

Menu Planning & Supportive Nutrition Environments in Child Care Settings

PRACTICAL GUIDE

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Ontario Dietitians in Public Health
Diététistes en santé publique de l'Ontario

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ODPH is the official voice of public health nutrition professionals in Ontario and represents registered dietitians working in the 36 public health units across the province. For more information, please visit our website at www.odph.ca/child-care-resources or contact us by e-mail at: info@odph.ca.

Project Managers

Laura Abbasi, RD, MHSc, Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit
Mélissa Cardinal, RD, Eastern Ontario Health Unit

Principal Authors

Mélissa Cardinal, RD, Eastern Ontario Health Unit
Lynne Giroux, RD, MPH, Eastern Ontario Health Unit
Judith Kitching, RD, MSc, Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services
Tracy McDonough, RD, MScA, Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington Public Health

Contributing Authors

Laura Abbasi, RD, MHSc, Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit
Julie Bates, Nutrition Student at University of Ottawa, Preceptorship at Eastern Ontario Health Unit
Ginette Blake, RD, Middlesex-London Health Unit
Sylvia Blay, RD, Chatham-Kent Health Unit
Erica Diamond, RD, Peterborough Public Health
Carolyn Froats-Emond, RD, Renfrew County and District Health Unit
Ellen Gregg, RD, MSc, Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services
Vanessa Hurley, RD, MHSc, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit
Rachel Morgan, RD, MPH, York Region Public Health

Reviewers

Marcia Dawes, RD, MPH, Region of Peel - Public Health

Marketa Graham, RD, MEd, Ottawa Public Health

Elaine McCarthy, Community Worker with Peterborough Public Health

Jennifer Yates, RD, Hamilton Public Health Services

Members of the Peel region Menus and Nutrition for Child Health Advisory Committee

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Editor

Alyson Beben, MA, BEd, OCT, Education and Curriculum Specialist, Region of Peel - Public Health

Designer

Natalie Laframboise, Laframboise Classique Designs

Translator

Chantal Sauvé

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SECTION 1: ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was created to help child care providers meet the food and drink requirements in the **Child Care and Early Years Act**, 2014 (section 42 of Ontario Regulation 137/15) for children one year of age or older. All meals, snacks and drinks offered must meet requirements set out in the following Health Canada documents:

- **Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide**
- **Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide - First Nations, Inuit and Métis**
- **Nutrition for Healthy Term Infants**

The information in this guide will help child care providers create supportive nutrition environments within their child care settings. The guide complements the **Ministry of Education's Child Care Centre Licensing Manual**, Section 5: Nutrition.

This practical guide does not include all requirements related to nutrition, such as posting of menus and bagged lunches. Child care providers should refer to the **Ministry of Education's Child Care Centre Licensing Manual** for additional requirements related to nutrition. This practical guide also does not address other legislative requirements that pertain to child care settings, such as the **Safe Drinking Water Act, 2002, Smoke-Free Ontario Act or the Highway Traffic Act**.

The scope of this guide does not include food safety or environmental health. Child care providers involved in any handling or serving of meals or snacks should complete the **Safe Food Handler Certification** every five years. For information on food safety requirements, child care providers should contact their **local public health unit**.

SECTION 2: MENU PLANNING

Children who are in child care for six hours or more per day should receive at least half of the recommended number of Food Guide Servings per day while in child care. Offering nutritious foods and creating a supportive nutrition environment helps children develop healthy eating habits for life.

Planning menus has many benefits including:

- better organization of time to purchase, plan and prepare meals;
- better management of food costs by minimizing waste;
- greater variety of foods offered which helps children become familiar with different foods; and,
- nutritionally-balanced meals and snacks.

A. Menu Cycle

A menu cycle is often built on a sequence of four to six weeks, and is the preferred menu format for licensed child care centres. Some child care settings use a seasonal cyclic menu; Fall/Winter and Spring/Summer. A seasonal cyclic menu allows cooks to offer foods that are in season locally, which can help reduce costs, promote variety and also link to nutrition education programming.

To help children learn about new foods, try these strategies:

- offer a variety of different foods from Canada's Food Guide;
- incorporate a variety of colours, shapes, temperatures, and textures to promote variety;
- serve new foods along with familiar foods; and,
- promote and support diversity by including dishes that reflect various cultures and traditions.

B. Number of Meals and Snacks

Children should be fed on a regular schedule with meals and snacks offered two and a half to three hours apart. The total number of meals and snacks offered will depend on the length of time a child attends child care. To meet the requirements of the **Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014**, it is recommended that children in attendance for less than six hours are provided with at least one snack. If they are in attendance at a meal time, they should be provided with a meal. Children in attendance for six to nine hours are provided with a meal and two snacks.

When a child is in attendance for more than nine hours, talk to the child’s parent or primary caregiver to determine if additional meals or snacks are required. Table 1 shows the number of food and beverage choices organized by Canada’s Food Guide (CFG) food group to include in meals and snacks, based on the number of hours in attendance.

Table 1. Number of food and beverage choices to offer, by food group, by hours in attendance

Number of hours in attendance	Number of Food and Beverage Choices to Offer		
	< 6 hours	< 6 hours AND present at meal time	6 to 9 hours
Meal and snack pattern	1 snack	1 meal	1 meal AND 2 snacks
Vegetables and Fruit	1	2	4
Grain Products	1	1	2
Milk and Alternatives		1	2
Meat and Alternatives		1	1

C. Meal and Snack Patterns

The meal and snack patterns below include the number of food and beverage choices to offer children.

Meal Patterns

Meals should include at least:

- 2 choices from the **Vegetables and Fruit** food group;
- 1 choice from the **Grain Products** food group;
- 1 choice from the **Milk and Alternatives** food group; and,
- 1 choice from the **Meat and Alternatives** food group.

Note: Canada's Food Guide recommends drinking milk each day. Offer age-appropriate milk or unsweetened fortified soy beverage at least once per day, at a meal or at a snack, for children in attendance six to nine hours.



For more variety, include one meal per week based on meat alternatives and one based on fish.

- Try meat alternatives such as beans, eggs, lentils and tofu. This could include vegetarian chili, egg sandwiches, hummus or bean dips or lentil soup.
- Consider fish choices such as salmon patties, tuna sandwiches or baked fish fillets.



