

Food Mentoring Toolkit

A resource for community organizations who offer food programs or talk about food and nutrition

Canada's Food Guide

The purpose of this booklet is to provide more detailed information on Canada's food guide. It is not designed for the purpose of following along with the video.

The information provided in this booklet, and all Food Mentoring Toolkit resources, is intended for general education purposes and should not replace medical advice. Consult a registered dietitian or qualified health professional before making significant changes to diet or lifestyle.

Canada's Food Guide

What's ahead in this booklet

- What is Canada's food guide (CFG)?
- Healthy eating habits
- Special dietary requirements
- Commonly asked questions



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URL: <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/food-guide-snapshot/>

Key messages

1. A nutritious eating pattern can be achieved through meals that have a balanced plate of **½ vegetables and fruits, ¼ protein, and ¼ whole grain foods.**
2. Eating is about more than just food choices – it includes habits such as cooking more often, being mindful while eating, and enjoying meals with others.
3. While the food guide eating pattern provides a framework for meals, nutrient requirements can vary between individuals.

Words matter:

You will notice throughout the Food Mentoring Toolkit that food neutral language is used. If you would like to learn more about this topic, here is a link to the [Food Neutrality Handout](#)

Supporting Materials

Handouts

- Canada's Food Guide Snapshot

Facilitator guide:

If you are interested in speaking to clients about this topic, please email publichealthnutrition@saskhealthauthority.ca to request a facilitator guide. The guide includes a step-by-step plan for watching the video as a group and working through group activities and discussions.

If you would like to watch a video on this topic, visit the Canada's Food Guide section on the [Food Mentoring Toolkit home page](#). For more information, there are additional resources listed at the end of this chapter.

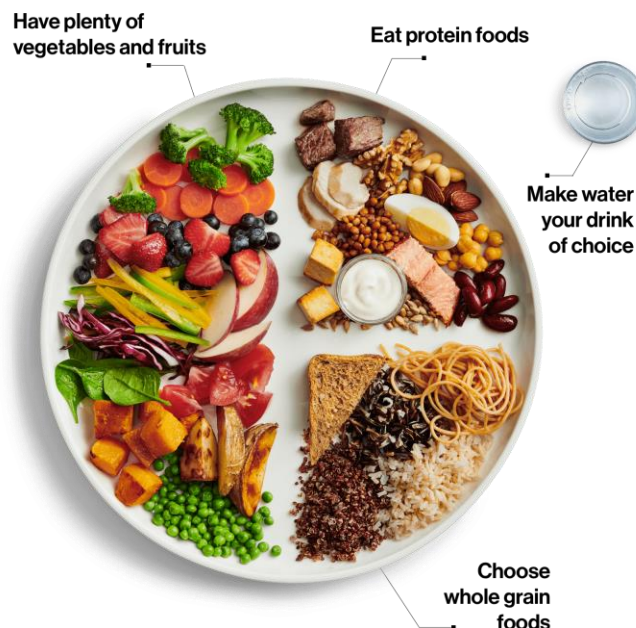
What is Canada's Food Guide?

Eating patterns and the plate

Canada's food guide is designed to promote healthy eating patterns and support the nutritional well-being of Canadians aged 2 years and older. In addition to providing key messages about choosing nutritious foods, it also emphasizes the importance of eating habits. The food guide serves as a practical tool for individuals and can also be used to inform best practices, guidelines, administrative procedures, and policies.

An *eating pattern* refers to the foods a person usually eats

Research supports an eating pattern that includes $\frac{1}{2}$ a **plate vegetables and fruits**, a $\frac{1}{4}$ **whole grains**, and a $\frac{1}{4}$ **protein foods**. While not all meals will be served on a plate, the idea is to design a variety of meals with similar ratios.



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*All information provided in this chapter on the Canada's food guide has been adapted from Government of Canada's website.¹

Consistently following an eating pattern outlined in the food guide can help to increase the intake of fibre and moderate the intake of saturated fat. A healthy eating pattern can improve nutritional health and well-being, while lowering the risk of long-term nutrition-related diseases.

