

Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth – An Overview

The *Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth* are designed to help assist Albertans to create an environment which provides healthy food choices and promotes healthy eating habits. These guidelines can be used wherever food is offered to children and youth in childcare facilities, schools and recreation/community centres.

The Food Rating System

The food rating system is a simple way to separate healthy foods from the less healthy foods. This rating system puts all foods into three categories, based on specific nutritional criteria. The three categories include Choose Most Often, Choose Sometimes and Choose Least Often.



Choose Most Often

High nutrient foods

These foods should be consumed daily and in amounts and appropriate portion sizes, based on age category. These foods are all recommended as healthy choices in *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*.



Choose Sometimes

Moderate nutrient foods

No more than three servings from the Choose Sometimes category are recommended per week. While foods in the Choose Sometimes category may still provide beneficial nutrients, they tend to be higher in added sugar, unhealthy fat and sodium (salt).



Choose Least Often

Low nutrient foods

Eating these foods is not recommended. One serving could be eaten once a week.



Tips for Implementing the Guidelines:

- Children and youth, parents, and staff must understand the food rating categories to be able to select healthy foods.
- For younger children, the rating categories can be simplified to familiar symbols such as “Go”, “Yield” and “Stop”.
- Adults are important role models for children and youth. Be consistent with the healthy eating messages in your facility and at home.
- Use only non-food items for rewarding children.
- Involve children and youth in taste testing and new food/menu item selection.

Using the Food Rating System

The following charts will help you find out which category foods belong to.

The food nutrient criteria is based on one Canada's Food Guide serving, so be sure to read the Nutrition Facts Label on prepackaged foods and note the serving size, as it may be different than that in the Food Guide.

A food must meet all criteria in the chart to fit into a specific category. For example:

- Low-fat milk (skim, 1%, 2%) and fortified soy beverage meet the nutrient criteria per serving for total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, sugar, fibre, and sodium. This is why they are classified as *Choose Most Often*.

If chocolate syrup is added for flavour, the fat(s) and sugar content is now higher. This is why chocolate milk belongs in the *Choose Sometimes* category.

When preparing meals or snacks, aim to use foods from Canada's Food Guide, and add only a little or no fat/sugar/salt. This may help fit your dish in the *Choose Most Often* category.

The information in this handout is taken from the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth (2008).

Vegetables and Fruit:

Canada's Food Guide recommends that vegetables and fruit be consumed more often than juice. The *Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth* recommend that 100% fruit juice be limited to ½ cup (125 mL) per day.

Per Serving:	Total Fat	Fat	Protein	Sugar	Fibre	Sodium	Examples
Choose Most Often All fresh, frozen or canned vegetables and fruit (low sodium and no added sugar) (1 medium or 1/2 cup/ 125 mL) 100 % pure juice(1/2 cup/ 125 mL)	≤ 5 g	Saturated ≤ 3 g Trans 0 g	All naturally occurring	All naturally occurring (no added sugar)	≥ 2 g	≤ 200 mg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Canned fruit (in juice) ▪ Dried fruit or 100% dried fruit leather ▪ Raw vegetable sticks
Choose Sometimes Fresh, frozen or canned vegetables and fruit, with added sodium or sugar (1 medium or 1/2 cup/ 125 mL) Some potato/ vegetable chips very lightly salted or unsalted and baked	≤ 10 g	Saturated ≤ 6 g Trans 0 g	No specified amount	≤16 g 20 g juice beverages	≥ 2 g	≤ 400 mg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Canned fruit (in light syrup) ▪ Dried fruit with added sugar ▪ Fruit/ apple chips ▪ Vegetable/ potato chips, very lightly salted and baked ▪ Lower sodium salsa

Grain Products:

Grain Products should contain whole grains, and be lower in fat, sugar and salt. Serving sizes should be consistent with Canada's Food Guide.