Snack Patterns

Snacks should include at least one choice from two different food groups:

- 1 choice from the **Vegetables and Fruit** food group **at each snack**;
- 1 choice from the **Milk and Alternatives** food group at one of the snacks; and,
- 1 choice from the **Grain Products** food group at one of the snacks.

Children in attendance for six to nine hours should be provided with two snacks in addition to the meal. Here is an example of a snack pattern for children in attendance for six to nine hours (offer Snacks A or Snack B in any order):

Snack A includes at least:

- 1 choice from the **Vegetables and Fruit** food group, and
- 1 choice from the **Milk and Alternatives** food group.

Snack B includes at least:

- 1 choice from the **Vegetables and Fruit** food group, and
- 1 choice from the **Grain Products** food group.

Include at least one dark green vegetable and one orange vegetable or fruit each day at a meal or snack (see Table 2 for examples).

D. Support Tools

Use the *Weekly Menu Plan Templates* in Appendices A and B to help plan meals and snacks that meet the recommended patterns.

Use the **Menu and Nutrition Environment Self-Assessment Tool** available from the **ODPH Child Care Resources** website to assess your menu(s) to ensure they meet the food and drink requirements in the **Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014** (section 42 of Ontario Regulation 137/15) described in *Section 2: Menu Planning*.



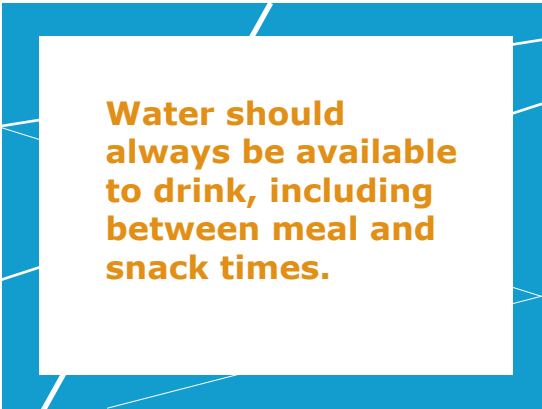
SECTION 3: FOOD AND BEVERAGE CHOICES

Young children need healthy foods and beverages to support their growth and development, and well-being. Canada's Food Guide defines a healthy eating pattern that includes nutrient needs and reduces the risk of chronic diseases. From one year of age, young children can be offered a variety of foods that generally follow Canada's Food Guide.

The eating pattern in Canada's Food Guide includes foods from the four food groups: **Vegetables and Fruit**, **Grain Products**, **Milk and Alternatives** and **Meat and Alternatives**, plus a small amount of added oils and fats.

Canada's Food Guide also provides additional guidance on how to choose healthy foods and beverages. These recommendations include the following:

- Eat at least one dark green and one orange vegetable or fruit each day.
- Make at least half of your grain products whole grain each day.
- Have meat alternatives such as beans, lentils and tofu often.
- Offer skim, 1% or 2% milk to children older than two years of age.
- Choose foods from each food group prepared with little or no added fat, sugar or salt.
- Offer water regularly to satisfy thirst. Offer more water in hot weather and when children are very active.



Water should always be available to drink, including between meal and snack times.

A. Food and Beverage Choices Tables

The *Food and Beverage Choices Tables* are found on the following pages. Foods are categorized based on their overall nutritional value. Table 2 presents foods and beverages to be served most often, Table 3 illustrates those to be served sometimes and Table 4 outlines foods and beverages that should not be served at all.

Note: Brand names of food and beverage products are not provided in the tables as ingredients often change without notice. Including brand names may also be misinterpreted as product or brand endorsement.

Always read food labels to check for whole grains, sugar and salt/sodium content as well as possible allergens. To learn more about reading labels, please refer to *Section 6: Reading Food Labels*.

Note: Food and beverage choices in the tables below do not address special dietary requirements that parents may request.

Legend:




-  Fish that contain higher levels of mercury. For more information, visit Health Canada's [Mercury In Fish](#) webpage.
-  Foods that are choking hazards. Do not serve these foods to children under four years of age.
-  Foods that may contain bacteria which can cause food poisoning.

Table 2: Serve Most Often Food and Beverage Choices

Serve Most Often

These food and beverage choices are from Canada’s Food Guide and naturally contain, or are prepared with, little or no added fat, sugar or salt/sodium.

Offer these foods and beverages at most meals and snacks.


Vegetables and Fruit	Grain Products	Milk and Alternatives	Meat and Alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh vegetables and fruits • Frozen vegetables and fruit with no added sugar, sodium or sauce • Unsweetened fruit sauce or fruit blends • Canned fruit in juice, drained • Canned vegetables, rinsed and drained • Potatoes, boiled, baked or mashed • Canned tomatoes (140 mg or less of sodium per reference amount) • Tomato sauce made on-site using Serve Most Often ingredients • Tomato sauce (140 mg or less of sodium per reference amount) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Whole grain, whole wheat or bran is first on ingredient list; AND, ✓ sugar 8 g or less per 30 g serving; AND, ✓ sodium 240 mg or less per 30 g serving; AND, ✓ the food does not contain any Do Not Serve ingredients. <p>Grain-Based Snacks and Baked Goods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some whole grain or bran muffins, loaves • Some oatmeal cookies • Some granola or cereal-type bars • Popcorn (air popped, unsalted, unflavoured)  • Some rice cakes • Some whole grain crackers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plain whole 3.25% M.F. cow’s milk or whole milk powder for children between 9 months and 2 years of age • Plain skim, 1%, 2% M.F. cow’s milk for children over 2 years of age • Skim milk or partly-skimmed milk powder for children over 2 years of age • Canned, evaporated milk (2% M.F. or non-fat, used in cooking and baking) • Buttermilk, used in cooking and baking • Unsweetened, fortified soy beverages, for children over 2 years of age • Plain and flavoured yogurt, soy yogurt and kefir (greater than 2% M.F. for children 2 years and under) • Yogurt tubes 	<p>Meat and Fish</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plain chicken, turkey, lamb, lean beef, pork • Extra lean and lean ground meat and poultry (e.g., beef, turkey, chicken, pork, lamb) • Traditional meats and wild game from federally inspected sources • Fresh, frozen, or canned fish low in mercury (e.g., cod, sole, haddock, salmon, tilapia, trout, canned light tuna, whitefish)

