



Healthy Eating for Early Learning Practitioners

Early childhood centres can be an important environment in supporting young children to make healthy food and beverage choices and lead active lives. Early childhood practitioners play a very important role in creating and maintaining a healthy environment in their centres. The example practitioners set is extremely important in fostering healthy children. The following section takes a break from focusing on preschoolers and concentrates on practitioners, keeping in mind the hectic pace and demanding nature of your work, to give some adaptable suggestions about packing lunch, maintaining an active lifestyle and modeling a healthy lifestyle.

What nutritional guidelines are important and what do they say?

Canada's Food Guide recommends that men and women consume the following number of food guide servings every day.

	Vegetables and fruit	Grain products	Milk and alternatives	Meat and alternatives
Ages 19-50				
Women	7-8	6-7	2	2
Men	8-10	8	2	3
Ages 51+				
Women	7	6	3	2
Men	7	7	3	3

Canada's Food Guide also recommends:

- Eating at least one dark green and one orange vegetable each day.
- Choosing vegetables and fruit more often than juice.
- Selecting whole grain products and those that are lower in sugar, salt (sodium) and fat.
- Consuming 500 mL of 1% or 2% milk per day.
- Picking meat alternatives often, eating fish twice per week, and selecting lean meats prepared with minimal added salt (sodium) and fat.
- Drinking water regularly.

Portion sizes are extremely important when using *Canada's Food Guide*. More information on serving sizes can be found at www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide.



Guidelines are nice, but my life is busy.

How can I incorporate *Canada's Food Guide* into my schedule?

Starting your morning off with a filling, nutritious breakfast can kick start your metabolism and set you up for a busy day. Breakfast should be eaten every morning, and should include all four food groups. Try these ideas:

- Microwave scrambled eggs, and pop them in a whole grain tortilla with some salsa or vegetables.
- Toast a whole grain English muffin, and top it with nut butter or low-fat cream cheese spread and banana or berries.
- Cook some stone-ground oats overnight in a slow cooker, with some cinnamon. In the morning, top it off with some milk or low-fat plain yogurt and fresh fruit.
- Whip up a cold smoothie by blending frozen fruit, low-fat plain yogurt, and a nut butter, with a little 100 % juice or milk.

Packing healthy lunches can help you reach the daily-recommended food guide servings given by *Canada's Food Guide*. Here are some quick and easy ideas for packed lunches that meet the nut free requirements of many early childhood education centres. While eating with children is important, these lunches can be eaten on the go in a pinch:

- Pack a sandwich with whole wheat bread. Try using an avocado with lime juice, hummus or mustard instead of a higher-fat spread, use only low-fat cheese, and include leafy greens and many vegetables.
- Fill a whole grain tortilla with lightly dressed green salad. Chickpeas, dried fruit, pumpkin seeds and feta cheese make tasty add ins.
- Make a low-fat plain Greek yogurt parfait, loaded with fresh fruits and topped with pumpkin seeds for an easy snack.
- An omelette, with two eggs, low-fat cheese, and loaded with vegetables and wrapped in a whole wheat tortilla can be easily reheated.

Make the most of your time by preparing either parts or your whole dinner in advance. The ideas below are quick to prepare and double as great leftovers for the next day.

- Load your slow cooker with low salt (sodium) chicken or vegetable broth, frozen chopped vegetables, herbs such as thyme or rosemary, pre-soaked beans, and barley or wild rice. Cook all day, and when you get home, stir in some fresh spinach or kale. Adding red wine vinegar, low salt (sodium) soy sauce, or some low-fat condensed milk are easy and tasty alterations.
- Pop low-salt (sodium) canned tomatoes, sautéed garlic and onions, rosemary and oregano, chopped carrots and mushrooms, and a splash of water in your slow cooker. Simmer all day, and before serving, stir in some spinach, kale, arugula, sautéed eggplant or zucchini. Serve over whole grain pasta, with a lean protein if you wish.
- Whip up a salad with interesting proteins; try mixing quinoa into your greens and vegetables, or top your salad with a black bean patty or filet of salmon. Create your



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own salad dressing by mixing plain low-fat yogurt, vinegar and fresh herbs, or create vinaigrette by blending vinegar, mustard, honey and a bit of extra virgin olive oil.

