

A smiling healthcare professional, likely a nurse or doctor, is shown from the chest up. She is wearing a white lab coat and has a stethoscope around her neck. She is holding a bright red apple with both hands, presenting it towards the camera. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting. The top of the image features a decorative graphic of overlapping, wavy lines in shades of blue, green, and cyan.

# En route to a healthy diet

Cadre de référence pour une  
saine alimentation au sein  
du Réseau de santé Vitalité

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## What is a healthy diet?

A healthy diet includes a variety of foods. It especially includes foods with high nutritional value:

- Vegetables and fruit
- Whole grains
- Proteins

A healthy diet leaves little room for foods with low nutritional value that are high in salt, sugar or saturated fats.

It meets our needs in essential nutrients for the proper functioning of our body.

### Benefits of healthy eating

Adopting healthy eating habits helps maintain good physical and mental health, resulting in a state of well-being.

### What is a healthy eating environment?

A healthy eating environment:

- facilitates access to nutritional foods;
- positively influences people;
- encourages people to choose healthy foods, whether consciously or unconsciously;
- limits the availability of foods and beverages with low nutritional value.

### Why create a healthy eating environment?

It's our duty to help our patients and our employees make better food choices to improve their health.

Vitalité Health Network wants to set an example. Therefore, the Network is making a health shift and implementing a healthy eating environment.

### Who does this reference framework apply to?

The goal of this reference framework is to guide food production and the sale of healthy and nutritional products.

It applies to all food services for patients/clients, staff, visitors and volunteers of the Network:

- menus, snacks and drinks offered to patients;
- meals and products sold in cafeterias, canteens and vending machines.



# Nutritional criteria and measures for providing health-promoting foods

The criteria and measures implemented by the Network, in connection with the Healthy Eating Environments policy, are based on the Canada's food guide, Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs) and other relevant resources.

Food, in addition to being a necessity, is also a source of pleasure that can have symbolic or emotional characteristics. This is why we adopt a somewhat flexible approach that allows more sugary, salty or fatty foods **occasionally**.

## 1. Offer meals and foods based on the recommendations of Canada's food guide and best practices

- Offer two vegetable choices at each meal
- Offer two fruit choices at each meal and at any time
- Offer servings that do not promote overeating
- Offer a variety of whole-grain products
- Offer fish at least twice a week
- Offer legumes at least once a week
- Limit fat, salt and sugar
- Avoid fried food, trans fats and saturated fats
- Avoid sugary drinks



### 1.1. Offer at least two fruit choices at each meal and at any time

Variety encourages people to eat more fruit. Always offer at least **two fruit choices**:

- on menus
- in patient snacks
- at cafeterias and canteens



Promote the consumption of whole fruit instead of fruit juices, even if they are 100% pure.

### 1.2. Offer at least two vegetable choices at each meal

Variety encourages people to eat more vegetables. Always offer at least **two vegetable choices**:

- on patient menus
- with meals served at the cafeterias

According to Health Canada, increasing consumption of fruit and vegetables can promote maintaining a healthy weight and reduce the risk of heart disease.<sup>5</sup>



### 1.3. Offer servings that do not promote overeating

Food servings that are too large can promote overeating and lead to long-term weight gain.<sup>1</sup> In addition, reasonable servings can reduce food waste.<sup>9</sup>

The servings offered must be large enough to be filling without promoting overeating.

### 1.4. Offer a variety of grains ensuring that 50% of the grain products contain at least 2 g of fibre per serving.

Whole-grain products are more nutritional than refined-grain products. They are richer in fibre, vitamins and minerals.<sup>6</sup> Consuming foods rich in fibre can reduce the risks of:

- Colon cancer
- Type 2 diabetes
- Heart disease
- Stroke<sup>6</sup>

Offer 50% of grains, preferably whole grains, containing at least **2 g of fibre per serving**:

- Whole-grain bread, pasta and rice
- Oats and oatmeal
- Whole grains (quinoa, buckwheat, amaranth, etc.)

Limit food made from refined grains:

- Products made from white flour: white pasta, white bread and some breads labelled as "multigrain."
- Many processed foods such as muffins, pastries, crackers, etc.