Table 2: Serve Most Often Food and Beverage Choices Continued

Vegetables and Fruit	Grain Products	Milk and Alternatives	Meat and Alternatives
<p>Dark green vegetables include: asparagus, green beans, bok choy, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, edamame, fiddleheads, endive, kale/collards, leeks, lettuce (romaine), mesclun mix, mustard greens, okra, peas, green peppers, seaweed, snow peas, spinach, Swiss chard, zucchini</p> <p>Orange vegetables and fruit include: carrots, pumpkin, squash, sweet potatoes, yams, apricots, cantaloupe, mangoes, nectarines, papaya, peaches</p>	<p>Bread, Pasta, Rice and Cereals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grain or 100% whole wheat breads, buns, bagels, rolls, English muffins, pitas tortilla, flatbreads, roti, naan bannock • Whole grain or 100% whole wheat pizza crust or dough • Whole grain or 100% whole wheat pancakes or waffle • Whole grains (e.g., quinoa, oats, bulgur, buckwheat, couscous, corn, cornmeal) • Brown rice, wild rice • Whole grain or 100% whole wheat pasta • Polenta • Plain oatmeal • Some breakfast cereals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard and soft, non-processed, pasteurized cheese: cheddar, mozzarella, brick, Monterey Jack, Havarti, Gouda, Swiss, feta, ricotta, cottage cheese, string cheese, cheese curds 	<p>Meat Alternatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grated eggs • Plain liquid egg product • Nut, legume and seed butters, including peanut, almond, walnut, sesame, sunflower, pea and soy butters • Whole nuts and seeds (plain, unsalted) 0-4 • Chopped/finely ground nut and seeds (plain, unsalted) • Cooked lentils, chickpeas or dried beans • Canned beans, lentils, chickpeas, drained and rinsed • Hummus • Tofu, tempeh, plain textured vegetable protein • Veggie burgers and veggie meatballs made on-site

Table 3: Serve Sometimes Food and Beverage Choices

Serve Sometimes

These food and beverage choices tend to have higher amounts of added fat, sugar, or salt/sodium compared to foods and beverages in the Serve Most Often category.

Offer these foods and beverages three times per week or less.

Vegetables and Fruit	Grain Products	Milk and Alternatives	Meat and Alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canned or jarred tomato sauces • Canned tomatoes (more than 140 mg of sodium per reference amount) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Whole grain, whole wheat or bran is not the first on ingredient list; AND, ✓ sugar 8 g or less per 30 g serving; AND, ✓ sodium 240 mg or less per 30 g serving; AND, ✓ the food does not contain any Do Not Serve ingredients. <p>Grain-Based Snacks and Baked Goods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some granola or cereal-type bars • Some cookies, quick breads, muffins, scones and biscuits • Some crackers <p>Bread, Pasta, Rice and Cereals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enriched flour or multigrain bread, bagel, buns, rolls, English muffins, pita, tortillas, flatbreads roti, naan, bannock • Some flavoured breads and bagels • Plain white pizza crust or dough • Plain white rice (converted, parboiled), instant rice • Plain white pasta • Rice noodles • Some breakfast cereals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drinkable yogurt 	<p>Meat and Fish</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frozen prepared meatballs (store-bought) <p>Meat Alternatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imitation ground meat • Prepared veggie burgers and meatballs (store-bought)

Table 4: Do Not Serve Food And Beverage Choices

Do Not Serve

These foods and beverages contain few or no essential nutrients, or contain a lot of added salt/sodium, sugar or unhealthy fats. Some are choking hazards or not recommended for food safety concerns.

Do not offer these foods and beverages.








Vegetables and Fruit	Grain Products	Milk and Alternatives	Meat and Alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% fruit and/or vegetable juice • Sweetened fruit juice • Unpasteurized juice  • Canned fruit in juice not drained • Canned fruit in light or heavy syrup • Canned fruit containing artificial sweeteners • Pre-packaged vegetables or fruit in sauce • Sweetened fruit sauce or fruit blends • Dried fruit (unless  used in baking or as part of a recipe) • Vegetable and fruit chips (e.g., potato, carrot, banana) • Pre-packaged potato products (e.g., French fries, hash browns) • Battered vegetables or fruit • Deep fried or par-fried vegetables or fruit (e.g., fried zucchini) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Whole grain, whole wheat or bran is not first on ingredient list; AND, ✓ sugar more than 8 g per 30 g serving OR; ✓ sodium more than 240 mg per 30 g serving OR; ✓ the food contains Do Not Serve ingredients. <p>Grain-Based Snacks and Baked Goods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some cookies, squares • Baked goods with chocolate, caramel or candy pieces • Dipped granola or cereal-type bars • Bagged or microwaveable flavoured popcorn • Any popcorn for children under 4 years of age  • Some crackers • Pretzels • Tortilla/corn chips and chip-like snack food • Seasoned mini rice cakes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skim, 1%, 2% M.F. cow's milk to children under 2 years of age • Flavoured skim, 1%, 2% M.F. milk (e.g., chocolate, strawberry, vanilla) • Flavoured, fortified soy beverage • Milkshakes • Eggnog • Hot chocolate • Homemade, instant or pre-packaged puddings • Unpasteurized milk and milk products  • Soy beverage for children under 2 years of age • Plant-based beverages (e.g., coconut, rice, almond, cashew, hemp, potato) • Yogurt with any Do Not Serve ingredients or artificial sweeteners • Fat-free yogurt is not recommended for any children 	<p>Meat and Fish</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raw or undercooked meat or poultry, seafood or shellfish  • Store-bought breaded or battered fried chicken, other meat or fish • Frozen, prepared hamburger patties • Deli meats (e.g., bologna, salami, macaroni and cheese loaf, summer sausage, deli roast beef, turkey and chicken) • Ham, fresh or canned • Prepared/cured meats (e.g., hot dogs, sausages, pepperoni sticks)  • Bacon, bacon bits • Wings, ribs • Rotisserie-style chicken (store-bought) • Frozen and prepared meat pies • Fresh, frozen or canned fish high in mercury (e.g., canned albacore tuna) 

Table 4: Do Not Serve Food And Beverage Choices Continued

Do Not Serve

These foods and beverages contain few or no essential nutrients, or contain a lot of added salt/sodium, sugar or unhealthy fats. Some are choking hazards or not recommended for food safety concerns.

