

There are requirements in the Child Care Licensing Regulation to ensure appropriate food and beverages are provided to children in licensed facilities. Here are some suggestions to help you meet these requirements:

1. Plan your menu with [Canada's Food Guide](#):

- Establish a meal and snack routine, offering a meal or snack every 2-3 hours.
- Offer at least one type of food from each food category (fruit/vegetable, whole grain, and protein foods) at each meal (for example: grilled cheese sandwich on whole wheat bread & apple slices).
- Offer foods from at least two food categories for each snack (for example: hummus & cucumber, banana & peanut butter, or yogurt & granola).
- Prioritize minimally processed foods while limiting foods and beverages high in saturated fat, added sugar, or salt (sodium), to learn more about label reading visit: [Nutrition Labelling | Health Canada](#). For example: serving muffins made with whole grains, nuts/seeds, or fruits/vegetables more frequently than pastries, donuts, or cakes or serving plain cereals or granola bars more frequently than sugar-coated cereals or granola bars.
- Other meal and snack resources:
  - [Meal and snack ideas for your 1-3 year old child | HealthLink BC](#)
  - [Recipes | Appetite to Play](#)
  - [Canada's Food Guide Kitchen](#)
  - [Child Care Menu Planning Practical Guide | Ontario Dietitians of Public Health](#)

2. Respect each child's choices around food and provide a safe environment during eating times.

- Do not use food to reward or manipulate a child's behaviour. Do not withhold food as a consequence or punishment for behaviour.
- Do not praise or scold children for the amount of food they eat, or for the order in which foods are eaten, or for the type of food their parents have provided.
- Remember [Ellen Satter's Division of Responsibility](#): Adults decide what food is served, when it is served, where it is served. Children decide whether they eat or not and how much they eat.
- Understand that it is normal for a child's appetite to vary; they may eat a lot one day and very little the next. A skipped meal or snack will not harm a healthy child.

3. Support age-appropriate learning experiences during food preparation and mealtimes:

- Choose pre-meal activities that help calm children and get them ready for eating (for example: small group and/or quiet activities like listening to a story, helping to prepare food, or setting tables).
- Allow older children to help in the planning and preparation of snacks and meals.
- Encourage skill development by allowing children to pour water into their own open cup or use their own fork. These activities may be a little messy but are important steps to learning.
- Whenever possible, eat together with children or in small groups. Allow for 20-30 minutes for a meal and 10-15 minutes for a snack
- Role model healthy eating habits by using neutral language about food (avoid calling foods "good" or "bad"), respecting hunger and fullness cues, and limiting distractions.
- Participate in a variety of ways when children are eating and drinking (for example: use words to describe the taste, texture, smell, or colour of foods, or connect food to culture, the land, and enjoyment). This will ensure safety, learning and a built-in opportunity to make personal connections with children of all ages.
- Help children learn about hand washing, personal safety, and food safety (for example: washing your hands before food preparation, sit down while eating, and refrain from double-dipping in shared foods like dips/sauces).

4. Offer foods that are nutritious, age-appropriate, respectful of culture and meet specific dietary needs.

- Decide if the facility, parents/caregivers, or a defined combination of the two, will provide the snacks and/or meals.

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- Support parents in bringing nutritious foods. Be mindful to not shame parents/caregivers for their choices as they can be impacted by many factors including time, convenience, and food insecurity.
- Offer a variety of foods and ensure at least one familiar food is available at each meal and snack, especially when introducing a new food (some children must be exposed to a new food many times before trying it).
- Modify foods to make them age-appropriate (for example: quartering grapes lengthwise or removing pits and seeds) and always supervise babies and young children when they are eating to reduce the risk of choking.

5. Beverage recommendations:

- For children under age 12 months, offer human milk or formula according to their hunger and fullness cues. Human milk is recommended until age 2 years and beyond.
- Water should be offered for thirst (except for infant programs). Consider providing a water cooler or jug for access to water all day.
- Babies and children don't need juice. If giving, limit juice to ½ cup (125mL) per day in an open cup with a meal or snack.
- Babies can learn to drink from an open cup at 6 months and should be weaned off the bottle by 12 months to prevent cavities and lower their risk of iron deficiency; support parents and children with this transition.
- For more information on beverages for young children, see [Fluids Facts | Island Health](#).

6. Follow the parent's instruction and/or the written care plan regarding the child's individual nutrition needs (for example: their request to have the child's meal cut up or to avoid specific foods due to allergy, intolerance, or preference). Make appropriate modifications or substitutions when snack and meal planning for children with allergies or other dietary requirements.

7. Each childcare facility should develop a method to ensure that parents are informed regarding the food and drink offered to their child each day, for example:

- Post a message to parents stating what was served at snack/lunch each day, or
- Inform each parent verbally of the foods offered to their child when the parents arrive for pick-up.

Section 56 of the Child Care Licensing Regulation states:

(1) A licensee must keep records of each of the following:

(e) written policies and procedures for respecting food and drink to be given to children.

What your Licensing Officer will be looking for during a visit is that the facility has a written policy that describes for parents and the childcare staff the specifics around the provision of healthy food and beverages. Consider the following when developing the policy:

- Using Canada's Food Guide as a resource.
- Are there any foods that you prefer that parents refrain from sending and what are the reasons for your request?
- How will the facility promote regular communication between parents and staff regarding the children's experiences with food and around the introduction of new foods?
- Infant and toddler considerations, e.g. safe texture for children under 4 years old, food safety, and the introduction of new foods.
- How snack and mealtimes will be opportunities to support eating competence (Is fullness respected? Are children involved in meal prep and set up? Are mealtimes neutral and pleasant?).
- List of foods that will be available on special occasions/celebrations. Alternatively, consider using non-food rewards for celebrations (examples: dance party, stickers, plants/seeds, extra free-play time).
- How special dietary needs, allergies and sensitivities will be addressed.
- The provision of healthy beverages. Is water always available?
- Your plans to provide opportunities for nutrition education in a non-stigmatizing way. How are cultural and traditional foods included at your facility?

Note: Many ideas gathered in this InfoSheet are from [Island Health's Public Health Dietitians](#), [Toddler's First Steps](#), [Appetite to Play](#), [Canada's Food Guide](#) and [Child Care Resources from Ontario Dietitians in Public Health](#).