### 1.5. Offer fish at least twice a week

Fish and fish-based dishes should be included at least **twice a week**:

- on patient menus
- on cafeteria menus

Fish is a good source of protein, omega-3 fatty acids and vitamins such as vitamin D<sup>11</sup> and minerals.

Choose fatty fish, rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as:<sup>12</sup>

- herring
- mackerel
- char
- sardine
- salmon
- trout



### 1.6. Offer legumes at least once a week

Legumes should be included at least once a week:

- on patient menus
- on cafeteria menus

Plant-based proteins, such as legumes, have many health benefits. Low in saturated fat and rich in dietary fibre, legumes reduce the risks of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and colon cancer.<sup>1</sup>

Kidney beans, black beans, chickpeas, soya beans, lentils and other legumes can easily be added to salads, chili, spaghetti sauces, rice-based dishes and vegetable stir-fries.



## 2. Offer foods low in saturated fats and with no trans fats

### 2.1. Limit the amount of fat. Choose unsaturated fats.

Replacing saturated fats with unsaturated fats reduces the cholesterol rate.<sup>1</sup>

**Choose unsaturated fats** (e.g., olive oil, canola oil, etc.) for cooking and in recipes.

Although unsaturated fats are healthier, limit the amount of fats added to recipes and meals.

Here are some substitutions to reduce the amount of saturated fats in recipes:

Avoid fats with high-saturated-fat content	Substitute recommended fats with low-saturated-fat content
Butter, shortening or vegetable oil high in saturated fats (coconut oil or palm oil) used in desserts	Vegetable oil (canola, sunflower, soy, etc.) or margarine
Butter to sauté vegetables or to cook other foods in the frying pan	Vegetable oil such as olive oil or canola oil
Cream-based salad dressings (e.g., Ranch)	Oil-based vinaigrettes (e.g., Italian)
Cream in broths and cream soups	Plain, low-fat yoghurt or silky tofu to give creaminess to soups
Sour cream in dips	Dips with a legume puree base (e.g., hummus)

### 2.2. Offer low-fat foods in which the saturated fat content does not exceed 10% of the daily value

Saturated fats are especially common in animal-based foods such as cream, butter, cheeses, fatty meats, but are also in some vegetable oils, such as coconut oil and palm oil.

Saturated fats are harmful to heart health and nearly half of Canadians consume too much.<sup>13</sup>

**Maximum fat content of foods served to patients and in cafeterias:**

- Milk and yoghurt: ≤ 2% MF
- Cheese: ≤ 20% MF
- Sour cream ≤ 10% MF
- Soups, desserts and snacks: ≤ 10% of the daily saturated fat value per serving (≤ 2 g of saturated fat per serving)



### 2.3. Offer ready-made foods without trans fats

Trans fats are strongly linked to heart disease and other health problems.

They are naturally occurring in small quantities in the fat of ruminant meats, such as in beef or lamb and in milk products.

Large quantities of trans fats used to be found in foods containing processed hydrogenated oils. These oils are now banned in Canada, which makes it easier to offer foods **with no trans fats** (less than 0.2 g of trans fats is considered no trans fats).<sup>10</sup>

### 2.4. Avoid fried foods

Fried or previously fried foods are fatty. The food absorbs part of the fat in which it is cooked.<sup>14</sup>

**Avoid** serving fried or previously fried foods to patients and at cafeterias:

- chips
- egg rolls
- doughnuts
- chicken nuggets...
- fries

### 2.5. Offer lean meats

Lean meat contains **at most 10% fat**.

Choose meats with less marbling and remove the skin from poultry.

Lean cuts of meat include:<sup>16</sup>

- the flank;
- the loin;
- the round;
- lean and extra-lean ground meat.<sup>15</sup>



## 3. Offer foods and drinks low in sodium

### 3.1. Aim for a sodium content of 2,300 mg per day in menus. Do not exceed 3,000 mg per day

The sodium content of the three meals offered to patient in a day should not exceed **3,000 mg** and should ultimately reach the target of **2,300 mg**.

