Eating Practices to Support Well-being

Booklet

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

Saskatchewan Health Authority
Food Mentoring Toolkit

The purpose of this booklet is to provide more detailed information on eating practices to support well-being. 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.

Eating Practices to Support Well-being

What's ahead in this booklet

- What are eating practices that support well-being?
- Eating competence and mindful eating
- Everyone has a role in the feeding relationship
- Avoid using food as a reward
- Get everyone involved in meal preparation
- Commonly asked questions

Key messages

1. Eating practices that support well-being focus not only on *what* foods we eat, but also on the routines and practices for *how* we eat.
2. To be competent at eating means having a positive attitude about food and eating.
3. Care providers play a powerful role in shaping the attitudes, eating habits and food preferences of those they care for.

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 the Food Neutrality Handout.

Supporting Materials

Handouts

- Teaching Food Skills: Age-Appropriate Tasks
- Cooking with Kids: Tips for Success

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 Eating Practices to Support Well-being section on the Food Mentoring Toolkit home page. For more information, there are additional resources listed at the end of this chapter.

Eating Practices to Support Well-being

What are eating practices that support well-being?

Eating well is a combination of what we eat and our eating behaviours. It includes the food we eat, the nutrients our body needs, the pleasure and traditions associated with food, and our positive relationship with food. Eating well also supports social well-being by bringing people together, encouraging connections and sharing through preparing and eating food with others.[1,2]

Eating practices that support well-being include maintaining a healthy relationship with both food and your body. It involves having a positive attitude about eating and food, trusting and responding to internal cues of hunger and fullness, and the skills to plan for, prepare and have regular meals and snacks.

Explore more

Eating practices that support well-being focus not only *what* foods we eat, but also on the routines and practices for *how* we eat.

What are positive eating habits?

Before you eat:

- Planning regular meals and snacks ahead of time based on Canada's food guide. This could include up to 3 meals each day, with or without snacks.
- Having a positive attitude towards food and eating.
- Trying new foods.
- Growing your own food or knowing where your food comes from.
- Eating before you feel too hungry. Waiting until you feel too hungry can change the type and amount of food eaten.

While you eat:

- Eating with other people such as caregivers or friends.
- Avoiding distractions while eating such as TV, cell phones, tablets and/or computers.
- Maintaining the "Division of Responsibility" (see below for more information).
- Following your body's hunger cues such as stopping eating when you are full, rather than finishing your plate.
- Eating mindfully (see below for more information).
- Being flexible and enjoying a variety of foods without feelings of guilt or shame.

Traditional food practices:

- Celebrating occasions and special holidays with cultural food traditions.
- Growing, hunting, fishing, harvesting and gathering your own food.
- Preserving and sharing family recipes.
- Asking elders, knowledge keepers or respected adults about cultural food traditions and their meaning.
- Giving thanks before eating.

Eating competence

Eating competence is being positive, comfortable, and flexible with eating. It means being reliable about getting enough to eat of enjoyable food. A competent eater does their best to plan for regular meals. They take the time to eat, and to give attention to their food while eating. To be a competent eater, be relaxed, self-trusting and joyful about eating, and take good care of yourself with food.[3]

Competent eaters are more joyful and positive about eating, are more active, sleep longer and have better medical tests. They are more self-aware and self-accepting, not only with food, but in other ways as well.[3]

For more about the evidence showing that competent eating is good for you, see The Satter Eating Competence Model.

To be competent at eating means	It is not
Having a positive attitude toward food and eating. People with eating competence enjoy eating, and do not feel guilty about eating food or their enjoyment of food.	Being uncertain or having negative thoughts about food.
Being able to explore more than just favourite foods. People who are not afraid of food eat a good variety of foods.	A fear of trying new foods.
Being able to self-regulate how much is eaten. A person can feel hunger and fullness and can eat comfortably until they are truly satisfied, both physically and emotionally.	Having fixed ideas about what and how much someone should eat. Feeling guilt when eating.
Creating structured opportunities to eat regularly.	Dieting, restricting, or skipping meals.
Being flexible.	Using the words *can* and *cannot* or *should* and *should not* when eating.