Do not offer these foods and beverages.











Vegetables and Fruit	Grain Products	Milk and Alternatives	Meat and Alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jellied desserts that contain fruit Fruit snacks (e.g., gummies, fruit rolls, fruit leather) including those made with juice or fruit purée  Store-bought deli salads  Raw sprouts (e.g., alfalfa sprouts, bean sprouts, clover, radish and mung beans)  	<p>Bread, Pasta, Rice and Cereals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some flavoured breads and bagels Iced or sugar-coated breads Flavoured, pre-packaged grains, rice, pasta (e.g., garlic, herb, chicken, vegetable) Flavoured oatmeal Some breakfast cereals including those with chocolate, candies, marshmallows or sugar-coated pieces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iced dairy desserts (e.g., ice cream, ice cream bars, ice cream cakes and ice cream sandwiches, frozen yogurt) Unpasteurized cheese  Processed cheese products (e.g., cheese slices, cheese spread) Fat-free cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smoked fish  Fish with bones  Cured fish <p>Meat Alternatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flavoured liquid egg product Unpasteurized egg products  Raw or lightly cooked eggs Nut, legume or seed butters that have added flavours or coatings (e.g., chocolate, honey, berry) Whole nuts or seeds larger than sesame seeds (cooked, raw or as an ingredient)  Chunky peanut or nut butter  Canned baked beans with pork, molasses or maple syrup Canned baked beans in tomato sauce Breaded and fried meat alternatives Frozen and prepared tacos/burritos

Table 4: Do Not Serve Food And Beverage Choices Continued

Other Foods

These foods and beverages contain few or no essential nutrients, or contain a lot of added salt/sodium, sugar or unhealthy fats. Some are choking hazards or not recommended for food safety concerns.

Do not offer these foods and beverages.

<p>Beverages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy drinks or sports drinks • Protein drinks • Caffeinated drinks • Fruit-flavoured drinks (e.g., fruit beverages, punches, cocktails) • Flavoured, mineral, carbonated or fortified waters 	<p>Other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cough drops  • Snacks using toothpicks or skewers  • Honey to children under one year  	<p>Other Food:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cakes, cupcakes • Candy (e.g., yogurt-covered candy, gummies, licorice)  • Chocolate bars (including energy and protein bars) • Chocolate chips, cocoa nibs • Coconut and palm oils • Cotton candy • Frozen treats (e.g., freezies, ice pops, slushies, frozen juice snacks) • Glazes and icing • Gum  • Hard margarines • Jelly desserts • Lard or shortening • Marshmallows  • Pre-packaged toddler meals • Simulated meat strips, imitation (soy) bacon bits • Sweetened spreads (e.g., caramel, cinnamon, chocolate, chocolate-nut) • Toaster pastries, pies, pastries, croissants, donuts • Vegetarian wieners, sausages, bacon
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B. Condiments, Sauces and Dips

Use minor ingredients in limited amounts [1 teaspoon (5 mL) to 1 tablespoon (15 mL)], and serve them on the side when possible. They **do not** count towards a food group choice. Minor ingredients include:

- condiments (e.g., ketchup, relish, mustard, salsa, soy sauce, cream cheese);
- dried fruit, including raisins (only in baking or as part of a recipe);
- toppings and extras (e.g., shredded coconut, olives, pickles, Parmesan cheese);
- gravies, sauces;
- store-bought dips (e.g., baba ganoush, spinach dip, tzatziki, sour cream);
- fats and oils (e.g., oil used for cooking, salad dressings, mayonnaise, non-hydrogenated margarine, butter, seal and whale oil, ooligan grease); and,
- honey (for children over one year of age), jam, jelly, syrup.

C. Choking Hazards

You can make some foods safer for children under four years of age by:

- chopping foods with fibrous or stringy textures finely (e.g., celery, pineapple);
- chopping nuts and seeds that are larger than sesame seeds;
- grating or thinly slicing raw vegetables or hard fruit;
- spreading nut or seed butters **thinly** on crackers or toast (not soft bread);
- cutting grapes, grape tomatoes and baby carrots into quarters or lengthwise; and,
- serving boneless fish or remove bones from fish before serving.



D. Support Tools

Use the **Menu and Nutrition Environment Self-Assessment Tool** available from the [ODPH Child Care Resources](#) website to assess your menu(s) to ensure they meet the food and drink requirements in the **Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014** (section 42 of Ontario Regulation 137/15) described in *Section 3: Food and Beverage Choices*.

SECTION 4: PORTION SIZES

Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide provides recommendations regarding the number of Food Guide Servings (FGS) a person should eat each day according to their age. A FGS is not the same as a portion. In child care settings, a portion is the amount of food offered at a meal or snack and may be more or less than a FGS. Recommended portion size ranges for children are based on FGS sizes and vary according to age as shown in Table 5: Recommended Portion Sizes by Age Group.

A. Portion Sizes to Offer at Meals and Snacks

Since young children have small stomachs, they need to eat small portions of food throughout the day. As children grow, the amount of food they eat will increase. The portion sizes to offer children by age group are based on FGS sizes and are presented in Table 5. For a detailed description of food and beverage portion sizes by food group and by age group (12 to 24 months, 2 to 5 years) see Table 6.

Children's appetites vary from meal to meal and from day to day. Children need different amounts of food depending on age, activity level, stage of growth and appetite. Illness or fatigue may also affect the amount of

food a child will eat. Child care providers should start by offering the portion size at the lower end of the range for younger children. Older children will be more likely to eat amounts at the higher end of the portion range. If a child is still hungry, let them have more food.

Tip: Create a positive meal time by providing a family-style meal service where children make their own food choices with assistance from supervising adults.



Child care providers should respect the children’s appetites. It is the child care provider’s role to recognize and respond to the child’s hunger and fullness cues in an appropriate manner:

- The child care provider decides **when, where** and **what** food is offered.
- The child decides **which foods to eat** from the foods offered, and **how much to eat**.