In addition to this meal pattern, water is promoted as the primary drink of choice.

Tips for developing or encouraging a nutritious eating pattern:

- Make or provide meals with $\frac{1}{2}$ plate vegetables and fruits, $\frac{1}{4}$ plate whole grains, and $\frac{1}{4}$ plate protein foods.
- Choose or provide dairy products lower in saturated fat, sodium, and sugars.
- Replace meats higher in saturated fat with leaner options.
- Eat or provide fish more often.
- Replace some of the meat in meals or menus with plant-based protein foods (e.g., beans).
- Limit the availability of highly processed foods.
- Drink or offer water as the main beverage.
- Read and compare food labels.
- Be aware of how food marketing and product placement can affect food choices.



Vegetables and fruits

Vegetables and fruits are recommended to be ½ the plate, as they are central to a nutritious eating pattern. Vegetables and fruits provide fibre, vitamins, minerals, and a unique combination of other nutrients. Canadian statistics show that less than 25% of those over the age of 12 consume at least five servings of vegetables and fruit per day.² Consuming five servings (around 400 grams) of vegetables and fruits daily helps to achieve adequate fibre intake and reduces the risk of chronic diseases such as Type 2 Diabetes.⁶

Here are some tips for making vegetables and fruits a key piece of meals and snacks:

- Eat or provide dark green vegetables often, as they contain folate and calcium.
- Eat or provide orange vegetables often, as they contain vitamin A.
- Fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables and fruits can be healthy options. Prepare products with varieties that have no added sugars, seasonings, breading, or sauces.

Whole grain foods

Whole grain foods provide nutrients such as fibre, vitamins, and minerals. When grains are “refined”, it means that essential parts of the grain are lost during processing. This results in the removal of many nutrients that can be beneficial for health. Whole grains keep all the parts of the grain intact (*bran, endosperm, and germ*), preserving the full nutritional value.

Ways to provide whole grain foods:

- Incorporate options like quinoa, whole grain pasta and breads, whole oats, and whole grain brown or wild rice.
- Incorporate a less commonly used grain such as buckwheat, barley, or bulgur.

Considerations for when choosing whole grain foods:

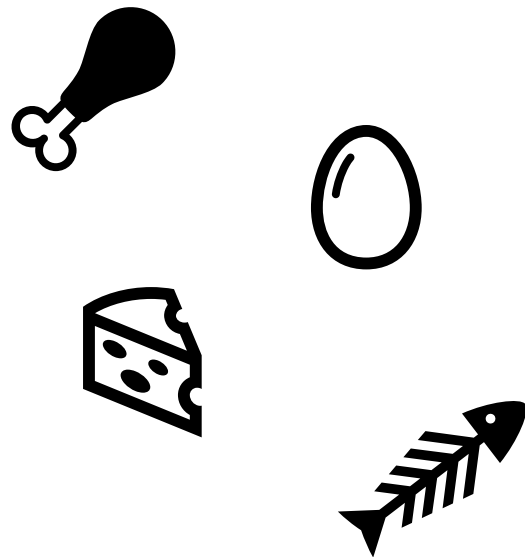
- Read the ingredient lists to make sure they include the term “whole grain,” followed by the name of the grain (e.g., whole grain brown rice).
- Use the nutrition facts table to look at the % daily value (%DV) to compare products and choose those with more fibre.

Protein foods

Foods from the protein category contain nutrients like protein, vitamins, and minerals. Protein can come from both animal and plant-based sources. Plant-based proteins offer many benefits, including more fibre and less saturated fat compared to animal-based proteins. Food labels can be used when choosing meat and plant-based proteins (like processed or simulated meat products), as some can contain high levels of sodium or saturated fat.

