

Guidelines For Healthy Menus In School Canteens



	Mon	Tues	wed	Thurs	Fri
Break					
Lunch					



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Ingredient Selection

Fresh and local produce

Fruits: use fresh fruits like bananas, mangoes, pineapples, and watermelon. They should be ripe but not overripe.

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Vegetables: opt for leafy greens (spinach, callaloo, lettuce), root vegetables (sweet potatoes, carrots, Irish potatoes), and other colourful vegetables (bell peppers, tomatoes).

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Grains: choose whole grain products such as rice, whole wheat bread, and oats.

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Lean proteins: *Meats:* select lean cuts of chicken or fish. Avoid processed meats like sausages and hot dogs that are high in sodium and unhealthy fats (saturated and trans fats).

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Plant-based proteins: incorporate beans, black beans, chickpeas, lentils, and tofu for vegetarian options.

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Low-fat dairy or alternatives:

Dairy: use reduced-fat milk, yoghurt, and cheese.

Alternatives: opt for plant-based milk such as almond or soy milk, which should be fortified with calcium and vitamins.



Cooking Methods

Steaming



Steaming involves cooking food using the steam from boiling water. It is a gentle cooking method that preserves the natural flavours, colours, and nutrients in food.

Best for: vegetables, fish, poultry and dumplings.
Benefits: steaming needs no added fats or oils and helps keep the vitamins and minerals in your food.

Grilling



Grilling involves cooking food on a grill or barbecue, where heat is applied directly to the food. It can be done over an open flame or using an electric or gas grill.

Best for: meats, vegetables and seafood.
Benefits: grilling allows excess fat to drip away from the food, resulting in lower fat content. It also imparts a smoky flavour without the need for added fats.

Poaching



Poaching involves cooking food gently in a liquid, such as water, broth or milk, at a temperature just below boiling.

Best for: eggs, fish, poultry and fruits.
Benefits: poaching is a low-fat cooking method that preserves the moisture and tenderness of delicate foods.

Pressure cooking



Pressure cooking uses steam and high pressure to cook food quickly. The pressure cooker traps steam, which raises the temperature and cooks food faster.

Best for: stews, beans, grains and tougher cuts of meat.
Benefits: pressure cooking keeps nutrients and flavours while significantly reducing cooking time. It also uses less water and energy compared to other methods.

Sautéing



Sautéing involves cooking food quickly in a small amount of oil over medium-high heat. The food is usually cut into small pieces to ensure even cooking.
Best for: vegetables, lean meats, and seafood.
Benefits: sautéing uses minimal oil and preserves the texture and flavour of the ingredients. It's a quick and efficient way to prepare a healthy meal.

Roasting



Roasting involves cooking food in an oven at hot temperatures, which allows the exterior to become brown and crispy while keeping the inside tender.

Best for: vegetables, meats, poultry and nuts.
Benefits: roasting enhances the natural sweetness of vegetables and creates a satisfying texture without needing much oil.

Stir-frying



Stir-frying is a fast-cooking method where food is cooked in a small amount of oil in a wok or large pan over high heat. The food is constantly stirred to cook evenly.

Best for: vegetables, tofu, lean meats and noodles.
Benefits: stir-frying uses minimal oil and preserves the colour, texture, and nutrients of the ingredients. It is a great way to create flavourful, healthy dishes quickly.

Boiling and simmering



Boiling involves cooking food in a large amount of water at a rolling boil, while simmering is done at a lower temperature just below boiling.

Best for: pasta, grains, vegetables and soups.
Benefits: boiling and simmering are simple, fat-free methods for cooking. However, to keep nutrients, it's best to use the cooking liquid in soups or sauces.

Baking



Baking uses dry heat in an oven to cook food evenly. It can be done at various temperatures depending on the recipe.

Best for: bread, pastries, vegetables, casseroles and meats.
Benefits: baking allows for even cooking with little to no added fats. It is versatile and can be used for both sweet and savoury dishes.

Broiling



Broiling is similar to grilling but is done in an oven with the heat source coming from above. The food is cooked close to the heat source to achieve a crisp, browned surface.

Best for: meats, poultry, fish and vegetables.
Benefits: broiling allows excess fat to drip away and requires no added oil.

