

# Nurturing Healthy Eaters

## EARLY AND MIDDLE YEARS



### WHEN A MEAL/SNACK IS PROVIDED BY FAMILIES

#### Family Decides

What food to offer

#### School Decides

When and where children eat

#### Student Decides

Whether and how much to eat

### WHEN A MEAL/SNACK IS PROVIDED BY SCHOOL

#### School Decides

What food to offer, when and where children eat

#### Student Decides

Whether and how much to eat

## Positive Eating Environment

- Have set meal and snack times; avoid grazing.
- Limit distractions such as screen time.
- Talk with children in casual conversation. Save nutrition education for the classroom instead of at meal times.

## Natural Hunger & Fullness Cues

- Allow students to control their own intake – don't specify a certain number of bites.
- Allow students to eat food in any order they choose – no need to finish one food before another.
- Trust and respect students when they say or signal they are full or still hungry.

## Build Trust With Students & Families

- Respect that families may define “healthy food” differently, and children have different health needs.
- Allow students to eat food items sent from home unless the food relates to an allergy. Students need to trust that their caregivers can feed them properly and teachers need to trust this as well.
- Support all families by encouraging access to reliable nutrition information such as [Dial-a-Dietitian Manitoba](#) (1-877-830-2892) or from [www.unlockfood.ca](http://www.unlockfood.ca).
- Refer families to breakfast, snack or lunch programs and other community food resources (such as food banks) when needed.

## Teach Food & Nutrition in a Positive Way

- Teach about a variety of foods, focusing on the benefits of fueling the mind and body. E.g. eating a variety of foods gives you energy to play and think.
- Keep all messages about food neutral. Discuss where foods come from, how foods look and feel and ways to eat different foods; rather than referring to food as good versus bad or healthy versus unhealthy.
- Focus on behaviors, such as regular meals, sleep, and physical activity to feel good not for weight control. Weighing, using weight tables or charts, or calorie counting activities can hinder health behaviours.
- Role model body acceptance and inclusivity by demonstrating that all bodies deserve respect and kindness. Avoid sharing personal views about food and body weight. Each person's body is different, and we should respect, accept, and celebrate these differences!



## Snack and mealtime should be enjoyable

**General eating advice:** The eating advice in this article is based on Ellyn Satter's principles and guidelines. For more about Satter's work, see: [ellynsatterinstitute.org](http://ellynsatterinstitute.org)

**Resource provided by** the registered dietitians of the Manitoba Food Environments for Early Learning and Schools (MB FEELS) Committee. Contact us for permission to modify this resource: [MBFEELSCommittee@gmail.com](mailto:MBFEELSCommittee@gmail.com)