Table 5: Recommended Portion Sizes by Age Group

Age Group	Portion Size
12 to 24 months	¼ to ½ FGS
2 to 5 years	½ to 1 FGS
6 to 12 years	1 FGS



Table 6: Food & Beverage Portion Sizes by Food Group & by Age Group (12 to 24 Months & 2 to 5 Years)







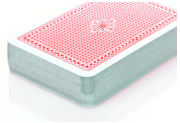


Food Choices (Examples)	Portion Sizes (FGS Size) by Age Group		Visuals
	12 to 24 months 1 portion (¼ to ½ FGS)	Ages 2 to 5 years 1 portion (½ to 1 FGS)	
Vegetables and Fruit			
Fresh or frozen vegetables or fruit, diced or sliced	30 to 60 mL = 2 Tbsp to ¼ cup	60 to 125 mL = ¼ to ½ cup	 = ½ cup of vegetable or fruit = 1 whole fruit
Cooked vegetables, diced or sliced	30 to 60 mL = 2 Tbsp to ¼ cup	60 to 125 mL = ¼ to ½ cup	
Canned fruits, diced or sliced (fruit salad)	30 to 60 mL = 2 Tbsp to ¼ cup	60 to 125 mL = ¼ to ½ cup	 = 1 cup of raw leafy vegetables
Whole fruit (orange)	¼ to ½ fruit	½ to 1 fruit	
Raw leafy vegetables (romaine lettuce)	60 to 125 mL = ¼ to ½ cup	125 to 250 mL = ½ to 1 cup	
Grain Products			
Bread	¼ to ½ slice	½ to 1 slice	 = 1 waffle/pancake/slice
Bagel, pita, tortilla, roti, whole grain muffins	9 to 18 g = ⅛ to ¼ of a bagel/pita/tortilla = ⅛ to ¼ muffin	18 to 35 g = ¼ to ½ of a bagel/pita/tortilla = ¼ to ½ muffin	
Pancake, waffle (1 small = 10 cm/4.5"/35 g)	¼ to ½ small	½ to 1 small	
Cooked pasta, rice, quinoa, couscous, polenta	30 to 60 mL = 2 Tbsp to ¼ cup	60 to 125 mL = ¼ to ½ cup	 = ½ cup of cereal = ½ cup of cooked pasta, rice, quinoa, etc.
Cold cereal	7 to 15 g = ¼ to ½ cup	15 to 30 g = ½ to 1 cup	
Cooked cereal (oatmeal)	60 to 85 mL = ¼ to ⅓ cup	85 to 175 mL = ⅓ to ¾ cup	
Crackers	7 to 15 g	15 to 30 g	

Table 6: Food & Beverage Portion Sizes by Food Group & by Age Group (12 to 24 Months & 2 to 5 Years) Continued

Food Choices (Examples)	Portion Sizes (FGS Size) by Age Group		Visuals
	12 to 24 months 1 portion (¼ to ½ FGS)	Ages 2 to 5 years 1 portion (½ to 1 FGS)	
Milk and Alternatives			
Cow's milk ^a	60 to 125 mL = ¼ to ½ cup	125 to 250 mL = ½ to 1 cup	 = 50 g / 1 ½ oz of cheese  = ¾ cup of yogurt
Unsweetened fortified soy beverage ^a	N/A	125 to 250 mL = ½ to 1 cup	
Block cheese (cheddar, feta), paneer	15 to 30 g = ½ to 1 oz	30 to 50 g = 1 to 1 ½ oz	
Yogurt (plain or fruit flavoured)	60 to 85 mL/g = ¼ to 1/3 cup	85 to 175 mL/g = 1/3 to ¾ cup	
Cottage cheese ^b	30 to 60 mL = 2 Tbsp to ¼ cup	60 to 125 mL = ¼ to ½ cup	
Meat and Alternatives			
Cooked poultry, fish, lean meat	20 to 40 g = 30 to 60 mL = ½ to 1 ¼ oz	40 to 75 g = 60 to 125 mL = 1 ¼ to 2 ½ oz	 = 2 ½ oz of meat, poultry, or fish  = 2 Tbsp of nuts and seeds, and nut butter  = ¾ cup of tofu
Eggs	½ to 1 egg	1 to 2 eggs	
Legumes (beans, lentils), hummus	45 to 85 mL = 3 Tbsp to 1/3 cup	85 to 175 mL = 1/3 to ¾ cup	
Tofu	40 to 75 g = 45 to 85 mL = 3 Tbsp to 1/3 cup	75 to 150 g = 85 to 175 mL = 1/3 to ¾ cup	
Peanut and nut butters, soy butter	5 to 15 mL = 1 tsp to 1 Tbsp	15 to 30 mL = 1 to 2 Tbsp	
Nuts and seeds ^c	N/A	30 to 60 mL = 2 Tbsp to ¼ cup	
^a Limit these beverages to 1 cup (250 mL) at any meal or snack to prevent young children from filling up on milk or fortified soy beverages. Offer whole cow's milk (3.25% M.F.) to children younger than 2 years of age. ^b For cottage cheese, portions may be limited to one half (½) of a FGS size. ^c Nuts and seeds can cause choking in children younger than 4 years of age and may only be offered with special preparation.			

Note: The portion size for the six to twelve years of age group is one FGS. For examples of one FGS, refer to the higher end of the portion size range in the 'Ages 2 to 5 years' column in Table 6. If children are still hungry, let them have more or add a third food from another food group to your snack. Remember to respect children's appetites by letting them decide how much to eat.

B. Amount of Food to Prepare

The lower end of the portion size range can be used to determine (or forecast) the quantity of food to prepare or have on hand, by age group. It is important to make sure that there is always enough food so that children's appetites are satisfied.

To determine the amount of food to prepare:

1. Multiply the number of children in the age group by the portion size at the lower end of the range for the respective age group.
2. To account for variability in children's appetites and food loss (e.g., spillage), multiply the number you obtain in Step 1 by 1.5* to prepare 50% more food. Using bread as an example, Table 7 outlines how to determine the amount of food to have on hand.
3. Regularly monitor the amounts children are eating and food waste to adjust the amount of food to prepare.

* This is only a guideline to help estimate the amount of food to prepare.

Remember that a child should not be offered more than 250 mL (1 FGS) fluid milk or unsweetened fortified soy beverage at a meal or snack.