Mindful eating

Being mindful means taking time to eat and noticing when you are hungry and when you are full. Use these ideas from Canada's food guide to help you be mindful of your eating habits.[4]

- Use your senses to be more conscious of the food you are eating. Pay attention to the aromas, textures, flavours and taste of food.
- Consider your eating habits by reflecting on why, what, when, and where you eat and make positive changes to routine eating behaviours.
- When eating, create a supportive environment by limiting distractions and eating in a comfortable setting.

For more information, refer to the Canada's Food Guide Section of the Food Mentoring Toolkit.

When working with children, everyone has a role

We all play a powerful role in shaping the attitudes, eating habits and food preferences of those we care for or work with. Food and eating skills are often learned from a parent, care provider, teacher, or program leader. People learn more from what they see and experience than from what they are told.

The Satter Division of Responsibility in Feeding (sDOR)[5] outlines the different roles that providers and children have during feeding. It is important for parents and caregivers to stay within their roles in the division of responsibility, for children to develop healthy eating habits.

Children often eat many meals away from home, so it is especially important for schools, childcare settings and community programs to model the division of responsibility. When everyone does their job with feeding, children will do their job with eating.

When food is brought from home		
Care provider decides what food to offer	Care provider decides when and where child eats	Child decides whether, how much, and what order to eat food.
When food is provided by a facility or program		
Care provider decides what food to offer, when and where child eats		Child decides whether, how much, and what order to eat food.

Providers should offer children a variety of nutritious foods but not cater to the child's likes and dislikes. Once the division of responsibility is established, children will eat the amount they need, and they will learn to eat many of the foods that those around them enjoy. This supports them to become competent eaters.[5]

The sDOR is copyrighted by Ellyn Satter, and the Ellyn Satter Institute is the official source for the interpretation and application of the Satter models.

Explore more

If you would like to learn more about feeding young children through practical tips and real-life scenarios, visit the Raising a Healthy Happy Eater webpage:

https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/your-health/conditions-diseases-services/raising-healthy-happy-eater

Avoid using food as a reward

Using foods as a reward can have a negative impact on children's physical health, mental health, and behaviour.[6] The ways food can be used as a reward, and the consequences of this, can occur in a variety of ways:

Situation	Consequence
Withholding liked foods as punishment.	Contributes to problems with regulating eating habits leading to overeating.
Rewarding good behaviour with foods high in sugar, saturated fats, and/or sodium.	Confuses children and teaches them to enjoy reward foods more. They learn to do the behaviour solely for the reward.
Rewarding with dessert for eating foods caregivers want them to eat.	Makes it difficult for children to read their hunger and fullness cues if they eat more than they want, just to get dessert.
Punishing children by forcing them to eat everything on their plate.	Causes children to dislike the foods they are being forced to eat and can also teach a child to ignore their fullness cues.

For more information, refer to the Creating Supportive Food Environments Section of the Food Mentoring Toolkit.

Food skills in the kitchen

The loss of food skills impacts eating habits and diet quality. [7] Factors such as changing priorities, less generational sharing, limited time, and readily available prepared meals contribute to a loss of everyday food skills.

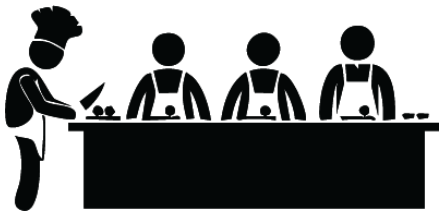
People have less time for intentional practices like meal planning, grocery shopping, and preparing and cooking balanced meals from scratch. This loss not only affects nutrition but also our connection to food, culture, and community.[7]

Explore more

"Foods skills can be regained—and when they are, individuals learn how to read labels, budget for healthy ingredients, prepare simple meals, reduce food waste, and cook with confidence. Rebuilding food skills empowers people to take control of their health, make informed choices, and pass valuable knowledge on to the next generation".[7]

Organizations that have current food safety certification are encouraged to provide opportunities to teach or practice food skills in programming whenever possible. Hands-on experiences with food are a perfect way to introduce nutrition topics and build confidence in the kitchen that can last a lifetime.

