




# HEALTHY *eating* Strategy



Health  
Canada

Santé  
Canada

Canada 



**Health Canada is the federal department responsible for helping the people of Canada maintain and improve their health.** We assess the safety of drugs and many consumer products, help improve the safety of food, and provide information to Canadians to help them make healthy decisions. We provide health services to First Nations people and to Inuit communities. We work with the provinces to ensure our health care system serves the needs of Canadians.

Également disponible en français sous le titre :  
***Stratégie en matière de saine alimentation***

To obtain additional information, please contact:

Health Canada  
Address Locator 0900C2  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0K9  
Tel.: 613-957-2991  
Toll free: 1-866-225-0709  
Fax: 613-941-5366  
TTY: 1-800-465-7735  
E-mail: [publications@hc-sc.gc.ca](mailto:publications@hc-sc.gc.ca)

This publication can be made available in alternative formats upon request.

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of Health, 2016

Publication date: October 2016

This publication may be reproduced for personal or internal use only without permission provided the source is fully acknowledged.

Cat.: H164-196/2016E-PDF  
ISBN: 978-0-660-06609-7  
Pub.: 160194

# THE CHALLENGES OF HEALTHY EATING

One of the most basic elements of everyday life is eating. Every single day, meal after meal, we make choices about what to eat. Healthy eating is something most of us aspire to because we know it helps maintain a healthy weight and prevent disease. Most Canadians are aware of Canada's Food Guide<sup>1</sup> and are familiar with its recommendations on how to eat healthily. However, we have seen obesity rates and diet-related chronic diseases increase over the past few decades, even as our awareness and knowledge about healthy eating have increased.

*Healthy eating can be challenging due to several factors, some beyond the control of the consumer. This is why the Government of Canada is taking actions to make the healthier choice the easier choice for all Canadians.*

Evidence shows that many factors in our food environment influence our ability to make healthy food choices and to follow a healthy eating pattern. **The food we have in our homes, schools, grocery stores, restaurants, as well as social influences and food marketing, have a major impact on our choices and make healthy eating a challenge for many of us<sup>2</sup>.** An increasing number of foods high in calories, fat, sodium and sugars are readily offered in multiple settings, thereby challenging our ability to make healthy choices.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, there is a constant flow of changing and often conflicting messages creating a lot of clutter and confusion about what to eat and what not to. Billions of dollars are spent marketing foods high in calories, fat, sodium and sugars, with 80% of all food products advertised falling into

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php)

<sup>2</sup> [www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/teaching-the-food-system/curriculum/\\_pdf/Food\\_Environments-Vocabulary.pdf](http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/teaching-the-food-system/curriculum/_pdf/Food_Environments-Vocabulary.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/94384/1/9789241506236\\_eng.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/94384/1/9789241506236_eng.pdf)

this category<sup>4</sup>. Canadians face challenges in understanding and using nutrition information and there is increasing interest in simplified messages as well as systems that help consumers navigate the food environment.

The current state of our food environment is of our collective making, which means that we need to work together at all levels to improve it.

This collaborative approach is essential because the Government of Canada cannot act alone. Every sector of society must be mobilized for action.

**We believe in a future where better food environments enable Canadians to make healthier eating choices as part of a healthy lifestyle.**

Through our regulatory, chronic disease prevention and health promotion function, the Health Portfolio<sup>5</sup> will support Canadians in making the healthier choice, the easier choice.



The Health Portfolio will help improve the food environment through a new Healthy Eating Strategy that will help Canadians be among the healthiest people in the world. This strategy aims to: improve healthy eating information; strengthen labelling and claims; improve the nutrition quality of foods; protect vulnerable populations; and support increased access to and availability of nutritious foods.

<sup>4</sup> Potvin Kent, et al, 2012, Obesity, Volume 20, Issue 9, pages 1829–1837.