Nutritious protein food ideas:

- Eggs
- Lean meats and poultry
- Wild game meats
- Fish and shellfish
- Lower fat dairy products
- Nuts and seeds
- Beans, peas, and lentils
- Tofu, soybeans, fortified unsweetened soy beverages, and other soy products



Tips for offering more plant-based proteins

Many organizations incorporate plant-based proteins into their menus. When a menu regularly includes plant-based proteins, vegetables, fruits, nuts, and seeds they are being “plant-forward.” Plant-forward menus can be good for the financial costs of preparing food for larger groups.

Pulses are a common plant-based protein and include dried peas, beans, lentils, and chickpeas. These foods are high in protein, fibre, zinc, iron, folate, and B-vitamins. Pulses are part of a sustainable food system, so they are good for nutrition, health, and for the earth.⁸

Try some of the following tips to add plant-based protein into meals:

- Beans in tacos or burritos.
- Lentils in soups, stews, curry, casseroles, or pasta sauces.
- Tofu in a vegetable stir-fry.
- Chickpeas in salads or make a bean salad.
- Pureed pulses in baked goods, like muffins.

Explore more

Health benefits of fibre³:

- Keeps you feeling fuller for longer.
- Helps with bowel regularity.
- Reduces colon cancer risk.
- Helps to reduce cholesterol levels.

Choose foods with healthy fats

Choosing foods with mostly healthy fats can help reduce your risk of heart disease. The type of fat you consume is more important than the amount of fat you consume. It is recommended to choose foods with mostly unsaturated fats and limit foods with saturated fats.

Some of examples of healthy fats:

- Fatty fish such as salmon, trout, sardines, herring, and mackerel
- Oils such as olive, canola, peanut, sesame, soybean, flaxseed, and sunflower oil
- Avocado
- Nuts and seeds
- Soft margarine
- Soybeans and soy products, such as tofu

Some examples of saturated fats:

- Processed meats like hot dogs, bologna, sausages, bacon, and deli meat
- Fatty meats such as pork belly, ribeye, brisket, and regular ground beef
- Some highly processed foods such as fries, candy bars, and bakery foods
- Tropical oils such as coconut and palm oil
- High fat dairy products such as butter, heavy cream, and ice cream
- Canned coconut milk or cream
- Lard, ghee, and hard margarine

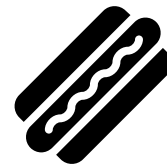
Limit highly processed foods

Highly processed foods are processed or prepared foods and drinks that often have excess sodium, sugars, or saturated fats. These foods are common in our food environment and are often conveniently accessed. When consumed frequently, they can contribute to poor health outcomes.

It is not necessary to eliminate these foods, but it is important to limit them and focus on whole, minimally processed options to support overall health. Preparing meals and snacks from scratch, and choosing less processed ingredients, can help reduce reliance on highly processed products. For example, instead of packaged granola bars or store-bought muffins, try making homemade versions.

Some examples of highly processed foods:

- sugary drinks
- syrups and jams
- chocolate and candies
- chips and pretzels
- sauces, dressings and gravies
- ice cream and frozen desserts
- bakery products, like muffins and cakes
- fast foods, like French fries and burgers
- frozen entrées like pasta dishes and pizzas
- frozen meats, like chicken fingers or nuggets
- processed meats like sausages and deli meats



Sodium^{9, 10, 11}

A small amount of sodium is needed to maintain health; however too much sodium can have negative impacts. For some people, too much sodium causes blood pressure to rise. High blood pressure increases the risk for heart disease and stroke. Too much sodium over a long period can also damage the kidneys.

The recommended amount of sodium for adults is:

- a minimum of 1500 mg per day and
- a maximum of 2300 mg per day



On average, adult Canadians consume about 3400 mg (roughly 1 ½ teaspoon) of sodium per day. This is significantly more than the recommended amount.

- One teaspoon of salt is 2300mg of sodium.

Most of the sodium Canadians eat (77%) comes from processed foods sold in grocery stores and in food service outlets (e.g. restaurants). Only about 5% to 11% is added at the table or when cooking food at home, with the remainder occurring naturally in foods.