- Create a flatbread pizza by spreading tomato sauce, vegetables, and low-fat cheese on a whole grain tortilla, pita, English muffin, naan or lavash bread. Roasting your vegetables the night before, or experimenting with unconventional pizza toppings, such as corn, spinach, beets or broccoli can add flavour. Hummus, pesto and salsa are tasty variations from tomato sauce.

Salad is a great meal option for lunch or dinner, and with a little creativity, even breakfast. This salad matrix is an easy way to create creative meals. Salads are great eaten cold, topped with warm broth, used to fill a sandwich, rolled in a tortilla or pita, tossed with whole grain pasta, or baked on a whole grain pizza crust. Load your salad with unique greens and hot or cold vegetables, mix in a serving of legumes, grains or fish or animal protein, and include a few delicious toppers.

LEAFY GREENS	VEGETABLES	GRAINS	PROTEIN	FLAVOURINGS	TOPPERS
Spinach	Asparagus	Farro	Edamame	Scallions	Avocado
Kale	Broccoli	Wild rice	Poached egg	Red Onions	Walnuts
Arugula	Mushroom	Brown rice	Hardboiled egg	Thyme	Pecans
Red or green Cabbage	Apple	Barley	Tofu	Parsley	Pistachios
Cooked Swiss chard	Peach	Bulgur	Cannellini beans	Basil	Pumpkin seeds
Leaf lettuce	Fennel	Quinoa	Chickpeas	Cilantro	Capers
	Sunflower sprouts	Whole grain couscous	Lentils	Hot peppers	Raisins
	Zucchini (shaved or roasted)	Whole grain pasta (small or large)	Black beans	Citrus zest	Blue Cheese
	Carrot (chopped, grated, roasted)	Toasted whole grain bread croutons	Smoked or canned fish	Dill	Feta Cheese
	Beet (pickled or roasted)	Wheat berries	Fresh sautéed fish or chicken	Grated ginger	Cheddar Cheese
	Corn	Orzo	Veggie patty	Roasted garlic	Cheese
	Snap peas	Oats	Turkey burger	Honey	Dried apricots
	Snow peas	Millet	Grilled or roast beef	Sesame	Hemp seeds
	Grapes		Traditional meat or wild game	Soya	Olives
	Radish			Pesto	Goat cheese
	Sweet potato				Almonds
	Berries				Pomegranate
	Citrus				Greek yogurt
	Squash				Sundried tomatoes
					Artichoke hearts

Adapted from *Planning Meals using Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide and Cook Healthy* by Dietitians of Canada, available at <http://www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health/Plan-Shop-Cook/Plan-Well.aspx>, www.wholegrainscouncil.org/recipes/ and startcooking.com/salad-greens-from-a-to-z



Additional healthy recipe suggestions that fit your busy lifestyle can be found at:

- www.healthcheck.org/page/recipes
- www.eatracker.ca
- www.getcracking.ca/mealplanningmadeeasy/
- www.heartandstroke.com/site/c.iklQLcMWJtE/b.3484019/k.6437/HeartHealthy_Recipes.htm

What about snacking for adults?

Canada's Food Guide recommends snacks that count towards your recommended servings of each food group, while avoiding snacks that are high in fat, salt (sodium), or sugar. Snacks should include two of the four food groups. Here are some suggestions that are appropriate for an early childhood education centre.

- Fresh fruit or raw vegetables, with fat free plain Greek yogurt or hummus to dip
- Homemade trail mix, with plain popcorn, pumpkin seeds and dried fruit
- Low-salt (sodium) pretzels or plain graham crackers with a medium-sized fruit
- Half of a whole grain bagel or English muffin with nut alternative spread

Dietitians of Canada recommend no more than three snacks per day. Snacks should not contain more than 200 calories. Use *Canada's Food Guide* for serving sizes and include options from two different food groups.

Adapted from www.dietitians.ca/Nutrition-Resources-A-Z/Factsheets/Healthy-Eating---General/Healthy-Snacks-for-Adults.aspx

Drink water! It can help keep your energy up

Canada's Food Guide recommends choosing water over all other beverages. For people older than 18 years of age, Dietitians of Canada recommends at least:

- 3 L (12 cups) of fluid a day for males
- 2.2 L (9 cups) of fluid a day for females

While fluid refers to water, juice, milk, coffee and tea, it is best to avoid sugar sweetened beverages such as pop. Juice should be limited, and you should aim for 500 mL of low-fat milk per day.