Per Serving:	Total Fat	Fat	Protein	Sugar	Fibre	Sodium	Examples
Choose Most Often Whole grain bread (1 slice), crackers (3-4), pasta (1/2 cup/ 125 mL) Whole grain naan, pita or wrap (1/2 of a 7" 17 cm diameter) Cereal without added sugar (3/4 cup/ 175 mL to 1 cup/ 250 mL or 30 g) Small portion, lower fat baked items (35 – 55 g) e.g. muffins	≤ 5 g	Saturated ≤ 3 g Trans 0 g	≥ 1 g	≤12 g	≥ 2 g	≤ 200 mg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low fat and low sodium crackers ▪ Whole grain cereal ▪ Low fat small whole grain cookies ▪ Whole grain bran and granola bars ▪ Small, low fat muffin
Choose Sometimes White enriched breads (1 slice), crackers (3-4), pasta (1/2 cup/ 125 mL) Naan, pita or wrap (1/2 of a 7" 17 cm diameter) Cereal with added sugar (3/4/ 175 mL to 1 cup/ 250 mL or 30 g) Small portion, low fat baked items (35- 55g) e.g. muffins Low fat, lightly salted, corn or grain snacks	≤ 10 g	Saturated < 6 g Trans 0 g	≥ 2 g	≤16 g	≥ 2 g	≤ 400 mg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low fat crackers ▪ Low fat small cookies ▪ Granola or energy bars that meet criteria ▪ Lower fat small portion tortilla chips, cereal mix, or pretzels ▪ Baked pita chips

The food nutrient criteria is based on one Canada's Food Guide Serving unless otherwise noted.
 < means "less than" ≤ means "less than or equal to"

Milk and Alternatives:

Select Milk and Alternatives that are lower in fat and added sugar. *Provide children under the age of two homogenized (whole) milk only.*

Per Serving:	Total Fat	Fat	Protein	Sugar	Fibre	Sodium	Examples
Choose Most Often Low fat milk (skim, 1%, 2%) or unflavored fortified soy beverage (1 cup/ 250 mL) Low fat hard cheese and cheese strings (50 g) Plain yogurt and kefir (3/4 cup/ 175 mL)	< 5 g/ 1 cup milk ≤ 20% MF cheese ≤ 2% MF yogurt	Saturated ≤ 3 g Trans 0.5 g	≥ 8 g	12 g naturally occurring ≤ 9 g added to fortified soy beverage	n/a	≤ 200 mg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skim, 1% and 2% milk ▪ Unflavoured fortified soy beverage ▪ Cheese strings ▪ Plain yogurt
Choose Sometimes Homogenized milk (1 cup/ 250 mL) Flavoured low fat milk or fortified soy beverage (1 cup/ 250 mL) Hard cheese (50 g) Sweetened yogurt and flavoured yogurt drinks (3/4 cup/ 175 mL)	< 10 g/ 1 cup milk > 20% MF cheese > 2% MF yogurt	Saturated ≤ 5 g milk ≤ 10 g cheese ≤ 3 g yogurt Trans 0.5 g	≤ 20 g	26 g (12 g naturally occurring + 14 g added) 26 g added to fortified soy beverage	n/a	≤ 400 mg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Flavoured lower fat milk or soy beverage ▪ Hard cheese ▪ Cottage cheese ▪ Fruit flavoured yogurt

Meat and Alternatives:

Select Meat and Alternatives that are lower in fat and sodium. Have meat alternatives such as beans, lentils, and tofu often.

Per Serving:	Total Fat	Fat	Protein	Sugar	Fibre	Sodium	Examples
Choose Most Often All lean meats (no added salt) (2.5 oz/ 75 g or ½ cup) Tofu/ soy protein (3/4 cup/ 175 mL) Legumes/ lentils (3/4 cup/ 175 mL) Unsalted nuts & seeds (1/4 cup/ 60 mL) *(high allergy/ choking risk)	≤ 9 g except nuts and seeds	Saturated ≤ 3 g Trans 0.5 g	21 g meat, poultry and fish ≥ 7 g lentils and beans	1 g lentils, beans 7.5 g baked beans	2 g lentil, beans	≤ 200 mg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Baked, broiled, boiled, poached or roasted lean meats, poultry and fish ▪ Canned light tuna ▪ Lean luncheon meats ▪ Nuts or peanuts, unsalted
Choose Sometimes Luncheon meat (2.5 oz/ 75 g) Salted beans and legumes (3/4 cup/175 mL) Salted nuts & seeds (1/4 cup/ 60 mL) *(high allergy/choking risk)	≤ 10 g except nuts and seeds	Saturated ≤ 6 g Trans 0.5 g	21 g meat, poultry and fish ≥ 7 g lentils and beans	16 g added	Occurs naturally in lentils and beans	≤ 400 mg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sandwich luncheon meat ▪ Nuts or peanuts ▪ Trail mix ▪ Stews or soups (reduced in sodium) ▪ Lower fat hot dog (e.g. turkey dog)

The food nutrient criteria is based on one Canada's Food Guide Serving unless otherwise noted.

