

# Canada's New Food Guide



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*Canada's new food guide emphasizes eating plants, drinking water and more cooking at home and eating with others.*

Canada's Food Guide has grown up. Making its latest debut just a couple of weeks ago, it's based on the most up to date evidence, it's available on a mobile app, and it's never been easier to follow: half of your plate should be fruits and vegetables, a quarter should be whole grains and the last quarter should be a protein source. This new approach, which leans heavily on plants as the backbone of our diet aligns well with the need to sustain this planet and promote eating behaviours that not only contribute to human health, but the health of our ecosystem. For anyone over two years of age, the recommendations are part of the federal government's larger healthy eating strategy. Millions of Canadians suffer from diet-related diseases. The Heart and Stroke Foundation estimate that in 2016 alone, there were 47,000 deaths. So there are high stakes in getting this right.

And there are some noticeable and welcomed changes. For the first time ever, water is being promoted as the beverage of choice. Gone are any recommendations to flavoured drink milk or fruit juice, both of which add calories and either natural or added sugars. Sugar sweetened beverages are the single largest contributor of sugar in the diet. High sugar intake is linked to heart disease, stroke, obesity, diabetes, high blood cholesterol and cancer. Instead, we are advised to choose plain water as the best hydration option to reduce sugar intake and promote oral health.

Another big change to note is that the guide no longer refers to portion sizes. Also, milk products including yogurt, cheese and milk are now included in the

category "protein foods", which make up 1/4 of the balanced plate at meals. This highlights an important point – which is to remember that this guide is for the general population and not for children under the age of two. We expect "part two" of the guide later this year: "Canada's Healthy Eating Pattern", which will provide more specific advice about the types and amounts of foods for the different life stages like infancy and older age. This soon-to-be released tool promises to give us some clarity on "how much" of these nutrients we need. In the meantime, it is important to remember that plain milk remains a nutritious beverage for children and is an easy way to ensure they are meeting their daily calcium needs for growth and development.

And please take note! Protein sources, including legumes, nuts and seeds as well as the more familiar meat, dairy, poultry and fish should make up a quarter of the plate. Whole grains, too, holding their own with a quarter plate, are a recommended part of our daily intake. Let that be important news for the many Canadians who have embraced high protein, high fat diets that demonize grains. By following Canada's new food guide instead, we can get our fill of both health and sustainability in every satisfying bite.

I'm glad to see that the new guide focuses on whole foods over processed and prepared foods that currently contribute to excess sodium, free sugars or saturated fat. About half the dietary energy consumed by Canadian children comes from ultra-processed foods—widely recognized as unhealthy food. Intense marketing by the food industry starts early in life and has taken its toll on our diets. For this reason, the new food guide goes beyond just the "what" of eating, to the "how": The guide considers that food skills are needed to navigate the complex food environment and support healthy eating. And let's all hope that our federal Senate will soon pass the legislation that will protect future generations of children by restricting the marketing of foods and beverages to them.

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