

Healthy eating for all occasions

Birthdays, cultural holidays and special activities are all occasions for kids to satisfy their sweet tooth. Holiday traditions usually involve offering children less nutritious food, both at home and at school. However, to remain consistent with the school's educational mission, it is crucial to encourage healthy eating through all kinds of activities and special occasions.

Where sweets fit into healthy eating

Healthy eating means eating a variety of foods and giving priority to nourishing foods from the Eat Well Plate in Canada's Food Guide. All foods are allowed, even candy and chocolate, but less often and in smaller quantities.

Schools should serve nourishing foods most of the time.

It is advised to serve children less nutritious foods at special occasions no more than four times per school year. Children have plenty of opportunities outside of school to eat these foods. When offering children sweets, all children should be allowed to partake (unless they are allergic). Offer each child the same portion and only allow one serving per person.

Nutritious ideas for celebrations

By improving the quality of foods served at celebrations, you send the message that nourishing foods are also enjoyable. These foods can enrich children's food-related experiences and be adapted for special occasions when we pay attention to presentation or their seasonal nature.

Here are a few suggestions. You can ask children to help out and do a craft or cooking project.

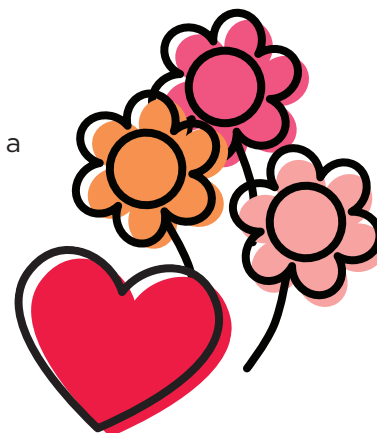
- ▶ Valentine's Day: plate of fresh veggies and a pink dip made from chickpeas and beets, red fruit skewers (strawberries, grapes, apples), melon hearts made with a cookie cutter
- ▶ Easter: colourful fresh fruit shaped into a bunny or an egg
- ▶ Halloween: squash muffins, pumpkin spice muffins, decorated clementines
- ▶ Christmas: string cheese decorated to make a snow man, fruit and vegetables shaped into a Christmas tree
- ▶ Back to school: tasting apples from Quebec
- ▶ Sporting events: smoothies, homemade energy bites, fruit salads



Other ideas for celebrations

There are many ways to make birthdays special that do not involve food. Here are a few examples of ways to make the day memorable for children:

- ▶ For Christmas, play holiday music at mealtimes or tell a Christmas story after lunch.
- ▶ For Valentine's Day, pass out cardboard hearts with sweet notes to children and bring them all together for a group hug after lunch.
- ▶ Give them extra time to play.



Celebrate a birthday



Celebrating each child's birthday means lots of opportunities to eat cake!

It is better to give the birthday girl or boy a personal cupcake rather than bringing a large cake for everyone to share. Each child gets their own cupcake on their birthday. Keep in mind that the birthday boy or girl will likely have other chances to eat cake on their special day.



Other ways to celebrate a birthday can include:

- ▶ Singing happy birthday at mealtime
- ▶ Giving the birthday boy or girl special privileges, like letting them choose their favourite group game to play after lunch or choose who they sit with at lunchtime
- ▶ Having all their classmates sign and give them a birthday card

Field trips

Use field trips to teach children about healthy eating and nutrition. Consider taking them to pick apples or pumpkins, or to visit gardens, farms, farmers or factories that make healthy foods (e.g., yogurt, cheese, bread, milk, etc.).

By applying healthy eating principles at all occasions, you encourage them to adopt healthy life habits.



Reference: Adaptation of suggestions from the diet component of the guide, *Politique-cadre pour une saine alimentation et un mode de vie physiquement actif.*