

Using the Provincial School Food Guidelines

School Food Providers Quick Reference Guide

How to assess a food or beverage

The Provincial School Food Guidelines (SFG) categorize foods and beverages using the food groupings from Canada's Food Guide (vegetables and fruits, whole grain foods and protein foods). There is also a category for mixed dishes, which may use foods from multiple groupings to make up one dish. In each category, there is a list of the healthiest choices to offer at school as well as a list of foods that cannot be sold and/or served at school.

Step 1 - Which of the categories does the food or beverage fall under?

When assessing a food or beverage, first determine if it fits into one of the categories:

Vegetables and fruits

Protein foods

Whole grain foods

Mixed dishes

If the food or beverage does not fit into one of these categories, then it may be listed in the ingredients that can be used in homemade dishes, or in the listing of condiments, beverages or other product sections of the guidelines.

Step 2 - Does the food or beverage fall into the "Healthiest choices" list or the "Do not sell or serve" list?

Within each of the four main categories is a list of the healthiest choices according to Canada's Food Guide. If a food or beverage is on this list there is no need to do any further analysis, it can be sold and/or served at school.

Within each of the four main categories is also a list of foods or beverages that cannot be sold or served at school. These foods and beverages are higher in sodium, sugars and/or saturated fat. If a food or beverage is on this list, there is no need to do any further analysis, it cannot be sold or served at school.

Step 3 - Do I need to apply Nutrient Criteria?

If the food or beverage in question is not found in any of these lists (healthiest choices; do not sell or serve; ingredients; condiments; beverages; other products) then the nutrient criteria needs to be applied.

Specific criteria for sodium (salt), sugars and saturated fat are provided for each category and if a food or beverage meets all three criteria it can be sold and/or served at school. If the food or beverage does not meet all three criteria, it cannot be sold and/or served at school. Use information on the Nutrition Facts table and the ingredients list to determine if a food or beverage meets the nutrient criteria.



Vegetables and fruits

Vegetables and fruits are an important part of healthy eating. It is recommended that they be offered as part of every meal and snack and when possible, make up half of the plate. Fresh, frozen and canned are all healthy options. These foods have important nutrients for growing children and youth including fibre, vitamins and minerals.



Healthiest choices	Do not sell or serve
<p>These foods and beverages can be sold or served at school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh vegetables and fruits • Frozen vegetables and fruits • Canned vegetables (use lower sodium varieties when possible or rinse before using) • Canned fruits or fruit cups (in juice or light syrup) • Fruit sauces (100% fruit with no added sugar, e.g., unsweetened apple sauce) • Dried fruits (100% fruit with no added sugar) 	<p>These foods or beverages are higher in sodium (salt), sugars and/or saturated fat and cannot be sold or served at school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% fruit juice, fruit drinks, punches or cocktails • Vegetables in sauces (pre-packaged) • Canned fruits in heavy syrups • Battered and/or deep fried vegetables • French fries/potato wedges (par-fried)* • Chips (regular or baked) • Sweetened gelatin / jellied desserts • Fruit cups in gelatin / jelly • Prepared pie filling • Processed fruit snacks (e.g., fruit leathers, gummies) • Frozen fruit bars or fruit-based freezies • Products with non-sugar sweeteners added

* Par-fried: Most French fries or potato wedges on the market are par-fried, meaning the potato is cut up and partially deep fried prior to being frozen or packaged. The potatoes are not browned in the process so can be mistaken for not being fried. Review product information to ensure the potato product being used is not par-fried. Potato products that are not par-fried (e.g., pre-cut potatoes, pre-cooked potatoes) can be sold and/or served at school if they meet the nutrient criteria below.

Nutrient criteria: Apply the criteria below to foods and beverages that do not fit in one of the lists above. Compare the criteria with the information on the Nutrition Facts table (which provides information for one serving of the food or beverage) for sodium and saturated fat, and on the ingredients list for added sugars. The product must meet ALL three criteria to be sold or served.

Nutrient	Criteria	Example
Saturated fat	1 g or less	85 g (6 pieces) roasted potato wedges (not par-fried)
Sodium	200 mg or less	
Sugars	None added	

Whole grain foods

Canada's Food Guide recommends eating a variety of whole grain foods. Moving toward offering whole grains when possible is encouraged. If whole grains are not available, choosing whole wheat foods over refined grains is recommended. Whole grain foods are a healthier choice because they include all parts of the grain and have more fibre. Eating foods higher in fibre can reduce the risk of chronic disease.