<sup>5</sup> The Minister of Health is responsible for maintaining and improving the health of Canadians. This is supported by the Health Portfolio which comprises Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

# MAKING THE HEALTHIER CHOICE THE EASIER CHOICE

At the most foundational level, what we decide to put on our grocery lists, how accessible we make food in our home and which recipes we use to prepare meals has the biggest impact on healthy eating. To help Canadians navigate complex and sometimes conflicting nutrition information, **Health Canada will revise the 6-page Canada's Food Guide into targeted products to communicate relevant, consistent and credible dietary guidance to Canadians.**

Over the next two years, Health Canada will seek input from Provinces and Territories, health professional associations, NGOs and the general public to inform dietary guidance and tools using a variety of mediums, including online and new technologies.

For most of us, information on what to eat is not enough. What we decide to buy can be influenced by other factors such as a constant stream of commercial messages and endorsements that trigger our most basic eating instincts, especially for sugary, salty and fatty foods. **Kids are particularly vulnerable and must be offered the protection and support they need to make healthy food choices easier.** To help improve this aspect of the food environment, Health Canada will restrict the commercial marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to kids. We owe it to the next generation to reduce the influences that encourage them to consume unhealthy foods and beverages.

Another key part of the food environment is the retail establishments where we get most of our food. When we go grocery shopping, we usually see the produce section up front, which is an excellent initiative by retailers to improve the food environment. To further help retailers attract attention to fresh produce and remind Canadians of the health benefits associated with their consumption, Health Canada will enable a health claim for fruits and vegetables through regulations by the end of this year.

*We believe in a future where better food environments enable Canadians to make healthier eating choices as part of a healthy lifestyle. Everyone has a role to play.*

What we see in the grocery store aisles now is different from what we used to see twenty, or even ten years ago. There are new and innovative products, and diverse foods and flavours from around the world that speak to both our evolving tastes and the cultural diversity of our population. We are often privileged to have a variety of options to choose from. Choice is a good thing, so long as we are able to make informed choices.

**We need to have the right tools to access, understand and use nutrition information to make healthier choices.**

Food labels are an important vehicle of such information and Health Canada works with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to ensure that food labels are truthful and not misleading. When we pick up two products in the grocery store aisle or local market, we can compare the Nutrition Facts table on the back to help make healthier choices. But some of the information needs to be updated and it's also difficult to compare similar products that have different serving sizes. To help make comparisons between similar food products easier, Health Canada will finalize regulations pertaining to the Nutrition Facts table and List of Ingredients on food labels by the end of this year.<sup>6</sup> These changes reflect the latest science as well as what we heard from Canadians and stakeholders over two years of consultation and engagement<sup>7</sup>.

We also heard that Canadians want simpler and easier to access and use nutrition information on food labels. This is why Health Canada will **engage the public and stakeholders to seek feedback and input on a proposed front of package labelling approach aimed at helping Canadians make healthier and more informed choices, particularly on sugars, sodium and saturated fats.**

*Health Canada will consult Canadians on front of package food labels aimed at helping Canadians make healthier and more informed choices, particularly on sugars, sodium and saturated fats.*

<sup>6</sup> <http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/health-system-systeme-sante/consultations/food-label-etiquette-des-aliments/process-processus-eng.php>

<sup>7</sup> [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/alt\\_formats/pdf/label-etiquet/modernize-report-moderniser-rapport-eng.pdf](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/alt_formats/pdf/label-etiquet/modernize-report-moderniser-rapport-eng.pdf)

The nutritional quality of our food supply is another problem that we need to address. For example, many of our processed foods are high in sodium, and excess sodium intake increases the risk of hypertension and other chronic diseases. Most of us are consuming too much sodium, well exceeding the 2.3 gram daily maximum,<sup>8</sup> the amount in about 1 teaspoon of table salt. In order to improve the availability of nutritious food options, we need to lower the amount of sodium in processed foods. However, this must be done gradually because sodium is used for food safety purposes in some foods and gradual reduction allows for consumers' tastes to adapt without reaching for the salt shaker. Health Canada will continue to work with food processors and manufacturers **to reduce sodium in prepackaged foods, with active government oversight and reporting to Canadians on progress.**

*Health Canada will improve the quality of foods available for Canadians by implementing measures that reduce sodium levels and eliminate industrially-produced trans fat.*

We know that Canadians are eating out more frequently and when they do they consume more sodium from the food prepared in restaurants and foodservices than when they eat homemade food. This is why Health Canada will work collaboratively over the next two years to **develop sodium reduction targets for the restaurants and foodservice sector.** Moreover, Health Canada will engage the provinces and territories to explore the best approach to provide nutrition information in restaurants and foodservice establishments.