How can I keep my energy up?

Caffeine can be a part of a balanced diet, but should be limited. Health Canada recommends no more than 400 mg of caffeine each day for adults. This is equivalent to:

- Two 10 oz. cups of coffee
- Three 16 oz. cups of black tea

Caffeine and food energy are available from these other sources. Chocolate contains caffeine, although chocolate should be consumed in small quantities, as it is high in sugar. Healthy choices to boost your energy include:

- Whole grains, such as whole grain crackers with low-fat cheese
- Water – staying hydrated increases energy
- Bananas and apples, or a smoothie
- Seeds or nuts

Adapted from www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/food-aliment/caffeine-eng.php and www.cspinet.org/new/cafchart.htm#table_teas

In addition to the many tips already outlined in this document, some ways that you can model healthy nutrition choices in the centre include:

- Eat what you hope children will eat. Avoid telling them your food is adult food.
- Eat where you expect children to eat. Sit with them at mealtime and enjoy your meals together.
- Discuss what you are eating – what are you enjoying, what textures are in your food. Ask children if they have eaten what you are eating, and encourage them to ask questions about their meals.
- Eat portions that demonstrate portion control. Show the children in your care that your meal might be larger, but it contains the same food groups. Eat small amounts and have more if you still feel hungry.
- Try new foods with children. If there is a food you avoid, explain why.
- If possible, grow or prepare food together.
- Encourage children to try new foods often, but don't force them to eat a food they refuse.
- Involve children in making food choices for special events.



Adapted from http://kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition_center/, www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/ and decoda.ca/children-families/leap-bc/



Early Learning Practitioner as a Healthy Role Model

Early childcare centres are important environments to support young children in leading active lives. Early learning practitioners play a very important role in creating and maintaining a healthy environment in their centres. The modeling provided by ELPs is extremely important in fostering healthy children. The following section takes a break from focusing on preschoolers and concentrates on ELPs. It keeps in mind the hectic pace and demanding nature of your work and to gives some adaptable suggestions about packing lunch, maintaining an active lifestyle and modeling a healthy lifestyle.

What about physical activity? How much, and what type, should I be getting?

CSEP has developed the Physical Activity and Sedentary Guidelines for Canadians, and recommends that adults ages 18-64 years:

- Accumulate at least 150 minutes of moderate (you should be sweaty and breathing harder than normally) to vigorous (you should be sweaty and out of breath) aerobic physical activity per week, in 10 minute or longer bouts.
- Muscle and bone strengthening activities using large muscle groups should be performed on at least two days each week. These large muscles groups include your back, abdomen, legs, hips, chest and arms.

More information on CSEP guidelines can be found at www.csep.ca/guidelines.

I'm pretty active during the day. What parts of my job count as physical activity?

According to CSEP, moderate to vigorous physical activity is the most important intensity to accumulate. Any time that you are short of breath or sweating for more than 10 consecutive minutes can count towards your recommended 150 minutes of physical activity per week. Some activities that might count include:

- Running with children, such as playing a tag game
- Playing a high-intensity game with children on the playground
- Vigorous cleaning or centre chores

It is crucial to remember that 150 minutes per week is a minimum recommendation. If possible, look to accumulate as much physical activity as possible.

After a day of work, I'm not able to go to the gym. What are some other ways that I can get my physical activity in?

Physical activity can be achieved in many ways, including:

- Brisk walking with a partner or community group.
- Search dance, Pilates, or workout videos online and practice them in your home.





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- Biking to and from work.
- Household or garden chores, such as mowing the lawn or raking leaves.

After a long day, small bursts of physical activity can help to keep your energy up. Some small ways to increase your activity level include:

- Park as far from work as possible, and enjoy the walk back to your vehicle at the end of the day.
- If you take the bus, get off a few stops early.
- Take the stairs instead of an elevator.
- Start some chores around the house or begin making dinner immediately when you get home from work. Try to avoid sitting down as soon as you return home.



Muscle strengthening activities that you can do at home include:

- Body weight resistance activities, such as push-ups, sit-ups or squats.
- Shovelling snow or digging in the garden.
- Using a belt or old T-shirt as a resistance band. Search online for resistance band exercise suggestions.
- Going for a walk up a hill or on uneven terrain.