Healthiest choices	Do not sell or serve
<p>These foods and beverages can be sold or served at school</p>	<p>These foods or beverages are higher in sodium (salt), sugars and/or saturated fat and cannot be sold or served at school</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grains such as barley, rye, whole oats, bulgur and quinoa • Whole grain bread products* (bread, bagels, tortilla wraps, pitas,buns, bannock, naan, pizza crust, flatbread, etc.) • Oatmeal (unsweetened) ^ • Brown rice • Whole grain wild rice* • Whole grain pasta* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pastries, croissants, pies, cookies⁺, donuts, cinnamon buns, sweet buns, cakes, brownies,squares • Pre-seasoned noodles, pasta or rice • Canned rice or pasta • Hot or cold cereals that are not whole grain • Hot or cold cereal (even if whole grain) withchocolate, candies or marshmallows • Coated granola or cereal bars (e.g. covered ordipped in chocolate or yogurt) • Puffed rice cereal bars (e.g. Rice Krispie squares) • Energy bars and protein bars • Toaster pastries • Cheesies, puffs, twists, crisps, straws, pretzels(regular or baked) • Products with non-sugar sweeteners added

* The availability of whole grain products is changing quickly and as demand for these products increases, availability and price should improve. School food providers are encouraged to offer whole grain (or whole wheat) versions whenever possible. If there are any concerns with accessing these foods for schools, please contact the Regional Nutritionist to discuss.

^ Other whole grain hot or cold cereals may fit but would need to meet criteria outlined.

+ Cookies cannot be served at school. Some school food providers make cookies with healthier ingredients (e.g., whole wheat flour or oats) however, these are still not acceptable to sell or serve at school.

Nutrient criteria: Apply the criteria below to foods and beverages that do not fit in one of the lists above (e.g., cereals, granola bars and crackers). Compare the criteria with the information on the Nutrition Facts table (which provides information for one serving of the food) for sodium, sugar and saturated fat. The product must meet all three criteria to be sold or served.

Nutrient	Criteria	Example
Saturated fat	2 g or less	30 g cold or ¾ cup hot wholegrain cereal 2 cups popped corn
Sodium	270 mg or less	35 g whole grain muffin/loaf, pancake or waffle 24-40 g granola or cereal bar
Sugars	8 g or less	30 g whole grain crackers (if smaller crackers or thins) or 6 whole grain crackers (if larger snack crackers)



Protein foods

Protein foods are an important part of healthy eating. Offer foods such as beans, lentils, nuts*, seeds*, lean meats and poultry, fish, shellfish, eggs, and lower fat milk and dairy products. Offer protein foods that come from plants more often. These plant-based options may provide more fibre and less saturated fat than other types of protein foods, which can be beneficial for heart health.



Healthiest choices	Do not sell or serve
<p>These foods and beverages can be sold or served at school</p>	<p>These foods or beverages are higher in sodium (salt), sugars and/or saturated fat and cannot be sold or served at school</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legumes (beans, peas, lentils) –fresh, canned, dried • Nuts and seeds* • Hummus • Baked beans • Eggs • Tofu • Fresh / frozen chicken, turkey, beef, pork, wild game+ • Extra lean or lean ground meat • Fresh / frozen fish, seafood • Canned fish • White milk (2% Milk Fat (M.F.)or less) • Unsweetened fortified soybeverage^o • Hard / block cheese (e.g. cheddar, mozzarella, Havarti) including pre-portioned or sticks of cheese • Cottage cheese • Unsweetened yogurt[^] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercially battered and/or breaded pre-fried meat, fish, chicken, turkey (e.g., chicken nuggets, chicken fingers)^x • Deli meats - Bologna, pepperoni, salami, ham,turkey, chicken and roast beef • Weiner / hot dog • Bacon • Sausage • Ice cream, frozen yogurt, frozen dessert • Homemade or pre-packaged milk shakes • Processed cheese – spread, slices or sauce(e.g., Cheez Whiz) • Pudding • Products with non-sugar sweeteners added

* Nuts and seeds are healthy protein food choices. Most schools do not permit peanuts and/or tree nuts due to allergy awareness. If your school does allow peanuts and/or tree nuts, they are considered healthy choices to sell or serve at school.