Table 7: Example - Determining the Amount of Whole Grain Bread to Have on Hand for a Meal or Snack

Age Group	Number of children	Lower end of portion size range	Portion size, in units (decimals, mL or grams)	Number of children x portion size = amount of food to prepare	Allowance for variety of appetite and loss (50% more)	Amount of food to have on hand
12 to 24 months	10	¼ FGS	0.25 (¼) slice	2.5 slices	x 1.5	3.75 (4) slices
2 to 5 years	20	½ FGS	0.5 (½) slice	10 slices	x 1.5	15 slices
Total amount for all age groups						19 slices

C. Support Tools

Use the **Menu and Nutrition Environment Self-Assessment Tool** available from the [ODPH Child Care Resources](#) website to help you assess your menu(s) to ensure they meet requirements regarding food and drink in the **Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014** (section 42 of Ontario Regulation 137/15) described in *Section 4: Portion Sizes* of this document.



SECTION 5: FOOD CHOICES IN MIXED DISHES OR RECIPES

A. Identify the Number of Food Choices in a Mixed Dish

Mixed dishes such as pasta, sandwiches, stir-fries, pilafs, casseroles, soups and side dishes may contain food choices from more than one food group. If a major ingredient in a mixed dish fits within one of Canada's Food Guide food groups, it should count towards a child's food and beverage choices. If ingredients are used in limited amounts, as defined on page 18 under the heading 'Condiments, Sauces and Dips', they are not considered food choices.

Identify the number of food choices in a mixed dish:

1. Identify the major ingredients in the recipe.
2. Identify which food group each major ingredient belongs to (See Table 8).

Mixed dishes must not contain any Do Not Serve ingredients.

B. Support Tools

Use the Recipe Analyzer tool designed by Dietitians of Canada to calculate the number of Food Guide Servings (FGS) that your recipe provides, by serving. The Recipe Analyzer can be accessed on the top banner at: www.eaTracker.ca.

How to use the Recipe Analyzer

- Enter the number of servings the recipe provides.
- Click on 'Add Ingredient'.
- Search each major ingredient (and enter the appropriate quantity).
- When all the ingredients have been entered, click on 'Analyze Recipe' to find the number of FGS from each food group.

Table 8: Major Ingredients in Lasagna

Major Ingredients	Food Group
Tomato sauce, made on-site	Vegetables and Fruit
Chopped spinach	Vegetables and Fruit
Whole grain lasagna pasta	Grain Products
Mozzarella cheese	Milk and Alternatives
Lean ground beef	Meat and Alternatives

Comparing a serving size of your mixed dish with the recommended portion sizes

For each food group in your mixed dish, compare the number of FGS per serving of your mixed dish to the portion size by age group outlined in Table 6. If the mixed dish does not provide the lower end of the portion size range for the age group, the recipe may be modified to include more food from that food group, or another food could be added to the menu to make up for the missing amount.



Analyzing grain-based snacks and baked goods made on-site

Some child care settings choose to prepare grain-based snacks and healthier baked goods on-site. To count as a portion of a grain-based snack, the portion offered needs to be the same as the lower end of the portion size range per age group as outlined in Table 6. The Recipe Analyzer tool can be used to calculate the amount of sugar and salt/sodium in a portion of the recipe, as well as the number of FGS from each food group. After entering the main ingredients of the recipe, compare the amounts of sugar and salt/sodium to the criteria outlined in *Section 3: Food and Beverage Choices*. For each food group, compare the number of FGS to the portion size by age group outlined in Table 6. Recipes may need to be altered to ensure they fit within the nutrient criteria. (The criteria are based on a 30 g serving size.)

SECTION 6: READING FOOD LABELS

Food labels are found on pre-packaged foods. They include the Nutrition Facts table and ingredient list. Use the information found there to choose which foods to offer most often.

A. Reading the Nutrition Facts Table

The Nutrition Facts table provides you with information on nutrients for the serving size shown.

1. Start by looking at the serving size listed in the Nutrition Facts table. It may be different than the amount of food offered in your child care setting. If the serving size is different, multiply or divide the nutrient listed in the Nutrition Facts table to ensure you are comparing two similar serving sizes. For example, if the serving size for crackers is 15 g and you offer 30 g, you need to double the amount of nutrients in the Nutrition Facts table.
2. Compare the amount of sugar and salt/sodium in each serving to what is listed for that food item in *Section 3: Food and Beverage Choices* to determine if it is a **Serve Most Often**, a **Serve Sometimes** or a **Do Not Serve** food item.

Table 9: Information on the Nutrition Facts Table

Nutrition Facts	
Valeur Nutritive	
per 6 crackers 30g/par 6 craqueins (30 g)	
Amount	%Daily Value
Teneur	%valeur quotidienne
Calories / Calories 110	
Fat / Lipides 2 g	3%
Saturated / satures 0 g	0%
+ Trans / trans 0 g	
Cholesterol / Cholesterol 0 mg	0%
Sodium / Sodium 150 mg	6%
Carbohydrate / Glucides 20 g	7%
Fibre / Fibres 2 g	8%
Sugars / Sucres 1 g	
Protein / Proteines 1 g	
Vitamin A / Vitamine A	0%
Vitamin C / Vitamine C	0%
Calcium / Calcium	0%
Iron / Fer	2%

Reference amount

Grain products should have **less than or equal to 240 mg** of sodium per 30 grams.

and **less than or equal to 8 g** of sugar per 30 g serving.

Example - Using the Nutrition Facts Tables to Determine the Category in which the Crackers Belong

Crackers are a grain-based snack from the **Grain Products** food group. For crackers to fit under the **Serve Most Often** category, nutrient criteria related to the Nutrition Facts table are:

- sugar 8 g or less per 30 g serving, and
- salt/sodium 240 mg or less per 30 g serving.

CRACKER A

Nutrition Facts	
Valeur Nutritive	
per 6 crackers 30g/par 6 craqueins (30 g)	
Amount Teneur	%Daily Value %valeur quotidienne
Calories / Calories 110	
Fat / Lipides 2 g	3%
Saturated / satures 0 g + Trans / trans 0 g	0%
Cholesterol / Cholesterol 0 mg	0%
Sodium / Sodium 150 mg	6%
Carbohydrate / Glucides 20 g	7%
Fibre / Fibres 2 g	8%
Sugars / Sucres 1 g	
Protein / Proteines 1 g	
Vitamin A / Vitamine A	0%
Vitamin C / Vitamine C	0%
Calcium / Calcium	0%
Iron / Fer	2%

This is a **Serve Most Often** choice because it has less than 240 mg sodium (150 mg) and less than 8 g sugars (1 g).

