



A NEWSLETTER FOR PROFESSIONALS

Nutrition Update Newsletter

April 2019

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Healthy Eating: It's More Than Knowing What to Eat

“Healthy eating is much more complicated than personal choice, as eating behaviour is highly contextual.” – Kim Raine, 2005

Healthy eating behaviour is significantly affected by factors beyond simply knowing what to eat. These factors interconnect and everyone will experience them differently. Being aware of what is impacting a person's decisions and actions will improve your ability to support them.

Here are some of the factors that impact how people choose what foods to eat and ideas to address them.

Income – *Can the person afford basic healthy foods?*

“Within Canada, research consistently demonstrates that the most important barrier to healthy eating is inadequate income” (1, 2). Learn about and connect people to community resources and income supports.

Housing – *Does the person have stable housing?*

“Housing is an absolute necessity for living a healthy life” (3). Having safe, affordable and stable housing decreases the risk for health problems (3). In addition to stable housing, safe drinking water, sanitary conditions for food storage and preparation, basic cooking equipment, and functioning

appliances are also essential (4). Learn about housing supports in your community such as housing authorities and connect people to them.

Food Access and Transportation – *Where would the person access food in their community or neighbourhood? How would they access it?*

What a person has access to will affect the types and quantity of foods purchased. Work with people to find creative solutions to improve their food access such as: carpool to grocery stores, advocate for improved public transportation, or ask corner stores to carry basic foods.

Social Support Networks – *Do they have a family/peer support network?*

If a person does not have a fulfilling social support network social isolation can lead to depression and reduced ability to prepare and consume nutritious meals (4). Encourage people to eat together, join a community kitchen or plan regular potlucks. *Is it a norm amongst their social supports to eat certain foods?*

Be aware that social networks can be a major influence on food choices. Work to identify how the person's social support networks affect their eating.

Food Environment – *Is the food available to them healthy?*

This can be in terms of food access but also what food is available and promoted to them at work, school, home, or in recreation settings. Work to identify environmental factors that affect their food choices and how to overcome these factors. As an organization, ensure your environment supports healthy eating behaviours.



Professionals and leaders have an opportunity to address the physical, economic and social factors that affect food choices (4). By addressing factors such as food access and food environments we can move beyond education alone and have a greater impact on healthy eating behaviours.

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What are healthy eating behaviours?

Healthy eating goes beyond *what* we eat. It includes behaviours like *how*, *where* and *when* we eat, and the environmental impact of our food choices. The new Canada's Food Guide highlights a few of these important behaviours.

- Be mindful of eating habits. Take time to eat and notice when you are hungry or full. You are more likely to eat the amount of food right for you (4).
- Cook more often. Plan and involve others. It can help teach food skills and increase time spent together while making healthier foods (4).
- Enjoy your food. Maintain cultural and food traditions (4).
- Eat meals with others. Use that time to socialize and bond (4).
- Use food labels. Food labels can be used to make informed decisions (4).

- Be aware of food marketing. The foods that are being promoted either through price, appealing packaging, sponsorships or placement can influence your food choices either positively or negatively (4).

Take time to reflect on your eating behaviours and what you can do to support yourself and others.

How do we create a food environment that supports healthy eating?

The food environments where we live, learn, work and play can undermine the efforts of other initiatives, programs and policies designed to promote healthy eating. "Creating supportive environments across settings can help increase the positive influence that dietary guidelines can have on individuals, families and communities" (4). Create food environments supportive of healthy eating in all settings which can include programs, events and retail settings.

- When offering food, include healthy options that align with Canada's Food Guide.
- Promote and advertise healthy options. This includes making them

highly visible and priced competitively.

- Limit the amount of and the promotion of highly processed food and beverage products such as sugary drinks, candy, baking and high salt snacks.
- Create "policies and practices that reflect Canada's food guidelines to improve the food environment in settings such as schools, workplaces, recreation settings and health care facilities" (4).
- Have non-food fundraisers and sponsorships.

Healthy eating behaviours become more difficult for everyone when food environments are not supportive. Making nutritious foods more available and easy to choose creates healthier food environments.

Support the places where you live, learn, work and play to have healthy food choices available for all.

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Canada's Food Guide – In January 2019, Health Canada released a new Food Guide that outlines the foundation for healthy eating in Canada. The Food Guide is based on the best available scientific evidence and includes a range of actionable advice for Canadians, policy-makers and health professionals. It is now an online suite of resources ranging from tips for making healthy food choices to the broad factors that influence our eating behaviours such as food access and the food environment. Here are some links to get you started: [Food Guide snapshot](#), [Healthy eating recommendations](#), [Recipes](#), [Videos](#), [Food environments](#), [Food marketing](#), [Healthy eating in the community](#), [Healthy eating and the environment](#).



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