Explore more

All types of salt are high in sodium. Whether it is sea salt, kosher salt, pickling salt, or a gourmet salt, they all have about the same amount of sodium as table salt. There is no difference in how they may affect your health.

Sugar^{11, 12, 13}

Health Canada recommends *free sugars* be **less than 10%** of total energy intake each day. For example: 10% of a 2000 calorie per day diet means that 200 calories, or less, should come from *free sugars* (200 calories from free sugar = 50g or 12.5 teaspoons).

Explore more

Free Sugars

Free sugars, include sugars that are added to foods and drinks, and sugars that are naturally present in honey, syrups, fruit juices and fruit juice concentrates. Free sugars do **not** include naturally occurring sugars found in vegetables, fruits, and unsweetened milk.

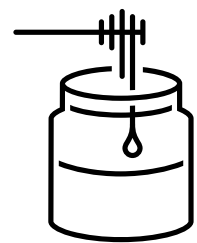
Free sugars like honey, maple syrup and agave may come from natural sources, but your body processes them in the same way as sugar.

Excess sugar in any form provides extra calories. Whether you choose to use honey, brown sugar, agave syrup or white sugar, use small amounts.

White table sugar and other sugars added to foods contribute extra calories to foods but no other nutrients. Eating foods with added sugars may lead to an increased risk of cavities (especially in children) excess calorie consumption and increased risk for chronic diseases.

To reduce the amount of free sugars in your diet:

- Drink water in place of sugary drinks.
- Aim for most of your sugar intake to come from fruits, vegetables, and unsweetened dairy products.



Saturated fat¹⁴

Fats are important for our overall health as they provide energy and help the body grow, develop, and absorb some vitamins. However not all fats are the same. Some fats help keep the heart healthy, while others increase risk for heart disease and should be limited. As mentioned earlier, saturated fat is a type of fat known to increase the risk of heart disease.

Tips to reduce intake of saturated fats:

- Look for foods that have less than 15% DV of saturated fat.
- Include plant-based protein foods more often (e.g., beans, chickpeas, lentils, tofu).
- Remove skin and trim fat off meat before cooking.
- Drain fat from cooked meat.
- Choose leaner types and cuts of meat such as bison, elk, moose, skinless poultry, extra-lean ground beef, sirloin steaks or roasts, and pork loin.
- Bake, broil, or grill foods rather than frying them with butter or lard.

Unsaturated fats¹⁴

Unsaturated fats are found mostly in plant-based foods and fish. They help to improve blood cholesterol levels and reduce the risk for heart disease. There are two kinds:

- **Monounsaturated fat** - naturally found in olive and canola oil, non-hydrogenated margarines, avocados, and nuts like almonds, pistachios, pecans, and cashews.
- **Polyunsaturated fat** - includes omega-3 and omega-6 fats:

- **Omega-3 fats** are found in fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, trout, herring, and sardines. They are also found in flax seeds, oils, and some soft margarines. Omega-3 fats are also added to some eggs, dairy products, and juices.
- **Omega-6 fats** are found in safflower, sunflower, and corn oils. They are also found in nuts and seeds such as almonds, pecans, Brazil nuts, sunflower seeds, and sesame seeds.

Limit the amount of saturated fats in your diet and replace foods that contain mostly saturated fat with foods that contain mostly unsaturated fat.

Trans fat¹⁵

Trans fats are found naturally in small amounts in animal-based foods such as dairy, beef, and lamb. Manufacturers, when processing some vegetable oils, can produce small amounts of unavoidable trans fats. Some prepackaged foods contain small amounts of these trans fats.

In 2018, Health Canada banned the use of partially hydrogenated oils, which are the main source of industrially produced trans fats. Manufacturers cannot purposely add them to any foods sold in Canada.