Adapted from www.csep.ca/guidelines and www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/adults.html

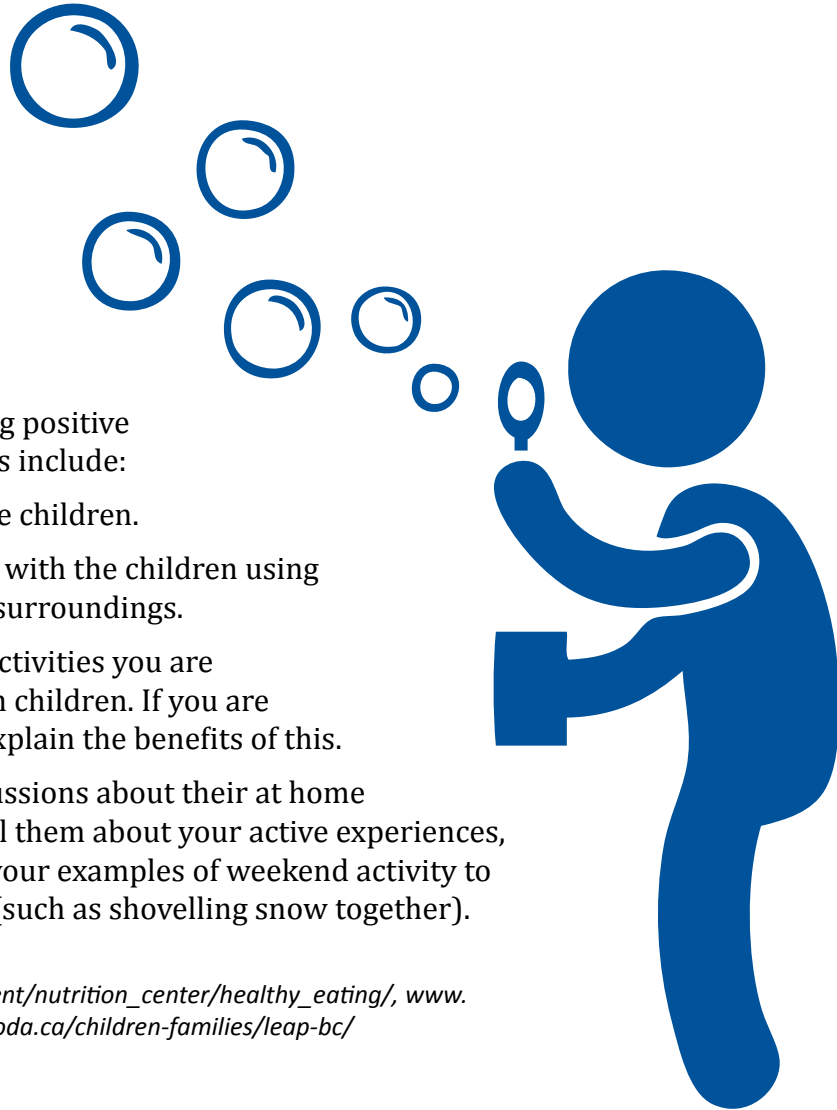
There's a lot of information out there about physical activity, mental health and stress. How can this help an ELP?

According to CSEP, increased physical activity can improve mental health and boost self esteem. The Canadian Mental Health Association recognizes that physical activity can positively impact depression, anxiety, tension, fatigue, anger and vigour.

Taking part in a favourite physical activity can help to release endorphins, which combat stress, anxiety, and fatigue. Aside from this, here are some other activities that might help to reduce stress after a busy day:

- Yoga allows for some flexibility improvements, interspersed with periods of focusing on breathing and relaxation.
- Gentle stretching can decrease stress. Focus on feeling a gentle pull in muscles you are stretching, and stop if you feel pain.
- Turn some favourite music on and dance vigorously. This burst of exercise will help to reduce stress.

Adapted from www.csep.ca/guidelines and http://www.cmha.ca/mental_health/benefits-of-good-mental-health/



Additional tips for modeling positive physical activity behaviours include:

Participate actively with the children.

- Create active games with the children using the equipment and surroundings.
- Enjoy the physical activities you are participating in with children. If you are breathing heavily, explain the benefits of this.
- Engage kids in discussions about their at home physical activity. Tell them about your active experiences, and possibly bring your examples of weekend activity to the centre to share (such as shovelling snow together).

Adapted from kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition_center/healthy_eating/, www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/, and decoda.ca/children-families/leap-bc/