CRACKER B

Nutrition Facts	
Valeur Nutritive	
Per 9 crackers 30g/par 9 craqueins (30 g)	
Amount Teneur	%Daily Value %valeur quotidienne
Calories / Calories 90	
Fat / Lipides 4.5 g	7%
Saturated / satures 2.5 g + Trans / trans 0 g	13%
Cholesterol / Cholesterol 0 mg	0%
Sodium / Sodium 280 mg	12%
Carbohydrate / Glucides 12 g	4%
Fibre / Fibres 1 g	4%
Sugars / Sucres 0 g	
Protein / Proteines 3 g	
Vitamin A / Vitamine A	0%
Vitamin C / Vitamine C	0%
Calcium / Calcium	2%
Iron / Fer	8%

This is a **Do Not Serve** choice because it has 280 mg sodium (more than 240 mg).

B. Reading Ingredient Lists for Whole Grains

The ingredient list tells you what is contained in a pre-packaged food. Look for 'whole grain' as the first ingredient in the list as this indicates the product contains more whole grain than any other ingredient. Do not assume 'multigrain' means the product contains whole grains.

Sample Ingredient List:

INGREDIENTS: whole grain whole wheat flour, water, sugar, wheat gluten, yeast, non-hydrogenated soybean oil, honey, salt.

This bread is considered whole grain because whole grain whole wheat flour is the first ingredient in this ingredient list.



Whole grains include:

- amaranth
- barley
- buckwheat
- bulgur
- cracked wheat
- kamut
- millet
- quinoa
- sorghum
- spelt
- wheat berries
- whole and rolled oats
- whole grain corn
- whole grain couscous
- whole grain rye
- whole grain whole wheat
- triticale
- wild or whole grain brown rice



C. Reading Ingredient Lists for Allergens

Ingredient lists can also be used to identify possible allergens when developing menus for children with allergies or intolerances. In Canada, the priority food allergens (eggs, milk, mustard, peanuts, seafood, sesame, soy, tree nuts and wheat), gluten and added sulphites must always be declared on food product packaging in one of two ways: in the list of ingredients, or in a 'contains' statement.

Examples of food allergens being declared in the ingredient list:

1. **Ingredient list: flour (wheat), liquid albumin (egg), vegetable oil, sugar, flavour**

This product should not be provided to children with wheat and/or egg allergies.

2. **Ingredient list: flour (wheat), butter (milk), liquid albumin (egg), canola oil, sugar, natural flavour**

This product should not be provided to children with wheat, milk, and/or egg allergies.

Examples of 'may contain' and 'contains' claims:

1. **Ingredient list: flour, liquid albumin, vegetable oil, sugar, flavour. Contains: wheat, egg**

This product should not be provided to children with wheat or egg allergies or intolerances.

2. **Ingredient list: flour, butter, liquid albumin, canola oil, sugar, natural flavour. Contains: wheat, milk, egg**

This product should not be provided to children with wheat, egg or milk allergies or intolerances.



Allergen-free claims:

Foods that have allergen-free claims (such as 'peanut-free' or 'wheat-free') or symbols that make this claim, are safe for those with corresponding food allergies. These foods are not permitted to contain any amount of the named food allergen in the product, whether through intentional or accidental means. Always speak to a child's parent or caregiver to determine what allergens to look for on an ingredient list. If you are unsure of whether a child with an allergy should be provided a specific food, speak to his/her parent or caregiver before serving this food.

D. Support Tools

Call EatRight Ontario (toll-free at 1-877-510-5102) to speak with a registered dietitian or visit www.eatrightontario.ca for more information on reading nutrition labels and food allergies.

Review Health Canada's resource for more information on how to read nutrition labels and use the Nutrition Facts table: healthycanadians.gc.ca/eating-nutrition/label-etiquetage/understanding-comprendre/interactive-tools-outils-interactifs/label-etiquette-eng.php.

Refer to the online course Anaphylaxis in Child Care Settings by Food Allergy Canada: www.allergyaware.ca/courses/. Visit Food Allergy Canada for more information on allergens, their names in an ingredient list, and their possible sources: foodallergycanada.ca/.

SECTION 7: STRATEGIES TO CREATE A SUPPORTIVE NUTRITION ENVIRONMENT

Since many young children spend a large portion of their day in child care, child care providers need to offer supportive nutrition environments where children eat, learn, play and grow. Child care providers play an important role in helping children develop a lifelong healthy relationship with food. In addition to developing menus that offer nutritious options in age-appropriate amounts, child care providers are able to adopt and model practices and attitudes that create and maintain supportive nutrition environments. A supportive nutrition environment encompasses not only physical structures such as chairs, utensils, food, and a setting free from commercial influences, but also supports children's social and emotional needs during their interactions with child care providers.

A. Best Practice Recommendations for Creating and Maintaining Supportive Nutrition Environments

Table 10: Best Practice Recommendations for Creating & Maintaining Supportive Nutrition Environments

Area	Best Practice Recommendations
Create positive meal times	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• At least one adult eats with children during meals and snacks.• Child care providers talk with children at meal and snack times, and encourage children to practice social and self-care skills.• All dining equipment including utensils (e.g., plates, bowls, serving dishes) and dining furniture are the appropriate size for children.• All distractions (e.g., toys, books, screens) are removed during meal and snack times.• Self-feeding (e.g., using a spoon, holding and drinking from an open cup, eating finger foods) is encouraged.• Meals are offered in 'family-style' where children select their own portions and serve themselves with assistance from supervising adults.• Children are involved in aspects of meal time such as setting the table and clearing dishes.

