



**Menu and Nutrition Environment  
SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL**

*for Child Care Settings*



Ontario Dietitians in Public Health  
Diététistes en santé publique de l'Ontario



# Menu and Nutrition Environment SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

## for Child Care Settings

This *Menu and Nutrition Environment Self-Assessment Tool* will help child care cooks, chefs and providers assess their menus to meet the food and drink requirements in the **Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014** (section 42 of Ontario Regulation 137/15). This self-assessment tool complements the **Menu Planning and Supportive Nutrition Environments in Child Care Settings Practical Guide** from the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH).

Assess the menu every time a new menu is planned or created, and every time changes are made to it.

### STEP 1:

Prepare the menu for the assessment process.

#### A. Get to know **Canada's Food Guide**.

- Although potatoes are 'starchy', they belong in the **Vegetables and Fruit** food group (NOT in the **Grain Products** food group).
- There is not enough fruit or vegetables in fruit-flavoured yogurt or baked goods (e.g., carrot muffins or banana bread) to count these items as a food choice from the **Vegetables and Fruit** food group.
- Cream cheese and sour cream can be used sparingly as a condiment but they DO NOT belong in the **Milk and Alternatives** food group. These are not sources of protein, calcium or vitamin D.
- While cheese provides protein, it DOES NOT belong in the **Meat and Alternatives** food group. Cheese belongs in the **Milk and Alternatives** food group.

#### Tip:

Identify the various food groups in your menu using different colours:

- Vegetables and Fruit
- Grain Products
- Milk and Alternatives
- Meat and Alternatives

Refer to the **Practical Guide** for more information about which foods belong in which food groups. The Practical Guide also categorizes food in three categories. Make sure that **most** foods offered in your child care setting are from the **Serve Most Often** category, that **no more than three foods** per week are from the **Serve Sometimes** category and that **no foods** from the **Do Not Serve** category are offered.

B. On the menu, add:

- details about the vegetables and fruit (e.g., canned peaches in juice (drained), raw carrot sticks, cooked broccoli, or fresh pear slices);
- whether or not a grain product is a whole grain (e.g., brown rice or quinoa) or is made with whole grains (e.g., whole grain bread); and,
- the major ingredients (in brackets) of all mixed dishes on the menu (e.g., smoothie: frozen strawberries, silken tofu, milk).

C. Identify the number of food choices in a mixed dish:

- For each major ingredient in the recipe, identify the food group to which it belongs (See Table 1).
- Determine the number of food choices the recipe provides.

**Table 1.** Major ingredients in lasagna

Major Ingredients	Canada's Food Guide Food Group
Tomato sauce, made on-site	Vegetables and Fruit (VF)
Chopped spinach	Vegetables and Fruit (VF)
Whole grain lasagna pasta	Grain Products (GP)
Mozzarella cheese	Milk and Alternatives (MkA)
Lean ground beef	Meat and Alternatives (MA)
One serving of this recipe includes TWO food choices from the VF food group, ONE food choice from the GP food group, ONE food choice from the MkA food group and ONE food choice from the MA food group.	

Refer to the **Practical Guide** for more information about identifying the number of food choices in a mixed dish.

D. Get to know the portion size to serve each child, by age group:

- In child care settings, a portion is the amount of food offered at a meal or snack and may be more or less than a Food Guide Serving (FGS).
- Recommended portion size ranges for children are based on FGS sizes and vary according to age. Refer to the *Portion Size Chart* on pages 4 and 5.

## STEP 2:

### Assess the menu.

A. Use the *Menu Assessment Checklist* on pages 6, 7, 8 and 9 to assess the menu's meal and snack patterns as well as the food and beverage choices.

B. Read each statement carefully and add a checkmark in the box for each item met.

C. To answer questions, involve staff who develop menus and prepare food (e.g., cooks, chefs).

**NOTE:** The *Menu Assessment Checklist* is for child care settings that offer 1 meal and 2 snacks per day as most children are in attendance 6 to 9 hours per day.

