



Mealtime Mentoring

August 2008

Selecting Foods

There are so many choices in the grocery stores, how do I pick the best choices for the children in my care?

In selecting foods to serve, your aim should be to serve healthy food and beverages more often and less healthy choices less often.

Check with the children's families regarding food allergies.

Select vegetables and fruits

Vegetables and fruit are a rich source of vitamins, minerals and fibre.

- Choose dark orange and dark green vegetables.
- If choosing processed vegetables and fruits make sure the vegetable or fruit is listed as the 1st ingredient (or second if water is listed first).
- Choose the whole vegetable or fruit rather than drinking juice. Juice has less fibre.
- Prepare vegetables and fruit with little or no added fat, sugar or salt.
- Fresh, frozen and canned vegetables and fruits have similar nutrient contents. Canned fruits may have higher sugar content. Canned vegetables may have a higher sodium (salt) content. They can be rinsed before cooking to remove extra salt.

Select whole grain breads and cereals

Whole grain products and enriched breads, cereals, pasta and rice give you the most nutrients and fibre.

- Serve at least half of the daily grain products as whole grains. Examples are whole grain wheat, whole oats, brown rice or pot barley.
- Read the labels on packaged products. Whole grain, enriched wheat flour or rice should be listed as the first ingredient (or second if water is first).
- When choosing cold or hot cereals and other processed grain products, sugar should not be the first or second ingredient listed. Look for varieties with less than 12 g of sugar.
- A food with an excellent source of fibre has at least 6 g of fibre per serving. Foods with a good source of fibre have 4 g of fibre per serving.
- Choose and prepare grain products with little or no added fat, sugar or salt.

Select age appropriate milk and alternatives

The nutrients in milk, yogurt, cheese and alternatives, including calcium, protein, vitamins D and A, are important for building strong bones and teeth.



- Breast milk is recommended for the first two years or more. If breast milk is not available, infant formula is recommended until children are 12 months old.
- Whole milk is recommended for children over 12 months. After a child is 2 years old, 1% or 2% can be offered.
- When choosing milk products, e.g., yogurt and cheese, the first ingredient listed must be milk.
- Ice cream, whipping cream, table cream and sour cream are lower in nutrients and are not considered milk servings.
- The terms MF (milk fat) and BF (butter fat) both refer to the fat content of the milk product. Use to compare products.
- Choose milk and alternatives with vitamin D. Vitamin D is added to fluid, evaporated and powdered milk and “fortified” soy beverages.
- If choosing alternatives to milk, water may be the first ingredient followed by a milk-like ingredient such as soy. Rice, fortified soy and other vegetarian beverages are not recommended until the child is two years of age and over. Until this age, continue with soy-based formula, at parent’s request.
- Choose meat alternatives regularly. These include kidney beans, dried peas, lentils, chickpeas, nuts, seeds and tofu.
- Add nuts and seeds to a stir-fry, salad or cooked vegetable dish.
- Choose lean or extra lean ground beef more often than regular ground.

Read food labels

- All packaged foods have an ingredient list and nutrition facts table. If you have a choice between product brands, check the nutrition label and choose the one that is lower in fat, sugar or salt or higher in fibre.
- On the nutrition facts table, the % DV (Daily Value) tells you if there is a lot or a little of a particular nutrient in the serving size given. You can use this information to compare similar food products.



Note: The daily values are not specific to the nutrient requirements of children.

- Read the ingredient list. The ingredient list tells you what the product is made of. The first three ingredients tell you mostly what is in the product.

Select lean meat and alternatives

Meat and alternatives are an important source of iron, protein, fat and vitamins and minerals.

- Make your choices without added fat, sugar and salt.
- Serve eggs and fish. Select tuna and salmon packed in water.
- When choosing processed products, a meat or alternative must be listed as the first ingredient.

Fats

Use unsaturated fats each day as these contain essential fats that the body cannot make. These include canola, sunflower, safflower, corn, olive and soybean oils. Choose soft margarines. Try to limit foods with saturated and trans fats. These contribute to heart disease. Limit hard margarine, butter, lard and shortening.

Adapted from: Healthy Foods for My School
Ministry of Health, 2008

Helping you provide healthy food and a positive eating environment in early learning and child care settings.