Table 10: Best Practice Recommendations for Creating & Maintaining Supportive Nutrition Environments Continued

Area	Best Practice Recommendations
Model positive attitudes and healthy behaviours	<p>Child care providers nurture positive attitudes and healthy behaviours when they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • model healthy eating by eating the same food and beverages offered to the children (unless they have special dietary considerations that prevent them from doing so); • avoid bringing personal food and beverages that are inconsistent with <i>Section 3: Food and Beverage Choices</i>; • remain positive about available food and beverage choices; • refrain from making negative comments about the food and beverage choices offered; • model positive body image by refraining from conversations about body size, amount of food eaten, dieting and weight loss, or making assumptions about how well or poorly a child will eat based on her/his weight; • treat all children the same way regardless of their body size or shape (e.g., avoid making judgements about the amount of food a child chooses to eat); and, • refrain from using personal electronics (e.g., cell phones) during snack and meal times.
Practice responsive feeding	<p>When offering meals and snacks, the child care provider follows the child’s lead and is responsive to hunger and fullness cues. The child care provider decides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what food is offered; • when it is offered; and, • where it is offered. <p>The child decides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • which foods (of those offered) to eat; and, • how much to eat.

Table 10: Best Practice Recommendations for Creating & Maintaining Supportive Nutrition Environments Continued

Area	Best Practice Recommendations
Avoid the use of pressure to influence food intake	<p>It is expected that child care providers do not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bribe, coax or force children to eat; • play games to increase food intake; • praise children for finishing all the food on their plate; • offer food or beverages to reward performance or reinforce good behaviour; • withhold food or beverages as a consequence for inappropriate behaviours; • withhold food at meals or snacks if child asks for more; • delay access to a food (e.g., serving a certain child last); • serve some foods before others to have children eat more of them (e.g., withhold fruit or grain products until vegetables are eaten); and, • provide food to comfort children who are upset.

B. Other Ideas

In addition to the strategies listed above, consider:

- welcoming mothers to breastfeed in your child care setting anytime by providing a comfortable area to breastfeed.
- incorporating consistent healthy eating messages into programming (e.g., reading books about where food comes from, gardening vegetables and herbs, colouring pictures of vegetables and fruit).
- celebrating in healthy and fun ways - either without food or by offering healthy choices.
- fundraising with non-food items or with nutritious foods and beverages.

C. Support Tools

Use the **Menu and Nutrition Environment Self-Assessment Tool** available from the [ODPH Child Care Resources](#) website to ensure your child care setting meets the supportive nutrition environment requirements in the **Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014** (section 42 of Ontario Regulation 137/15) described in *Section 7: Strategies to Create a Supportive Nutrition Environment*.

Resources

Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating

www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/canada-food-guide/get-your-copy.html

- Order copies of Canada's Food Guide or view it online.

Cookspiration

www.cookspiration.com/

- Access a wide array of recipes with photos to fit any appetite.

EaTracker Recipe Analyzer

www.eatracker.ca/

- Use the Recipe Analyzer by Dietitians of Canada to determine the number of Canada's Food Guide servings from each food group in a mixed dish.

EatRight Ontario

www.eatrightontario.ca/

- E-mail or call a dietitian (toll-free at 1-877-510-5102) for nutrition information on a variety of topics, meal planning tips and healthy recipes.

Food Allergy Canada

foodallergycanada.ca/

- Find information on each common food allergens and how to prevent reactions.

Food Safety for Children ages 5 and Under

www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-safety-vulnerable-populations/food-safety-information-children-ages-5-under.html

- Access information from Health Canada on how to prepare foods safely for young children.

Foodland

www.ontario.ca/foodland/

- Learn more about local produce and discover which vegetables and fruit are in season.

Health

www.canada.ca/en/services/health.html

- Find general healthy eating and food allergy information from Health Canada.

Nutri-eSTEP

www.nutritionscreen.ca/

- Take an online questionnaire for parents and caregivers of toddlers and preschoolers about their child's nutrition and activity habits.
- Find out "What is Going Well" and "What to Work On".
- Link to resources and community services.
- View and share free flyers at: www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Articles/Promotional-Material/Nutri-eSTEP-Flyer.aspx

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Appendix A: Weekly Menu Plan Template (Without Weekends)

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
MORNING SNACK					
Vegetables and Fruit					
LUNCH					
Vegetables and Fruit					
Grain Products					
Milk and Alternatives					
Meat and Alternatives					
AFTERNOON SNACK					
Vegetables and Fruit					

Appendix B: Weekly Menu Plan Template (With Weekends)

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
MORNING SNACK							
Vegetables and Fruit							
LUNCH							
Vegetables and Fruit							
Grain Products							
Milk and Alternatives							
Meat and Alternatives							
AFTERNOON SNACK							
Vegetables and Fruit							

Appendix C: Daily Sample Menu (for a 6 to 9 Hour Day in Care)

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Morning snack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grain cereal • Diced cantaloupe • Milk 	Yogurt Parfait (Plain yogurt, sliced peaches, crushed whole grain cereal) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grain blueberry muffin • Diced melon • Milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grain bagel with: • Nut free spread or seed butter • Grapes (quartered) • Water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grain banana bread • Nectarine slices • Milk
Afternoon snack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homemade oatmeal cookie • Apple slices • Water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grain pita • Hummus • Diced cucumbers • Water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grain crackers • Fruit salad • Water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sliced pear • Cubed cheese • Water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grain tortilla strips • Unsweetened applesauce • Water

Appendix C: Daily Sample Menu (for a 6 to 9 Hour Day in Care) Continued

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homemade beef burger • Whole grain bun • Garden salad • Diced kiwi • Milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chana Masala (Chickpea curry) • Wild rice • Peas and carrots • Banana • Milk 	Meat Lasagna (turkey, chicken, beef, or wild game meat and whole grain lasagna noodles) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steamed cauliflower and green beans • Apricot halves • Milk 	Chili (turkey, chicken or beef, beans and vegetables) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zucchini strips • Whole grain bread • Sliced mango • Milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salmon cakes • Quinoa • Steamed broccoli • Berries • Milk
	*Vegetarian option: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homemade lentil burger • Whole grain bun • Garden salad • Diced kiwi • Milk 		*Vegetarian option: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegetable lasagna • Baked tofu cubes • Steamed cauliflower and green beans • Apricot halves • Milk 	*Vegetarian option: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegetable and bean chili • Zucchini strips • Whole grain bread • Sliced mango • Milk 	*Vegetarian option: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegetable and cheese egg omelet • Quinoa • Steamed broccoli • Berries • Milk