### STEP 3:

#### Assess the nutrition environment.

- A. Use the *Supportive Nutrition Environment Checklist* on pages 10 and 11 to assess the nutrition environment of the child care setting.
- B. Read each statement carefully and add a checkmark in the box for each item met.
- C. To answer questions, involve staff who establish and work in the nutrition environment (e.g., Early Childhood Educators).

### STEP 4:

#### Make a plan to improve the menu and nutrition environment.

- A. Review the *Response Guides* at the end of the *Menu Assessment Checklist* and the *Supportive Nutrition Environment Checklist* on pages 9 and 11.
- B. Share findings with the child care team. Develop a plan together, starting with one or two goals at a time to help make lasting improvements to your menu and nutrition environment.

### STEP 5:

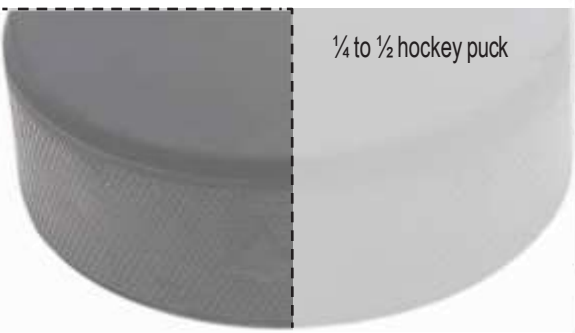
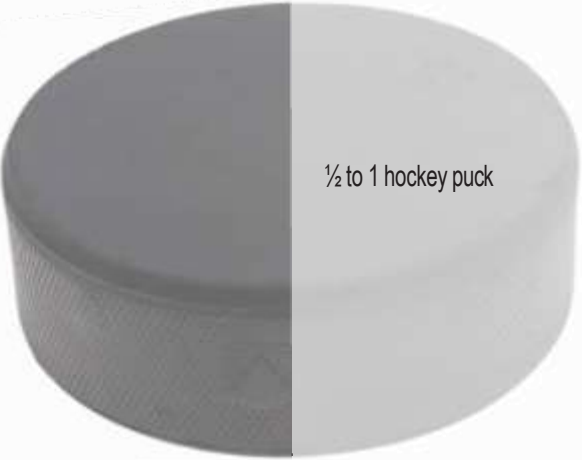
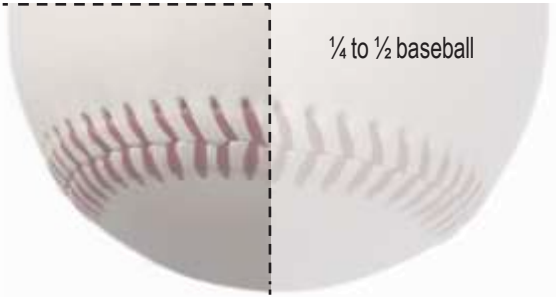

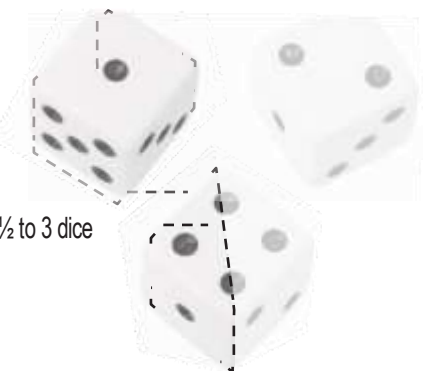
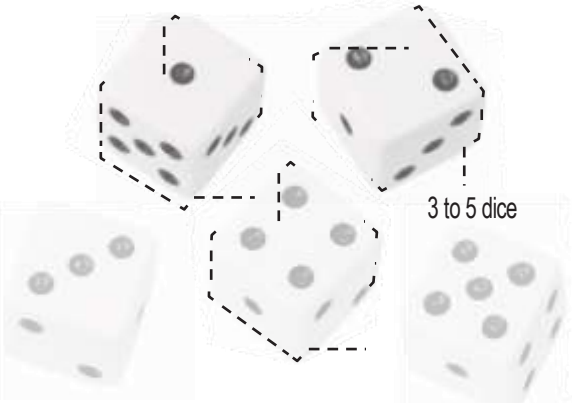


#### Gather more information, if necessary.

- A. Visit the ODPH website to get a copy of the **Menu Planning and Supportive Nutrition Environments in Child Care Settings Practical Guide**.
- B. Call your local **health unit** or visit their website.