Some considerations for lowering the use of highly processed foods include:

- Plan meals around whole foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and lean proteins.
- Swap out processed deli meats by using larger cuts of meat (e.g., roast chicken, beef, or pork) that can be cooked and thinly sliced for sandwiches, wraps, and salads.
- Incorporate nutrient-dense snack options such as fresh fruit, raw vegetables, hard-boiled eggs, plain popcorn, cheese cubes, or unsalted nuts and seeds instead of packaged snack foods.
- Limit highly processed sauces, spreads, and condiments by choosing simpler versions (e.g., mustard, hummus, or homemade dressings), or make your own using basic ingredients like olive oil, vinegar, herbs, and spices.
- Get familiar with food labels—check for added sugars, sodium, and long ingredient lists with unfamiliar or artificial additives. Aim for products with fewer ingredients.

Explore more

Sugar substitutes are commonly found in sugar free drinks and some packaged foods. Some examples are aspartame, stevia, and acesulfame-potassium. For more information on sugar substitutes and their safety, visit [Health Canada's](#) website here.

Water

Drinking water is important for health and is the best way to hydrate. We lose water through sweating, breathing, and getting rid of waste, so we need to replace what is lost to prevent dehydration. Many beverages provide excess calories, sodium, sugar, or saturated fats.

Tips for drinking more water:

- Make water the primary option at meals and throughout the day.
- Encourage and remind everyone to bring a water bottle or make water highly visible.
- Offer a fruit and herb infused water or carbonated water when other options are desired.
- Emphasize the importance of drinking water before, during, and after physical activity or playing sports.

Use food labels

Nutrition information is available on food packages, which supports informed choices. This information can be useful for individuals to make personal choices, as well as organizations to determine if certain foods meet desired nutrition criteria.

Most packaged foods will contain the following:

1. **Nutrition facts table**, which provides information on serving size, energy content, certain nutrients, and % daily values (% DV). The % DV can be used as a guide to show you if the serving of a stated size has a little or a lot of a nutrient.
 - 5% DV or less is a little
 - 15% DV or more is a lot
2. **Ingredient list**, which lists all the ingredients in a food product by weight. The list starts with the ingredient that weighs the most and ends with the ingredient that weighs the least.

3. **Nutrition claims** include nutrient content claims and health claims. All foods with a claim must meet certain criteria but some foods may not have a claim even though they meet the criteria.
4. **Food allergen labelling** provides information to help you avoid specific food allergens.
5. **Date labelling** provides information on how long an unopened food product will last and the safety of certain products. The most common types of dates are “best-before,” “packaged on” and “expiration” dates.

For more information refer to the Label Reading Section of the [Food Mentoring Toolkit](#).

Explore more

The expiry date and best-before date are **not** the same. For foods that have a best before date, it is referring to the expected time that the unopened product will retain freshness under standard conditions. For expiration dates, after that date has passed, the food may not have the same nutrient content as described on the label and should be discarded. Only certain foods that have strict nutritional and compositional specifications such as infant formula or meal replacements require expiration dates.⁷

Be aware of food marketing

We are frequently exposed to food marketing, which can make food choices more challenging. Sometimes marketing is obvious, such as recognizable characters or brand logos on packages. Other times it is more subtle, like front-of-package claims such as “low fat.” Food marketing is also common online, appearing across websites, apps, and social media on phones or tablets. Even the placement of products on store shelves is a marketing strategy that can influence shopping decisions. Overall, food marketing is designed to create trends and persuade people to buy certain foods or brands.

Being aware of food marketing is important and can help:

- Recognize when foods are being marketed to you.
- Remind you to evaluate the food label.
- Create awareness for children and youth about food marketing.
- Make more informed food choices.

For more information refer to the Creating Supportive Food Environments Section of the [Food Mentoring Toolkit](#).

Healthy eating habits

Eating well is about more than just choosing certain foods—it is also about building positive habits and creating environments that make positive choices easier. Organizations play an important role in shaping these environments to support and promote health.

Be mindful of your eating habits

Mindful eating means paying attention to how, when, and where we eat, not just what we eat.

Taking time to slow down and limit distractions can lead to:

- greater enjoyment of meals.
- better awareness of hunger and fullness cues.
- making healthier choices more often.