+ Any food service provider who serves wild game needs both a Food Establishment License and a Wild Meat Service License.

^o Other plant-based beverages like rice and coconut are low in protein and are not part of the Protein foods category. Unsweetened types of other plant-based beverages are listed with beverages.

[^] Other yogurts may fit but would need to meet criteria outlined.

^x Most breaded products on the market are pre-fried, meaning the product is deep fried prior to being frozen or packaged. Review product information to ensure the product being used is not pre-fried. Products that are not pre-fried (e.g., pre-baked chicken burgers) can be sold and/or served at school if they meet the nutrient criteria outlined.

Nutrient criteria: Apply the criteria below to foods and beverages that do not fit in one of the lists above. Compare the criteria with the information on the Nutrition Facts table (which provides information for one serving of the food or beverage) for sodium, sugar and saturated fat. The product must meet all three criteria to be sold or served.

Milk, yogurt drinks or fortified soy beverages

Nutrient	Criteria	Examples
Saturated fat	3 g or less	200 mL flavoured yogurt drink 250 mL chocolate milk* 250 mL flavoured fortified soy beverage
Sodium	180 mg or less	
Sugars	20 g or less	

* Milk is an important source of nutrients for school-aged children and youth. In NL, the School Milk Foundation offers white and chocolate milk in the majority of schools as part of the School Milk Foundation’s program. A new chocolate milk with less added sugar has been developed for the School Milk foundation that meets the above criteria. At lunchtime, school food providers should offer both white and chocolate milk at school.

Milk Products (not beverages)

Nutrient	Criteria	Examples
Saturated fat	3 g or less	100 g flavoured yogurt 50-60 g yogurt tube 21 g cheese string
Sodium	180 mg or less	
Sugars	16 g or less	

Other meat, poultry or fish

Nutrient	Criteria	Examples
Saturated fat	3 g or less	60 g precooked meat, fish or poultry (not pre-fried) 60 g pre-seasoned meat, plant-based pattie, fish or poultry 60 g meat balls 35 g dried meat (not pepperoni or salami)
Sodium	350 mg or less	
Sugars	N/A	

Mixed Dishes

Use this category for dishes that are either homemade or pre-packaged/prepared that use foods from more than one grouping (vegetables and fruits, whole grain foods and protein foods). This may include spaghetti with meat sauce, macaroni and cheese, stew, salads, pizza, etc.

School food providers are encouraged to prepare menu items in house whenever possible to support healthy eating and limit the offering of highly processed food. Home-made items offered must still align with foods that can be sold or served at school as outlined in these guidelines, e.g., homemade cookies, regardless of their ingredients, cannot be sold or served. Also all general recommendations in these guidelines should still be applied when cooking and baking in-house, e.g., using lower sodium products, using wholegrain or whole wheat flour and avoiding the use of non-sugar sweeteners as ingredients.

Healthiest choices	Do not sell or serve
These foods and beverages can be sold or served at school	These foods or beverages are higher in sodium (salt), sugars and/or saturated fat and cannot be sold or served at school
Dishes freshly made using ingredients* that are listed in any of the Healthiest choices categories can be sold and/or served at school.	<p>Dishes (whether homemade or pre-prepared) that include ingredients that cannot be sold or served at school. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dishes made with protein foods that are listed in the Do not sell or serve category, e.g. pizza or subs with salami or pepperoni • Dishes made with non-sugar sweeteners <p>Dishes (pre-prepared fresh or frozen) such as pastas, wraps, pizzas, subs etc. that are not made with whole grain or whole wheat flour.</p>

*Ingredients can also come from the list provided later in this document.

Nutrient criteria: Use the criteria outlined for foods and beverages that do not fit in one of the lists above. Compare the information on the Nutrition Facts table (which provides information for one serving of the food or beverage) with the criteria. The product must meet all three criteria to be sold or served.