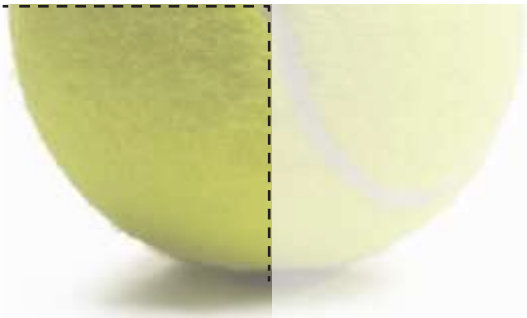
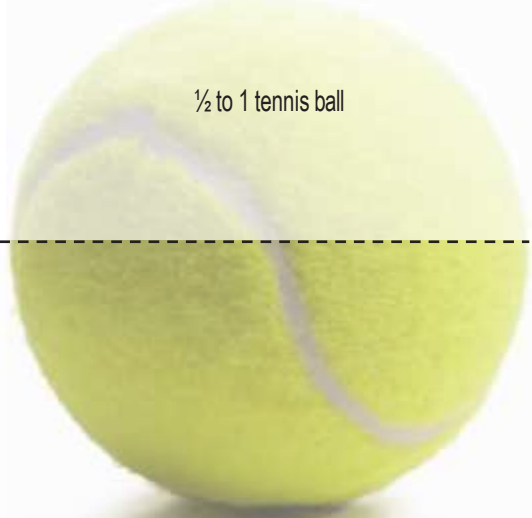
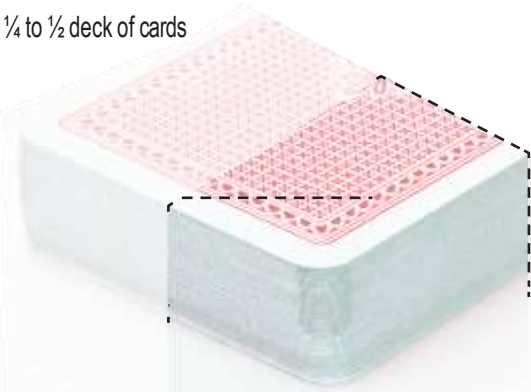
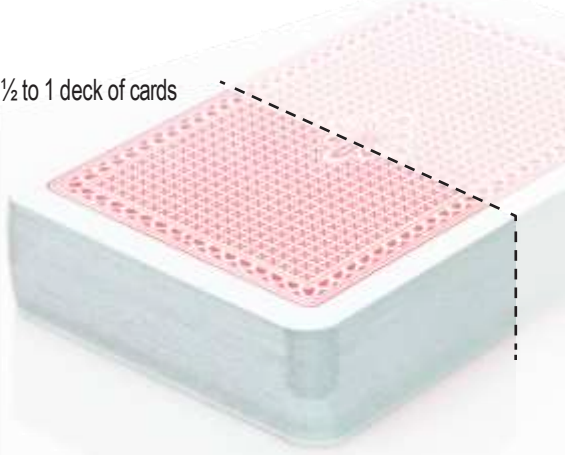