Blanching



Blanching involves briefly boiling food, then plunging it into ice water to stop the cooking process.

Best for: vegetables and fruits, especially before freezing or canning.
Benefits: Blanching preserves the colour, texture and nutrients in vegetables while also making them easier to peel or prepare.

Using less salt

Reducing sodium

Minimizing salt in your cooking does not mean sacrificing flavour. Here is how to enhance taste without relying on table salt:

- **Use fresh herbs and spices**

Garlic: fresh or roasted garlic adds a savoury flavour to dishes, making the taste richer without the need for extra salt.

Ginger: ginger offers a warm, spicy flavour that can enhance both savoury and sweet dishes, adding depth without salt.

Cilantro: cilantro provides a fresh, citrusy flavour that enhances salads, salsas and cooked dishes.

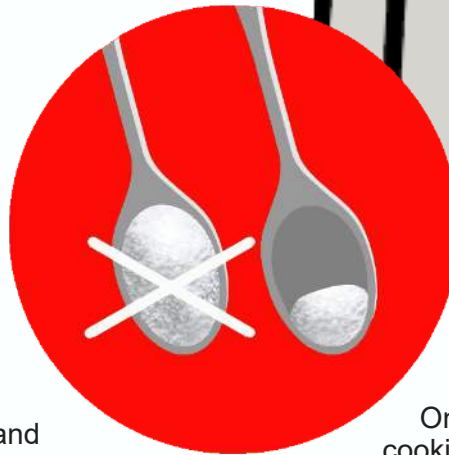
Other herbs and spices: experiment with basil, rosemary, thyme, cumin, paprika and black pepper. These can create complex flavour profiles that enhance the taste.

- **Citrus juices and zests**

Lemon or lime juice: A squeeze of lemon or lime juice can enhance the flavours in your dish, giving a sharp, tangy flavour that reduces the need for salt.

Citrus Zest: Adding lemon, lime or orange zest to your dishes gives a burst of flavour and aroma, elevating the overall taste.

Vinegar, Balsamic, apple cider: vinegars add acidity that can brighten flavours, making dishes taste well-seasoned without salt.



- **Aromatics**

Onions, shallots, and scallions: cooking with onions and other aromatics can provide a sweet / savoury base that enhances the overall flavour profile.
Celery and carrots: these vegetables naturally have sodium and add a salty flavour when cooked, which can help reduce the need for added salt.

- **Flavourful broths**

Low-sodium or homemade broths: use low-sodium or homemade vegetable, chicken, or beef broth in place of water to add more depth of flavour to soups, stews, and sauces.

- **Roasting and searing:**

Roasting vegetables and meats: roasting enhances the natural flavours of ingredients through caramelization, reducing the need for added salt.
Searing: searing meats and vegetables on high heat creates a flavourful crust, adding richness that can make up for less salt.



Using less sugar

Try natural sweeteners

Cutting down on sugar does not mean your dishes have to be bland or unsweetened. Here is how to use natural sweeteners and other techniques to maintain flavour.

- **Use natural sweeteners**

Fruit purees: applesauce, mashed bananas or pureed dates can add sweetness to baked goods and sauces. They also provide fibre and nutrients.

Honey or maple syrup: if a recipe requires added sweetness, use a small amount of honey or maple syrup. These natural sweeteners are more flavourful than sugar, so you can use less. Incorporate naturally sweet ingredients

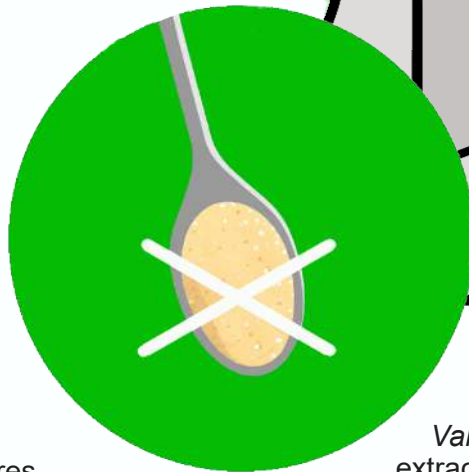
Dried fruits: dried fruits like raisins, dates or apricots can be added to dishes like oatmeal, salads, or baked goods for natural sweetness.

