Chapter 8: Healthy Eating

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Requirements in the Act

All infants and children attending child care centres in Ontario must be provided with enough safe and nutritious food to meet their individual energy and nutrient requirements (Child Care and Early Years Act O. Reg. 137/15).

Refer to the nutrition sections (42-44) of O. Reg. 137/15 for a detailed explanation of the requirements related to feeding. For example:

- Receive written feeding instructions from parents for all children less than one year of age
- Receive written instructions from parents for all children with special dietary needs. Food or drink provided by parents must be clearly labelled with the child's name and the date the food was sent to the centre.
- Store food or drink to maximize nutritive value and minimize the risk of contamination or spoilage
- List all children with food allergies and food restrictions and the specifics of the allergy or restrictions. Post this list in clear view in every cooking, serving and play area as well as available and accessible in any other area of the child care centre.
- Post complete menus in an obvious, visible location for the current and following week
- Keep menus for 30 days following the last day that they were applicable

Feeding infants in your care

Dietitians of Canada partners with other health professional organizations and Health Canada to develop evidence-based guidance on infants and toddler feeding.

Of particular relevance to child care providers is Nutrition for Healthy Term Infants from six to 24 months (2014), published by Health Canada, developed jointly by Dietitians of Canada, the Canadian Paediatric Society and the Breastfeeding Committee for Canada. A few key principles and recommendations include:

Foods for older infants and young children must be prepared, served, and stored safely

- Infants and young children must be supervised during feeding
- Avoid offering hard, small, round, smooth, sticky or solid foods. These may cause aspiration and choking.
- Prepare and store food safely to prevent foodborne illness. Avoid products that contain raw or undercooked meat, eggs, poultry, or fish; unpasteurized milk or milk products; unpasteurized juice; and cross-contamination between cooked and uncooked foods.
- Do not give honey to a child under one year of age. This helps to prevent infant botulism.

Responsive feeding promotes the development of healthy eating skills

- Encourage responsive feeding based on the child's hunger and satiety cues (e.g. closing mouth, turning the head away)
- Promote offering finger foods to encourage self-feeding
- Encourage use of an open cup, initially with help

From one year of age, young children begin to have a regular schedule of meals and snacks

- Set a regular schedule of meals and snacks, offering a variety of nutritious foods from Canada's Food Guide
- The healthiest eating patterns include mostly plant-based foods such as
    - Vegetables and fruit
    - Whole grain foods
    - Plant-based protein foods



- Prepare foods with little or no added salt or sugar
- Nutritious, higher-fat foods are an important source of energy for young children
- Encourage continued breastfeeding or offer 500 ml per day of homogenized (3.25 per cent milk fat) cow's milk
- Offer water to satisfy thirst
- Role model healthy eating habits

Supporting breastfeeding

Child care centres play an important role in supporting a family's decision to provide breast milk for their child. Demonstrate support to breastfeeding families by:

- Arranging a comfortable place where mothers can breastfeed their children or express or pump breastmilk
- Practicing the safe handling, storage, and preparation of expressed breastmilk when it is provided by a family with instructions to give to their child while in the child care centre

Feeding expressed breastmilk

Warm breastmilk by placing under running warm water or in a bowl of warm water for no longer than 15 minutes. Swirl the bottle to evenly heat. The milk should feel slightly warm, not hot. Throw away any breastmilk a child does not finish within two hours or that has been thawed for longer than 24 hours. Thawed breastmilk may look blue, yellow, or brown with fatty layers.

Fresh milk can be kept in the fridge for up to 4 days, while thawed milk can be kept in the fridge for up to 24 hours. It can take up to 12 hours to thaw in the fridge, or it can be placed directly from the freezer under cool, then warm running water. Breastmilk can be kept in the freezer for six to 12 months.

The Canadian Pediatric Society provides the following guidelines when handling expressed breastmilk in child care centres:

- Breastmilk container labels should include the child's name and the date the milk was expressed. The label should be carefully checked (preferably by two people) before every feeding. It is important to avoid giving breastmilk to the wrong baby, as there is a small risk of a blood-borne virus being present.
- Have a protocol for managing breastmilk errors. Both the mother who produced the breastmilk and the parents of the baby who was given the wrong milk must be advised. If an error occurs, parents or guardians must contact the affected child or children's health care provider. Blood tests may be required, and the baby who received the milk in error may need hepatitis B. immunization.

For infants receiving breastmilk substitutes, follow steps to safely prepare infant formula.

Canada's Food Guide

Canada's Food Guide provides information and up-to-date advice on healthy eating.

It recognizes the importance of:

- Traditional foods for Indigenous Peoples
- Cultural diversity
- Environmental sustainability

It recommends making it a habit to eat a variety of healthy foods each day:

- Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits, whole grain foods and protein foods. Choose plant-based protein foods more often.
- Choose foods with healthy fats rather than saturated fat
- Limit highly processed foods. If you choose these foods, eat them less often and in small amounts.
- Prepare meals and snacks using ingredients with little to no added sodium, sugar or saturated fat
- Choose healthier menu options when eating out
- Make water your beverage of choice
- Replace sugary drinks with water
- Use food labels
- Be aware that food marketing can influence your choices

It recognizes that healthy eating is more than the foods we eat:

- Be mindful of your eating habits
- Cook more often
- Enjoy your food
- Eat meals with others