Despite significant commendable progress by the food industry, some of our foods remain high in trans fat. This means that some of us are still consuming more than the maximum level recommended by the World Health Organization, which increases the risk of coronary heart disease. Trans fats can be naturally occurring or industrially produced. Partially hydrogenated oils (PHOs) are the main source of industrially produced trans fats. As part of our efforts to improve the nutritional quality of the food supply, Health Canada will engage the public and stakeholders to seek feedback on a proposal to **eliminate industrially-produced trans fat from the food supply.**

---

<sup>8</sup> [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/sodium/index-eng.php#a2](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/sodium/index-eng.php#a2)

In addition to improving nutrition information and the nutrition quality of the food supply, it is important to have access to and availability of nutritious foods.

The Nutrition North Canada program is one way in which the Government of Canada supports increased access to and availability of nutritious foods. The program, through Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, provides a retail subsidy to help make perishable nutritious foods more accessible and more affordable to residents of isolated northern communities without year-round surface (road, rail or marine) access. Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada also provide funding support for eligible communities to deliver nutrition education activities to increase knowledge of healthy eating and develop skills in selecting and preparing nutritious foods.

Effective October 1, 2016 NNC was expanded to an additional 37 isolated northern communities. This change will help more families living in isolated northern communities to have access to affordable and nutritious foods.

**The Government of Canada is currently engaging with Northerners, Indigenous partners, retailers and suppliers, provincial and territorial governments, and other stakeholders on ideas to keep improving the program and ensure it is sustainable for Northerners. For more information visit: [www.nutritionnorthcanada.gc.ca](http://www.nutritionnorthcanada.gc.ca)**



# IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

The food environment is a complex and interconnected network of factors and public policy needs to affect multiple parts of the network to affect real change. By taking concrete action on these key areas, **we believe that this new approach to addressing healthy eating can have a meaningful impact on the long-term health of Canadians.**

This approach seeks to make better use of all federal policy levers working together in a consistent and mutually reinforcing manner to effectively achieve our policy objectives. In the areas of identified federal action, the Health Portfolio will **continue to support policy decisions on the basis of robust scientific data**, and strengthening our evidence base and research capacity by investing in food supply and population data.

The Health Portfolio will capitalize on its funding programs and strategic partnerships to increase the uptake of healthy eating interventions and initiatives and to promote healthy and supportive environments for Canadians.

Furthermore, **awareness, education, knowledge translation and outreach activities** will support the implementation of these healthy eating initiatives.

Health Canada remains committed to **responsible regulation-making**, taking into account costs and benefits as well as realistic implementation periods. There will be concrete milestones and timelines, all the while **measuring and reporting on progress** to Canadians and evaluating the public health impact of our collective actions against key indicators.

*Health Canada will work with its partners and remain committed to evidence-based decision making, openness, transparency and meaningful engagement with the public and stakeholders on healthy eating initiatives.*

Importantly, Health Canada remains committed to **openness, transparency and meaningful engagement** with the public and stakeholders on healthy eating initiatives. Canadians will have more information available than ever before and will have more opportunities to participate in discussions on government policies and priorities. In addition, to maintain public trust in the policy development process, Canadians will be provided information on **stakeholders' meetings and correspondence with Health Canada**.

## WORKING TOGETHER FOR SUCCESS



Today's food environment makes it very difficult for Canadians to make healthy food choices: There is a constant flow of changing and often conflicting messages on healthy eating; there is widespread availability and promotion of foods that do not contribute to a healthy eating pattern; and Canadians face challenges in understanding and using reliable nutrition information.

These new Health Portfolio initiatives put forward a vision for a healthy Canada—one that focuses, among other things, on building better food environments for Canadians to make healthier food choices.

Importantly, improving the food environment to make healthy eating easier cannot be done by the Government of Canada alone; healthy eating is a shared responsibility and everyone plays a role. Many sectors, including provinces and territories, municipalities, non-governmental organizations, academia and private sectors, are partners in improving the food environment and supporting healthy eating.