Fresh Fruits: fresh fruits such as berries, apples or pears can naturally sweeten breakfast items such as desserts or salads.

- **Spices**

Cinnamon: cinnamon adds a sweet flavour to dishes, which can reduce the need for added sugar.

Nutmeg, cloves and allspice: these spices provide a sweet, aromatic flavour that enhances the



sweetness of baked goods and desserts.

Vanilla extract: a splash of vanilla extract can enhance the feeling of sweetness without adding sugar.

- **Roasting for natural caramelization**

Roast fruits and vegetables: roasting fruits like apples, pears or sweet potatoes brings out their natural sugars and intensifies their sweetness, reducing the need for added sugar.

- **Balanced flavours**

Add a pinch of salt: a small amount of salt can enhance the sweetness in a dish, allowing you to use less sugar overall.

Use acidity: balancing sweet and tart flavours, e.g., using a bit of lemon juice or yoghurt can make a dish taste sweet with less added sugar.

- **Reduce sugar gradually**

Gradual reduction: start by slightly reducing the amount of sugar in your recipes. Over time, taste buds will adjust to a point where less sugar can be used to achieve a level of sweetness which is acceptable.



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Food preparation

Serving sizes

Serve appropriate sizes for different age groups. Example, a serving of meat should be about the size of a deck of cards.

Vegetables

Wide variety of fresh, frozen, canned or dried vegetables - 5 servings or 2½ cups of vegetables daily

Examples of one vegetable serving:

1 cup raw leafy salad greens
½ cup cut-up vegetables
½ cup 100% vegetable juice, low-sodium or no-salt-added

Fruits

Wide variety of fresh, frozen, canned or dried fruits - 4 servings or 2 cups of fruit daily

Examples of one fruit serving:

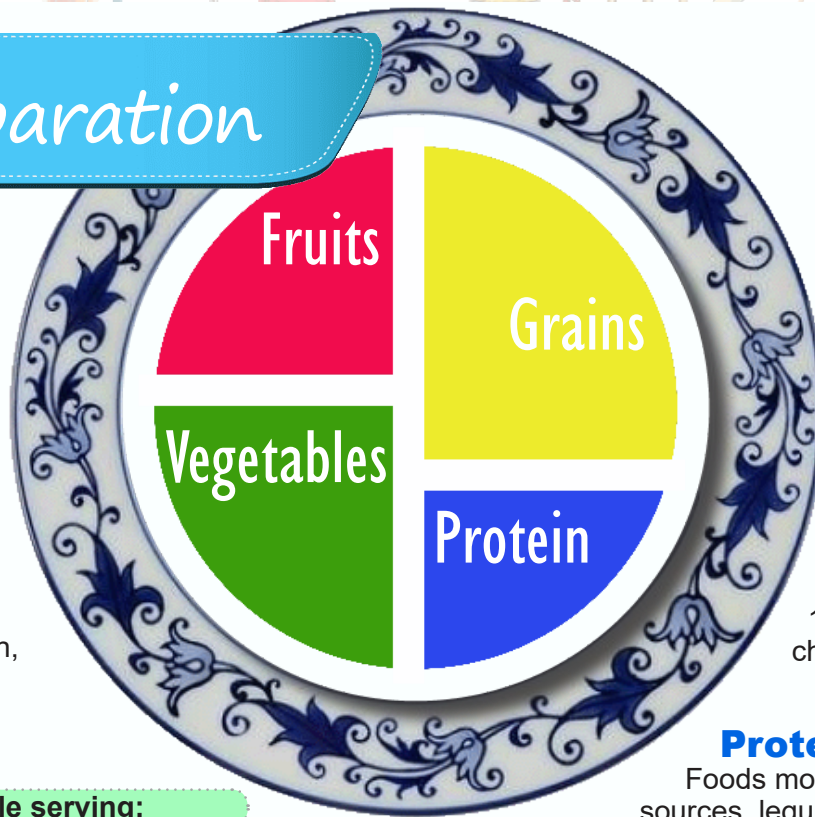
1 medium whole fruit
½ cup cut-up fruit
¼ cup 100% fruit juice
¼ cup dried fruit

Grains

Whole grain rather than refined grain products. 3 to 6 servings or 3 to 6 ounces of grains daily. At least half of total grains should be whole grains.

