



March
2007

Client handout courtesy of Certified Professional Trainers Network, CPTN e-News



Tips for Consumers...

Helping young children follow Canada's Food Guide

Putting good habits into practice

Families and caregivers play a big role in creating a positive eating environment. The early childhood years are a time to discover new foods and to develop a love and appreciation for healthy eating. Take advantage of the fact that young children are eager to learn. Even simple activities such as helping to cut open a pumpkin or making muffins are ways children learn about food. Preparing food gives children a feeling of accomplishment and encourages them to try the foods prepared. Here from Health Canada are some tips for helping children to follow the new Canada Food Guide, which now allows for age and gender differences in eating. For more information on the new Canada Food Guide, visit the Health Canada website at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca>

It is recommended that you prepare meals that include foods from each of the four food groups. For children, it is appropriate to divide the recommendations of one Food Guide Serving into smaller amounts of food to be eaten throughout the day.

- ▶ Children should consume a total of 2 cups of milk or fortified soy beverage daily. This will also provide their daily requirement of Vitamin D.
- ▶ It is important to offer a variety of nutritious foods (such as milk and peanut butter) that contain fat.
- ▶ Setting regular meals times provides an opportunity for healthy eating where children don't feel rushed. This also helps to establish a healthy routine for eating.
- ▶ Sitting down and eating with children, provides a pleasant eating environment. Leave the television **off** during meal times.
- ▶ Children might feel more positive about eating if they help with simple food-related tasks, such as setting the table or washing the vegetables.
- ▶ While parents and caregivers can determine **WHAT** children eat, children themselves are responsible for **how much** they eat. Encourage them to stop when they feel slightly full. Offer **suitable-sized** portions related to the **size** of the child, with options for second helpings.
- ▶ If an unfamiliar food is rejected the first time around, it can be offered again. Be patient. The more often children are exposed to new foods, the more likely they will be to accept them.
- ▶ It is important to be a positive role model for children. Children are more likely to try new foods and eat a variety of foods if you do.
- ▶ Young children rely on parents to provide physical activity opportunities in a safe environment. Encourage physical activity by organizing fun and easy activities such as bicycling, walking, dancing, games of ball or tag in the summer, and sledding or creating snow sculptures in the winter.

(adapted from the **Advice for Different Ages and Stages** section of Canada's Food Guide)

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