The sodium content of each main dish should be limited to **600 mg** and not exceed **900 mg**.

Sodium is an essential nutrient, but too much is strongly linked to high blood pressure, which is a risk factor for heart disease.

The average sodium intake of Canadians is 3,400 mg per day, which is double the necessary daily intake of 1,500 mg of sodium.<sup>7</sup> Our goal of 2,300 mg of sodium per day corresponds to a maximum acceptable intake for this nutrient (maximum amount that can be consumed without too great a health danger).<sup>8</sup>

### 3.2. Offer foods and beverages with a sodium content under 20% of the daily value, but aim for a sodium content under 15% of the daily value

This applies to all foods, other than main dishes, and to drinks served to patients or at cafeterias and canteens:

- mixed nuts and snacks
- vegetable juice, sparkling water
- soups, desserts and prepackaged foods

A serving of the foods must contain:

- under 480 mg of sodium so as not to exceed 20% of the daily value in sodium;
- under 360 mg of sodium so as not to exceed 15% of the daily value in sodium.



## 4. Offer foods low in sugar and that do not contain sweeteners

### 4.1. Offer desserts and snacks:

- with a total carbohydrate content under 30 g;
- that contain less than 15 g of added sugar per serving;
- that do not contain sweeteners.

Foods high in sugar:

- can lead to tooth decay;
- contribute to an excessive caloric intake;
- lead to excess weight and obesity.<sup>17</sup>

Desserts and snacks must contain a maximum of 30 g of carbohydrates and less than 15 g of added sugar per serving. This includes puddings, yoghurts, cakes, quick breads (e.g., banana bread), muffins, granola bars, etc.

This criterion does not apply to fruit, which are nutritional and whose consumption should be encouraged.

Foods that contain sweeteners, also called sugar substitutes, can:

- make healthy eating more difficult;
- replace more nutritional foods;
- cultivate the taste for sugar and promote sugary food choices in the long run.

It is better to get used to less sugary foods and foods that do not contain sweeteners and to learn to enjoy them.<sup>18</sup>



## 5. Offer appropriate hydration

### 5.1. Choose water, milk, vegetable juice and 100% pure fruit juice

The Network's facilities do not offer sugary drinks.

### 5.2. Offer easily accessible self-serve water dispensers

Since water should be the drink of choice, self-serve water dispensers must be easily accessible throughout the Network's facilities. Water helps ensure proper hydration without extra calories.<sup>1</sup>

### 5.3. Offer milk, milk substitutes and milk-based drinks containing at most 30 g of carbohydrates per 250 mL

Milk and milk substitutes are generally nutritional drinks, but sometimes they contain large quantities of added sugar. To limit the consumption of sugary drinks, the milk and milk substitutes sold or offered in the facilities must not contain more than **30 g of carbohydrates** per 250 mL serving.

### 5.4. Offer juice and milk sizes under 360 mL. Give preference to sizes of 250 mL or less

Milk and 100% pure fruit juice may be nutritional choices, but they should not replace water for hydration. Individual bottles of juice and milk are often too large, which encourages overeating.

Drinks offered or sold by the Network must not exceed 360 mL; give preference to smaller sizes of 250 mL.

### 5.5. Sugary drinks, energy drinks and sweetened drinks are not permitted within the Network

Sugary drinks contain a lot of added sugar and calories with little nutritional value. Consuming them regularly increases the risk of:

- obesity
- type 2 diabetes
- tooth decay<sup>19</sup>

The Network has **completely eliminated** all sugary drinks (e.g., soft drinks, vitamin water, fruit punch, lemonade, iced tea, etc.) from its facilities.

Drinks containing sweeteners have also been eliminated. They can cultivate a preference for the taste of sugar in people who consume them regularly.

To help you know whether a product contains a sugar substitute, here are the names of some sweeteners that may be found in the list of ingredients:<sup>18</sup>

- Xylitol
- Erythritol
- Sorbitol and sorbitol syrup
- Lactitol
- Saccharine
- Maltitol and maltitol syrup
- Isomalt
- Aspartame
- Stevia extract and steviol glycosides
- Mannitol



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