

Food Guide Facts

7

Background for
Educators and Communicators

The Importance of Healthy Eating

For some time it has been known that adequate nutrition is essential for proper growth and development. More recently, it has been accepted that healthy eating is a significant factor in reducing the risk of developing nutrition-related problems, including: heart disease, cancer, obesity, hypertension (high blood pressure), osteoporosis, anaemia, dental decay and some bowel disorders.

What "Reducing Risk" Means

Reducing risk means that the chances of developing a disease are lowered. It does not guarantee that a disease will be prevented. Since several factors are involved in the development of disease, risk reduction usually involves several different strategies or approaches. For instance, healthy eating is one positive action that may help to avoid a potential problem.

Now, the importance of healthy eating is also being recognized as

a way to actively promote health. Healthy eating contributes to an overall sense of well-being and helps people to look, feel and perform better.

Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating Meets Individual Needs

Factors That Influence a Person's Needs for Energy and Nutrients

When it comes to food and nutrition needs, no two people are exactly alike. They differ according to:

- **Age** – For example, teens generally have higher energy needs than a mature person.
- **Body Size** – Nutrient and energy needs are greater for those with a larger body size.
- **Gender** – Males, because of their larger body size and greater muscle mass, generally have higher nutrient and energy needs. Females too have special nutrient needs, particularly for calcium and iron.
- **Activity Level** – Increased activity levels can increase energy and nutrient needs.

● **Pregnancy and Breast-feeding** – Both these stages in a woman's life increase nutrient and energy needs.

● **Individual Variation** – There is a natural variation in the need for energy and nutrients from person to person, even when factors such as age, body size, gender and activity levels are similar.

How Can One Food Guide Meet Everyone's Needs?

The Food Guide is just a guide. The ranges in both the number of servings and the size of servings make the Food Guide flexible. Individuals with energy needs ranging from 1 800 to 3 200 Cal (7 500 – 13 400 kJ) can choose the number and size of servings appropriate to their nutrient and energy needs.

People with lower energy needs such as older women will plan their healthy eating pattern around the lower number of servings for each group. To meet all of their nutrient needs without consuming too much energy, these people must choose nutrient-rich foods

that are lower in fat and energy from each food group and the Other Foods category.

Recommended Range of Servings in the Food Guide

Grain Products	6 - 8
Vegetables & Fruit	7 - 10
Milk Products	
Children Ages 4-9	2 - 3
Youth Ages 10-16	3 - 4
Adults	2 - 4
Pregnancy and Breast-feeding	3 - 4
Meat & Alternatives	2 - 3
Other Foods - No specific serving range	

In contrast, athletes or adolescent boys with high energy needs have more flexibility in the choices they make. Choosing a variety of foods and lower-fat foods more often is still important. But, the extra energy that these people need gives them the option to include foods that are higher in fat and energy more often.

Most people will meet their needs for energy and nutrients by choosing a number of servings that fall somewhere between the lower and upper ends of the servings range. People may also vary their intakes from day to day.



One day they might eat 9 Grain Products and just 5 foods from the Vegetables & Fruit group; the next day only 6 Grain Products but 10 choices from Vegetables & Fruit.

Too Much Food?

You can expect the comment that the Food Guide recommends too much food, especially from the Grain Products and the Vegetables & Fruit groups. However, when you compare some *typical* serving sizes with the recommended serving sizes, the number of servings no longer seems too large.

For instance:

- 1 cup/250 mL of orange juice or a juice box counts as 2 servings of fruit (1 serving is only 1/2 cup/125 mL).
- 1 cup/250 mL of broccoli counts as 2 servings of vegetables.
- A whole bagel or bun, or a cup of pasta or rice is 2 servings of Grain Products.
- One sandwich made with 2 slices of bread counts as 2 servings of Grain Products.

Vitamin and Mineral Supplements

Choosing foods according to the Food Guide can provide all of the vitamins and minerals needed for good health for most people.

Vitamin and mineral supplements may be indicated for special situations such as: iron and folacin supplements during pregnancy; fluoride supplements for children three years of age and older who are at high risk of dental decay

and are living in a non-fluoridated area; vitamin D for people who are not exposed to the sun or who do not consume enough vitamin D-fortified fluid milk or margarine.

Consumers who need vitamin/mineral supplements should be directed to a doctor or dietitian.

The Food Guide and Healthy Eating

Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating is intended to encourage an overall pattern of healthy eating. Healthy eating is the average of what is eaten over time. Choices may be balanced over a day, or even over several days.

Enjoying food is part of healthy eating. Healthy eating means being able to enjoy different eating routines on different days, like regular weekdays, weekends and special times.

Birthdays, holidays, religious celebrations, vacations and visiting can bring special foods into our lives. Consumers can relax and enjoy these festive times while remembering to balance missing food groups or higher-fat choices over the course of several days.

Canada's Food Guide

Complete the following questions in your notebook after reading the materials provided (Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating Meets Individual Needs). Use effort.

1. Why is adequate nutrition essential?
2. Healthy eating is a significant factor in reducing the risk of what nutrition-related problems?
3. What does 'reducing risk' mean?
4. Healthy eating also contributes to what?
5. Canada's Food Guide uses ranges for the recommended numbers of daily servings. What factors influence a person's needs for energy and nutrients?
6. What group of people have lower energy needs?
7. What group of people have high energy needs?
8. What does Canada's Food Guide say about the need for vitamin and mineral supplements?
9. What are 3 examples of the special situations where supplements may be necessary?
10. Is it necessary for a person to eat a variety of foods according to Canada's Food Guide at every meal?
11. Why does Canada's Food Guide provide a range for the recommended number of daily servings?