For ways to involve children in meal preparation, see the handout *Teaching Food Skills: Age-Appropriate Tasks.*



Get everyone involved in meal preparation

Children and adolescents can be involved in the planning, preparation, and serving of food. Cooking is a great way to teach important life skills. Young adults who are involved in preparing meals and who enjoy meals socially tend to have better nutritional intake. Children will also be more likely to try the foods they help prepare. It is a fun, hands-on activity that teaches literacy, science, and math. It does not have to be complicated – start simple and build skills. Younger kids can use age-appropriate cooking tools, help measure ingredients and stir. Older kids can help peel and chop vegetables. Once they are confident, they can help bake, broil or sauté.[8]

When children help, it may be messy and that is okay! Children can also help clean up. Plan for additional time when cooking with children. Choose easy recipes with lots of easy tasks that children can help with. To save time, prepare some ingredients before you begin cooking.

Here are some tips for getting others involved:

- Allow others to have input and provide suggestions for the menu.
- Invite participants to help you shop, prepare meals, and assist with clean up.
- Choose a theme to help engage participants.

For ways to involve children in meal preparation, see the handout *Cooking with Kids: Tips for Success.*

Commonly Asked Question

1. **What are some ideas to model supportive eating practices during programming, meetings and community events?**

   - Create a supportive food environment. Include nutritious and appealing choices when offering food.
   - Ask participants for ideas on how you can create an environment that supports positive eating habits.
   - Provide enough time so all participants can eat their meal together.
   - Maintain a regular schedule if meals and/or snacks are offered each day.
   - Follow the division of responsibility when feeding children and older adults. Do not pressure or restrict the amount of food participants eat.
   - Encourage families to take food home that they do not finish. Provide take away containers for leftover food.

Additional Reading

Family Meals with no TV - Dietitians of Canada

The Joy of Eating: Being a Competent Eater - Ellyn Satter Institute

The Division of Responsibility in Feeding Poster - The Ellyn Satter Institute

Be Mindful of Your Eating Habits - Health Canada

References

1. Rev W. Position on Healthy Eating: An Integrated Population Health Approach. Northern Health. 2019. https://www.northernhealth.ca/sites/northern_health/files/about-us/position-statements/documents/healthy-eating-full.pdf

2. Healthy Lifestyle - Eating Together Summary of Recommendations and Evidence [Internet]. [cited 2024 Aug 21]. Available from: https://www.pennutrition.com/KnowledgePathway.aspx?kpid=6750&trcatid=42&trid=6681

3. Satter E. The Joy of Eating: Being a Competent Eater [Internet]. The Ellyn Satter Institute. 2022 [cited 2024 Aug 21]. Available from: https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Joy-of-eating-2022.pdf

4. Canada H. Canada's Food Guide. 2020 [cited 2024 Aug 21]. Be mindful of your eating habits. Available from: https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/healthy-eating-recommendations/be-mindful-of-your-eating-habits/

5. Satter E. The Satter Division of Responsibility in Feeding [Internet]. Ellyn Satter Institute. [cited 2024 Aug 21]. Available from: https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/how-to-feed/division-of-responsibility/

6. Why Parents Shouldn't Use Food as Reward or Punishment - Health Encyclopedia - University of Rochester Medical Center [Internet]. [cited 2024 Aug 21]. Available from: https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/encyclopedia/content.aspx?ContentTypeID=160&ContentID=32

7. The Benefits of The Family Table [Internet]. American College of Pediatricians. [cited 2026 Jan 21]. Available from: https://acpeds.org/the-benefits-of-the-family-table/

8. Cooking with Kids - Unlock Food [Internet]. [cited 2024 Aug 21]. Available from: https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Childrens-Nutrition/Cooking-and-Meal-Planning/Cooking-with-Kids.aspx
9. Cooking with Kids of Different Ages - Unlock Food [Internet]. [cited 2024 Aug 21]. Available from: https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Child-Toddler-Nutrition/Cooking-with-Kids.aspx

Acknowledgements

The Food Mentoring Toolkit was developed by Saskatchewan Health Authority public health nutritionists.

Saskatchewan Health Authority gratefully acknowledges the contributions of individuals and organizations in the renewal of this toolkit. We appreciate the support and contributions from registered dietitians and community organizations who helped to ensure this resource meets the needs of those using its content.