



**community food centres**  
**CANADA** good food is just the beginning

## GOOD FOOD FOR YOU

A NO-NONSENSE APPROACH TO CHOOSING FOOD THAT'S GOOD FOR YOU,  
YOUR COMMUNITY AND THE PLANET

### **You matter, and it matters what you eat**

The research is clear: Almost all chronic health conditions, from heart disease to stroke and cancer and obesity, are significantly affected by what you eat. What and how you eat impacts how you feel emotionally, as well as on how you perform at work or play, how you look or simply whether there's a spring in your step. So it's worth considering whether you can make some changes and start taking some steps toward eating the healthiest diet you will enjoy and can afford. Eating well is one of the nicest things you can do for yourself to just say "I'm worth it."

### **Make changes you can live with (and still be happy)**

Tastes are formed over many years. Chances are that even if you grew up on junk food, and crave sweet, salty, fatty foods, you also like some healthy foods. By learning what's healthier, building on what you already like, cutting back a bit on what you know isn't good for you and trying new foods, you can gradually tip your diet in a healthier direction — without suffering. If you try to push yourself too far too fast or make changes that feel restrictive and punishing, you'll be more likely to give up on change altogether.

### **There is no exact recipe for healthy eating — aim for consistency, not perfection**

You don't need to overthink or be scared of food! The negative effects of unhealthy eating add up over years, not today or this week. Stressing about every detail of what you eat every day is an approach that's often counterproductive. Aim for a general awareness of what you're putting in your mouth — what different foods you need, what's best avoided (for you), what's in your food and what a portion looks like — as you try to move in a positive direction by taking small steps toward healthier eating.

### **Plan to plan, cook, and shop more**

At first it can take more time to cook and shop regularly, but prioritizing this makes healthy eating so much easier. If you love to cook, that's great. But food doesn't need to be your passion or hobby, because there are many meals and snacks that are healthy and quick to prepare if you learn some simple strategies and skills. Income can factor in whether you have the resources and equipment to shop and cook, but there are tactics that are within reach for all income levels to take as much control over our own food supply as possible — while we fight for the healthier, fairer food system we need!

### **Sit down to eat when you can — with yourself or with others**

So much of our eating is done distractedly and at top speed. Taking the time to prepare even a simple meal and eating it consciously pays off in terms of social and physical health-- just for you, or for family and friends. Bringing people together around a shared table can be one of life's great pleasures. Children in families who eat together do better in a variety of ways. Friendships are made and family and cultural ties are built around tables.

### **Make vegetables and fruits your best friends — especially vegetables**

A good general rule to keep in mind is that 50% of everything you eat should ideally be fruits and vegetables. Increasing your fruit and vegetable intake may be the single most important thing you can do for your health. Many find fruit is easier to like than vegetables, but vegetables should be your best friends of all. The more you know about how to prepare them to make them delicious, the easier it will be.

### **The whole foods rule! rule**

Eating more whole foods means eating foods that are as unprocessed as possible. That means less white flour, pasta and rice, and more whole grains, like whole wheat, whole-grain pasta and brown rice. It also means reducing packaged foods, processed meats (like lunch meats and hot dogs), and eating fewer fast food meals.

### **Plants vs. animals - the plants take it!**

For a variety of reasons — from environmental considerations to cost and health — it makes sense to reduce the amount of red meat that we eat, and generally the amount of protein and fat from animal sources such as dairy products. That may not mean eliminating these foods, but the Harvard School of Public Health (currently the simplest, best healthy eating guidelines) recommends aiming to reduce meat to two servings per week or less and dairy products to one to two servings per day. Moderate amounts of healthier fats from fish, like salmon and sardines, and plants, like olive oil, almonds, and avocados can help lower your blood cholesterol and protect your heart.

### **That's just too much sugar, sweetie**

We eat a lot of sugar — an average of 22 teaspoons a day of *added* sugar, much of which comes from packaged food and sweetened drinks. Keep an eye out for added sugars on labels, especially if they appear in the top three ingredients. Yes, that means *you* glucose, fructose, sucrose and syrups! (Those are all sugar code names.) A really good place to start in moving toward healthier food habits is to reduce sweetened drinks, like soda, energy drinks, iced tea, lemonade, etc. They simply don't fill you up or nourish you. Though the naturally-occurring sugars in whole fruit are fine, approach fruit juice with care. (Strive for no more than ½ cup per day for a child.) Juice may have added sugars, and even without them, it has a lot of calories without the fibre of whole fruit. Let's all learn to love water!

### **Put your money where your mouth is**

Organic food is better for the environment for a variety of reasons: it's better for the health of farmers, and there's research to suggest that it's healthier for eaters in terms of nutrient content and avoiding pesticide residues. However, unless you can grow your own, buying organic costs a lot more and is therefore out of reach for many. Eating lots of fresh fruits and vegetables — organic or not — is great for our health. And choosing locally grown produce, or growing your own, is often a low-cost way to get tasty, fresh food onto your table. Buying local supports our farm economy and helps to safeguard our ability to grow the food we need closer to home. Depending on how much time and money you have, you can use your grocery dollars to support both your values and your health.