- Create practical opportunities to learn about, see, smell, touch, grow, cook, and try a variety of food.
- Focus on behaviours, such as regular meals, sleep and physical activity to feel good, not for weight control or appearance.
- Avoid weighing students, using weight tables or charts, or calorie counting activities.
- When using food in classroom lessons or school activities, choose foods from Canada's Food Guide.
- Avoid using any food as a reward.

Promote Positive Body Image

- Be mindful of what you say and avoid sharing personal views about food, dieting and body weight.
- Teach about natural body diversity. Each person's body is different, and we should respect, accept and celebrate these differences!
- Teach students how to look at media messages and stereotypes critically. There is no ‘ideal’ body and all bodies are worthy.



Eating Should Be Enjoyable

The information in this article is based on Ellyn Satter's principles and guidelines (www.ellynsatterinstitute.org).

Adapted with permission from the Manitoba School Nutrition Action Group