Examples of one serving of grains:

1 slice whole-grain bread
1 small tortilla
1 ounce (1 cup) ready-to-eat cereal flakes
1 ounce (½ cup) uncooked pasta or brown rice
½ cup cooked brown rice, pasta or hot cereal, such as oatmeal
3 cups popped popcorn



Dairy

Low-fat (1%) and fat-free
3 servings or 3 cups daily

Examples of one dairy serving:

1 cup milk
1 cup yoghurt
1½ ounces hard cheese

Protein

Foods mostly from plant sources, legumes and nuts; fish and seafood; fat-free and low-fat dairy products in place of full-fat versions; if you eat meat, lean cuts and skinless poultry; avoid processed meats.

1 to 2 servings or 5½-ounce equivalents of protein daily including:

5 ounces per week of nuts, seeds, beans, peas or lentils

6 to 8 ounces per week of seafood, preferably oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, cobia, striped bass, herring or sardines

Examples of one ounce protein equivalents:

¼ cup cooked beans, peas or lentils
¼ cup or 2 ounces tofu
½ ounce nuts or seeds or 1 tablespoon peanut butter
1 ounce cooked seafood, meat or poultry
One egg or two egg whites

Fats and Oil

Opt for polyunsaturated and monounsaturated liquid plant oils. Avoid tropical oils (coconut, palm and palm kernel) and animal fats (lard and butter) or partially hydrogenated fats.

2 to 3 servings of fat or oil per day or 9 teaspoons

Examples of one serving fats and oil:

1 teaspoon vegetable oil, such as canola, corn, olive, soybean, safflower
1 teaspoon soft margarine
1 tablespoon mayonnaise
2 tablespoons light salad dressing

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Portion control

Balanced plates

Ensure each meal includes a balance of protein, whole grains and vegetables. For example, a plate could include a serving of grilled chicken, a part of brown rice, and a side of steamed vegetables.



Avoid Processed Foods

Processed Meats:

Limit or avoid meats like sausages, bacon and hot dogs. Instead, use fresh or minimally processed alternatives.

Variety

Food groups:

Include all food groups in each meal – fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and proteins.

Labelling

Clearly label food items with preparation dates to track freshness. Label foods having common allergens, e.g., nuts, dairy, to ensure safety for students with allergies.

Packaged snacks

Avoid snacks high in sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats. Opt for fresh fruit, vegetable sticks or homemade baked goods.

Feedback mechanism

Surveys and suggestions:

Collect feedback from students and staff to understand preferences and make improvements to the menu.

Processed Food

Meats



CAUTION

Processed foods do not meet the proven nutritional requirements needed to ensure a healthy, sustainable meal.

Breakfast sausage: Typically made from pork, beef or turkey and often seasoned with spices.

Italian sausages and pepperoni: Flavoured with fennel or anise, often used in pasta dishes and pizzas.

Chorizo: A spicy sausage commonly used in Spanish and Mexican cuisine.

Frankfurters: Also known as wieners or hot dogs, typically made from beef, pork or chicken.

Cheese dogs: Hot dogs with cheese incorporated into the sausage.

Turkey hot dogs: Made from ground turkey as a lower-fat alternative.

Luncheon meat Ham: Includes varieties like honey ham, smoked ham, and city ham.

Roast beef: Typically served sliced for sandwiches.

Turkey breast: Often used in sandwiches, can be smoked or oven roasted.

Salami: A cured sausage made from fermented and air-dried meat.

Bologna: A large, smooth-textured sausage, often sliced for sandwiches.

Capicola: A dry-cured pork shoulder or neck.

Pork bacon: Made from pork belly, often smoked and cured.

Turkey bacon: A lower-fat alternative made from turkey.

Key characteristics of processed meats

- **High sodium:** many processed meats have significant amounts of salt for flavour and preservation.

- **Additives and preservatives:** often include nitrates, nitrites and other chemicals to enhance colour and extend shelf life.

- **Fat Content:** this can be high in saturated fats and trans-fats, contributing to cardiovascular health risks.

Canadian bacon: Made from pork loin, less fatty than traditional bacon.

Pizza pepperoni: A spicy, dried sausage commonly used as a pizza topping.