Mixed Dishes:

Mixed dishes should be combined with foods from the other food groups so that there is a source of protein (Meat and Alternatives or Milk and Alternatives), a source of whole grains and a vegetable or fruit.

Per Serving:	Total Fat	Fat	Protein	Sugar	Fibre	Sodium	Examples
Choose Most Often Soups (1 cup/ 250 mL) Stews, chili, dahl, casseroles (1 cup/ 250 mL) Packaged meals (300 to 400 g per package) A serving should contain at least one serving from three of the four food groups from <i>Canada's Food Guide</i> .	≤ 9 g except nuts and seeds	Saturated ≤ 3 g Trans 0.5 g	21 g meat, poultry, fish ≥ 7 g beans, lentils	Added sugars not in the first three ingredients	≥ 2 g	≤ 700 mg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low sodium soups, stews, dahl ▪ Baked casseroles ▪ Chili ▪ Macaroni and cheese containing meat, poultry, fish or legumes ▪ Meat, poultry, fish, or tofu stir fries
Choose Sometimes Soups (1 cup/ 250 mL) Stews, chili, dahl, casseroles (1 cup/ 250 mL) Packaged meals (300 to 400 g per package) A serving may contain one serving from one of the four food groups from <i>Canada's Food Guide</i> .	≤ 15 g	Saturated 6 g Trans 0.5 g	21 g meat, poultry, fish ≥ 7 g beans, lentils	12 g added	2 g preferred	≤ 1000 mg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Soups, stews, dahl ▪ Baked casseroles ▪ Chili ▪ Macaroni and cheese containing meat, poultry, fish or legumes ▪ Meat, poultry, fish, or tofu stir fries

The mixed dishes are *not* based on one Canada's Food Guide Serving, but are based on the serving of food as identified by the manufacturer.

Choose Least Often

Foods from this category are very low in nutrients and higher in calories, fat, sugar, and salt. For this reason, these foods do not meet the nutrition criteria of the *Choose Most Often* or *Choose Sometimes* categories. These foods should be limited to small portions and offered no more than once a week. The following examples are based on 100 calories per serving.

Example	Serving Size
Chips and crackers	30 g, 1 cup/ 250 mL
Sugary cereal ≥ 16 g	30 g, 1 cup/ 250 mL
Cookies and granola bars, ≥ 16 g sugar ≥ 10 g fat	30 g or greater Cookie (2) Granola bar (1)
Chocolate bars or candy	20 g (1 mini)
Bakery items including, but not limited to pastries, muffins and doughnuts	55 + grams
Frozen desserts, including, but not limited to ice cream, in a dish or frozen on a stick	85 g or ½ cup serving
Pop or fruit flavoured drinks	8 oz/ 237 mL

Additional Resources

For more nutrition information that complements the *Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth*, refer to the nutrition resources list below.

From Alberta Health and Wellness:

- *Feeding Baby Solid Foods: From 6 to 12 months of age*
 - *A Guide for Food Serving Sizes for Babies 6 to 12 months of age*
 - *Healthy Eating Active Living For your 1 to 5 year old*
 - *Food Guide Serving Sizes for 1-5 years*
 - *Healthy Eating Active Living For your 6 to 12 year old*
 - *Healthy Eating Active Living For Ages 13 to 18 years*
 - *Food Guide Serving Sizes for 6-12 Years*
 - *Food Guide Serving Sizes for 13 to 18 Years*
- <http://www.health.alberta.ca/public/growing.html>

From Capital Health:

- *Healthy Drinks, Healthy Kids*
 - *Healthy Kids, Healthy Bodies, Healthy Weights for Ages 2+*
 - *Label Reading the Healthy Way*
 - *Quick and Easy Meals*
 - *Healthy Rewards for Children*
 - *Healthy Food Choices for Schools*
 - *Developing Healthy Eating Guidelines for Schools*
- <http://www.capitalhealth.ca/EspeciallyFor/SchoolsandPreschools/default.htm>