Pre-made, pre-packaged, or frozen meals (nutrients as per single serving indicated on the label)

Nutrient	Criteria	Examples
Saturated fat	4 g or less	pizza burrito
Sodium	500 mg or less	pita meat pie
Sugars	NA	sub lasagna

Chili, stew, chowder or soup (served as a meal, not as an ingredient)

Nutrient	Criteria	Examples
Saturated fat	3 g or less	250 mL chili, soup, chowder, stew
Sodium	350 mg or less	
Sugars	NA	

Ingredients used in recipes for mixed dishes

Additional ingredients can be used to prepare recipes. Where possible try to use lower sodium varieties (e.g., tomato sauce, soup). The following are examples of ingredients that can be used to prepare recipes:

- Oils, soft tub margarines (these types of margarines can also be served in individual portions)
- Sugar, maple syrup, table syrup, corn syrup, honey, molasses
- Herbs, spices, salt, flavourings (e.g., vanilla, onion powder, garlic powder, etc.)
- Tomato sauces, tomato paste
- Condensed soup, broth, bouillon
- Cocoa powder
- Whole grain flours or whole wheat flour – whole grain wheat flour may not be readily available, and Canada’s Food Guide notes that although whole wheat flour is not whole grain, it can still be a healthy choice because it contains fibre (along with other nutrients)
- Baking powder, baking soda, cream of tartar, corn starch
- Vinegar

Condiments

Condiments are used to enhance the flavour of foods and beverages. They can be high in sodium, sugars and/or saturated fat and should be used in small quantities. Where possible, try to use low sodium varieties (e.g. ketchup, soy sauce) or low saturated fat versions (e.g., sour cream).

Examples include:

- Ketchup
- Mustard
- Relish and pickles
- BBQ sauce
- Mayonnaise
- Salad dressing
- Soy sauce
- Sour cream
- Salsa
- Guacamole
- Hot sauce
- Cream cheese
- Jam
- Honey
- Syrup (for pancakes or waffles that meet the guidelines)
- Croutons
- Soft tub margarine
- Gravy (only when served as part of a roast meat dinner or sandwich such as with turkey, chicken, beef, pork or wild game OR when made as part of a homemade stew)



Beverages

Canada's Food Guide recommends making water your drink of choice. Healthy beverage options other than water can include:

- Milk
- Unsweetened fortified plant-based beverages (e.g., soy, almond, rice, coconut, etc.)
- Unsweetened coffee and teas*

* These beverages can be sold or served in high school only and can be made available to students or staff. Condiments i.e., milk, cream and sugar can be served on the side.

Non-sugar sweeteners cannot be served.

Other beverages should not be consumed regularly as they have too much sodium, sugars and/or saturated fat, or are sources of caffeine or non-sugar sweeteners.



These beverages cannot be sold or served at school:

- Flavoured water (artificially flavoured, sweetened with sugar or non-sugar sweeteners)
- 100% fruit juice
- Fruit drinks, punches and cocktails
- Vitamin water
- Sports drinks
- Energy drinks or Energy shots
- Soft drinks / Pop (regular and diet)
- Slushy drinks
- Sweetened iced tea
- Sweetened hot or cold coffee or tea drinks
- Homemade or pre-packaged milk shakes
- Bottled / Pre-prepared Smoothies
- Packaged hot chocolate (regular or "lite")



Other products

Highly processed foods and beverages should not be eaten regularly because they are not a part of a healthy eating pattern. **These foods and beverages add excess sodium, sugars and/or saturated fat to the diet and cannot be sold or served at school.**

- Highly processed foods and beverages include the sugary drinks listed in the beverages section above, and:
- Candy, chocolate (bars or candies), cookies
- Gum
- Chips, cheesies, puffs, twists, crisps, straws, pretzels (regular or baked)
- Ice cream, frozen yogurt, frozen desserts or popsicles
- Pudding
- Sweetened gelatin (jelly) / jellied desserts
- High sugar dessert toppings or syrups
- Whipped cream or whipped dessert topping
- Deep-fried products of any kind
- Poutine
- Nachos

Non-sugar Sweeteners

Sometimes, in an attempt to lower the sugar content of foods and beverages, non-sugar sweeteners are added to products. Often, these products are low in nutrition and may replace healthier foods and beverages. The Provincial SFG do not allow foods or beverages that contain non-sugar sweeteners to be sold and/or served at school.

Non-sugar sweeteners can include artificial sweeteners, sugar alcohols and natural non-sugar sweeteners. You can find out if a food or drink contains non-sugar sweeteners by reading the ingredient list. Look for words such as: aspartame, acesulfame potassium, neotame, advantame, sucralose, saccharin, cyclamate, thaumatin, sugar alcohols (sorbitol, isomalt, lactitol, xylitol, mannitol, maltitol, erythritol, hydrogenated starch hydrolysates), steviol glycosides (stevia), and polydextrose.