Salami pepperoni A variation of pepperoni made from salami.

Canned corned beef Typically used in sandwiches and various dishes.

Brisket corned beef Brisket cured with spices and salt.

Liver pâté: Made from liver and other meats, blended into a smooth spread.

Country pâté: Coarse, often including pork and various spices.

Chicken and pork nuggets Breaded and fried pieces of chicken, often having added preservatives.

Chicken tenders: Similar to nuggets but typically larger and breaded.

Frozen meatballs: Pre-cooked and frozen meatballs are often high in sodium.

Spam: A canned meat product made from pork and ham.

Ham steak: Pre-cooked and sliced ham, often used in meals.

Tips for healthier alternatives



- **Choose fresh meats:** use fresh lean meats, such as chicken breast or turkey and avoid pre-packaged or cured options.

- **Check labels:** look for meats without added preservatives or excessive sodium.

- **Cook at home:** preparing meals from fresh, unprocessed meats allows for better control over ingredients and healthier cooking methods.



Menu options

Main dishes

Jerk chicken legs: oven-baked mild jerk chicken legs or breast seasoned and flavourful.

Grilled fish fillets: lightly seasoned and grilled local fish fillets.

Chicken stir-fry: chicken pieces stir-fried with mixed vegetables.

Vegetable curry: mild curry with potatoes, carrots, and peas.

Grilled chicken: lightly seasoned and grilled chicken.

Pan-seared fish: pan-seared fish fillets seasoned with garlic.

Roasted chicken drumsticks: seasoned and oven roasted.

Chicken and vegetable skewers: grilled skewers with chicken and mixed vegetables.

Grilled chicken tacos: whole wheat tortillas filled with grilled chicken, lettuce, and tomato, topped with a mild salsa.

Chicken stir-fry: chicken stir-fried with mixed vegetables, served over rice.

Fish fillet tacos: fish fillets in whole wheat tortillas with shredded cabbage and salsa.

Shepherd's pie: ground beef/chicken/fish cooked with vegetables; carrots, peas or corn, seasoned with Caribbean spices, topped with a layer of mashed potatoes and baked until golden brown and crispy.

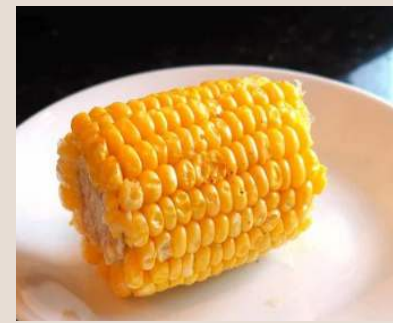
Beef stew with mashed potatoes: tender chunks of beef, slow cooked with carrots, onions and herbs, in a savoury broth, served with mashed potatoes. The potatoes soak up the rich gravy, making each bite satisfying.



Caribbean spaghetti and meatballs with veggies: lean meatballs seasoned with Caribbean spices and served with whole grain spaghetti mixed with a vibrant tomato sauce infused with bell peppers, carrots and onions.

Chicken or beef pelau: a dish made with rice, meat (pieces of chicken or beef), spices and vegetables (carrots).

Bajan soup: made with meat, beef or chicken, with ground provisions added, sweet potato, yam etc. and vegetables egg carrots and fresh herbs, thyme.



Side dishes

Baked sweet potato wedges: sprinkled with paprika.

Caribbean rice and peas: long-grain rice, cooked with peas or beans, flavoured with garlic, thyme and chives.

Mixed green salad: lettuce, cucumber and tomato with a simple lime vinaigrette.

Coleslaw: shredded cabbage and carrots with a light dressing.

Corn on the cob: steamed or boiled and lightly seasoned.

Baked plantains: sliced plantains baked until tender and sprinkled lightly with cinnamon.

Baked sweet potato fries: seasoned (basil/cinnamon) and baked until crispy.

Roasted sweet potatoes: cubed and seasoned with herbs.

Cucumber and tomato salad: slice and drizzle lightly with a lime / tangy dressing.

Cornmeal cou cou: a dish made from cornmeal, okra, and water. Cooked slowly over a low heat, until the mixture absorbs all the liquid..

Breadfruit cou cou: breadfruit that is boiled until soft and mashed until smooth with added herbs.