Tips to support mindful eating:

- Eat at designated areas such as a cafeteria, breakroom, or dining table.
- Encourage staff and participants to eat with others, when possible.
- Promote social connection during meals with conversation and interaction.
- Focus on the eating experience such as taste, texture, smell, and presentation.
- Minimize distractions such as phones or TV while eating.
- Allow adequate time for meal and snack breaks.
- Share resources and messaging on mindful eating habits.

Tuning into hunger and fullness

Recognizing and responding to internal hunger and fullness cues can support balanced eating and reduce the likelihood of overeating—especially when people are busy, distracted, or emotionally driven to eat.

Ways individuals can build this awareness:

- Establish a regular eating pattern such as eating three meals a day.
- Complete a “self check-in” before eating to evaluate hunger levels.
- Slow down eating to give the body time to register fullness.
- Pause before second helpings.
- Notice how emotions, stress, or distractions may influence eating.
- Reflect on how the environment affects food choices.

Ways to support hunger and fullness recognition:

- When providing food, offer balanced meal and snack options using the food guide plate.
- Create a pleasant and distraction free eating environment.
- Provide adequate time to eat.
- Offer nutritious food and drink options in vending machines, canteens, or catered meals—and make them the most accessible and affordable choice.
- Make water stations visible and accessible as the primary beverage option.

Cook more often and support food literacy

Cooking more often supports building long-term positive eating habits. Preparing food from scratch gives individuals more control over ingredients, reduces reliance on highly processed foods, and provides a platform for skill-building and connection.

How organizations can support cooking and food literacy:

- Involve participants in food preparation when appropriate.
- Regularly offer hands-on experiences with food (e.g., gardening, cooking workshops).
- Ask for input from staff or community members to shape food-related activities and resources.
- Highlight practical tips for planning, meal prepping, and budgeting.



Eat together

Eating together can strengthen relationships, make meals more enjoyable, and provide opportunities to celebrate culture and family food traditions. Shared meals create meaningful moments of connection and can also encourage trying a wider variety of foods.

Organizational practices to encourage communal eating:

- Maintain welcoming, clean, and comfortable shared eating spaces.
- Host meal-based events that encourage bringing and sharing foods from diverse backgrounds.
- Limit distractions, such as screens during eating.
- Use conversation prompts or fun table activities to foster positive interaction.

Respecting culture and food traditions

Food is deeply personal and cultural. Recognizing and celebrating food traditions within programming helps create inclusive and welcoming environments that support identity and belonging.

Cultural traditions can influence:

- what we eat, when we eat, and how we eat
- where food comes from
- how food is prepared and shared



Ways organizations can be inclusive of food cultures:

- Welcome diverse food traditions in events, snacks, and meals.
- Provide culturally relevant nutrition information and resources.
- Encourage participants to share recipes and traditions.
- Build awareness and pride in cultural food practices.
- Support intergenerational sharing of food knowledge, skills, and traditions, by inviting elders and knowledge keepers to programming.

For more information refer to the Eating Practices to Support Well-being Section of the [Food Mentoring Toolkit](#).

Special dietary requirements

People with special dietary requirements (e.g., diabetes, celiac disease, etc.) may need nutrition guidance from a registered dietitian. To see a dietitian, a referral from a family physician or walk in clinic may be required. Contact your local health clinic to inquire about scheduling an appointment.

Commonly Asked Questions

1. What are some strategies for offering nutritious food while on a budget?

Reduce food waste

- Prepare only the amount participants are likely to eat.
- Save leftovers or freeze for future use.
- Freeze fruits, vegetables, and bread before they spoil.

Stretch meals

- Add beans, lentils, vegetables, oatmeal, breadcrumbs, or eggs to meat dishes to make them go further.
- Combine lower-cost ingredients with higher-cost items to balance nutrition and budget.

Choose budget-friendly, filling foods

- Beans, lentils, eggs, ground beef, cabbage, squash, whole grains, oatmeal, potatoes, canned tuna, sardines, tomato sauce, and peanut butter.

Shop smart

- Buy foods with less packaging (avoid single-serving packs that cost more).
- Cook from scratch more often instead of buying mixes or ready-made items.
- Choose store brands, they are usually just as good as name brands, at a lower price.

Quick, affordable meal ideas

- Quesadillas, omelets, spaghetti, chili, oatmeal, homemade soup, pizza buns, sandwiches, cheese-and-vegetable wraps, tuna casserole.

For more information refer to the Staying Within Your Food Budget handout on the [Food Mentoring Toolkit](#) page.

Further support

If a client or participant is struggling to purchase enough food, most communities have services to help people get food. Call 211 or go to www.211saskatchewan.ca to help find service in your area.

2. Where should I refer people to for special eating guidelines?

People with kidney disease, diabetes, heart disease, or celiac disease, among others, may require special eating guidelines that are not covered in this course. For example, people with diabetes need to be mindful about their carbohydrate intake throughout the day, and people with celiac disease need to follow a gluten-free diet.

If you have individuals in your program that are seeking additional information, counseling, or guidance for these conditions and their specific eating guidelines, suggest they make an appointment with their family physician and ask to be referred to a Registered Dietitian. Some clinics allow self-referrals for dietitian services in some communities. Contact your local health clinic to inquire about the process of working with a dietitian.

3. How can I prevent getting gassy from eating pulses (dried peas, beans, chickpeas, and lentils)?

"Beans, beans, the musical fruit..."

Pulses—such as beans, peas, lentils, and chickpeas—are highly nutritious but are sometimes known for causing gas. This is due to complex sugars found in pulses. Interestingly, they don't cause more gas than many other foods like cabbage, broccoli, or certain fruits.

The good news: You can reduce gas from pulses!

- Give your body time to adjust. Regular consumption helps your digestive system adapt, and gas production often decreases.
- Start small. Begin with small portions, drink plenty of water, and gradually increase your intake.
- Rinse canned pulses. This removes some of the compounds that contribute to gas.
- Soak dried pulses properly. Change the soaking water 2–3 times during a long cold soak.
- Discard soaking liquid. Always cook pulses in fresh water.
- Cook thoroughly. Well-cooked pulses are easier to digest than undercooked ones.

4. What else supports good health?

A health-promoting routine that includes enjoyable movement supports both physical and mental well-being at every age. By respecting individual experiences and capacities, we can find activities that feel good and can be sustained long-term.

Benefits of regular movement include:

- Encouraging healthy growth and development.
- Lowering the risk of chronic diseases such as cancer, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease.
- Building stronger muscles and bones.
- Boosting daily energy.
- Helping manage and reduce stress.
- Supporting positive mental health.
- Promoting independence as we age.

For more information on how to get active, visit:

<https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/tips-for-healthy-eating/physical-activity-healthy-eating/>

5. Why are there no recommended portion amounts for individuals on the new Canada's food guide?

The 2019 update to Canada's food guide reflects input from Canadians and shifts the focus toward healthy eating habits rather than prescribed portion sizes. It emphasizes practical guidance and tools to help Canadians make informed food choices. This approach is simpler, more flexible, and easier to adapt to individual needs and lifestyles.⁵



6. Is dairy still an important food to include?

Dairy products—such as milk, yogurt, and lower sodium cheeses—are still included in Canada’s food guide under the protein foods category. While there are no longer specific daily recommendations for dairy intake, these foods remain valuable sources of protein, calcium, and vitamin D.



Additional Reading

1. [Canada's Food Guide](#) – Health Canada
2. [Canada's Food Guide Other Languages](#) – Health Canada
3. [Canada's Dietary Guidelines](#) – Health Canada
4. [Food Guide Friendly Initiative](#) – Health Canada
5. [Toolkit for Educators: Activities for Ages 4-6, 7-8, and 9-11](#) – Health Canada
6. [Saskatchewan School Food Guidelines](#) – Ministry of Health
7. [School Food Programs in Canada - Food Literacy Education Guide](#) – University of Saskatchewan

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