# PORTION SIZE CHART

Food & Beverage Choices	Portion Size 12 to 24 months	Portion Size 2 to 5 years
<p>Fresh, frozen, cooked or canned vegetables or fruit, diced or sliced</p> <p>Cooked pasta, rice, quinoa, couscous, polenta, bulgur</p> <p>Cold cereal</p> <p>Cooked cereal (e.g., oatmeal)</p> <p>Cottage cheese</p>	 <p>¼ to ½ hockey puck</p>	 <p>½ to 1 hockey puck</p>
<p>Raw leafy vegetables (e.g., romaine lettuce)</p>	 <p>¼ to ½ baseball</p>	 <p>½ to 1 baseball</p>
<p>Block cheese (e.g., cheddar or feta), paneer</p>	 <p>1 ½ to 3 dice</p>	 <p>3 to 5 dice</p>
<p>Pancake, waffle (1 small)</p> <p><b>* Not at actual size. Reduced to 25%.</b></p>	 <p>¼ to ½ CD*</p>	 <p>½ to 1 CD*</p>

# PORTION SIZE CHART

Food & Beverage Choices	Portion Size 12 to 24 months	Portion Size 2 to 5 years
Peanut and nut butters, soy butter  Nuts and seeds  <i>Nuts and seeds can cause choking in children younger than 4 years of age and may only be offered with special preparation.</i>	$\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ golf ball  	$\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 golf ball  
Yogurt (plain or fruit flavoured)  Tofu  Legumes (e.g., beans) or hummus  Whole fruit (e.g., orange)	$\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ tennis ball  	$\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 tennis ball  
Cooked poultry, fish, lean meat  Tofu, firm or extra firm	$\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ deck of cards  	$\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 deck of cards  
Bread	$\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ slice	$\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 slice
Bagel, pita, tortilla, roti, muffin	$\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ of a whole	$\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of a whole
Cow's milk* (3.25% for children $\leq$ 2 years of age)	$\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup	$\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 cup <i>*Limit these beverages to 1 cup (250 mL) at any meal or snack to prevent young children from filling up on milk or fortified soy beverages.</i>
Unsweetened fortified soy beverage*	N/A (do not serve)	$\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 cup
Eggs	$\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 egg	1 to 2 eggs

# MENU ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

## Meal Pattern

**Tip:** Use the **Meal Pattern Table** below to help you assess your meal pattern for a 4-week menu cycle.

	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
WEEK 1	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA
WEEK 2	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA
WEEK 3	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA
WEEK 4	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA	VF GP MkA MA

1. All meals include at least TWO choices from the <b>Vegetables and Fruit (VF)</b> food group.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. All meals include at least ONE choice from the <b>Grain Products (GP)</b> , <b>Milk and Alternatives (MkA)</b> and <b>Meat and Alternatives (MA)</b> food groups.	<input type="checkbox"/>



# MENU ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

## Snack Pattern

**Tip:** Use the **Snack Pattern Table** below to help you assess your snack pattern for a 4-week menu cycle.

		SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
WEEK 1	SNACK A	○ VF ○ GP MkA MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP MkA MA
	SNACK B	○ VF ○ GP MkA MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP MkA MA
WEEK 2	SNACK A	○ VF ○ GP MkA MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP MkA MA
	SNACK B	○ VF ○ GP MkA MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP MkA MA
WEEK 3	SNACK A	○ VF ○ GP MkA MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP MkA MA
	SNACK B	○ VF ○ GP MkA MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP MkA MA
WEEK 4	SNACK A	○ VF ○ GP MkA MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP MkA MA
	SNACK B	○ VF ○ GP MkA MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP ○ MkA ○ MA	○ VF ○ GP MkA MA

3. All snacks include at least ONE choice from TWO different food groups.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. SNACK A includes at least ONE choice from the <b>Vegetables and Fruit (VF)</b> food group.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. SNACK B includes at least ONE choice from the <b>Vegetables and Fruit (VF)</b> food group.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. One of the snacks (SNACK A or SNACK B) includes at least ONE choice from the <b>Grain Products (GP)</b> food group.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. One of the snacks (SNACK A or SNACK B) includes at least ONE choice from the <b>Milk and Alternatives (MkA)</b> food group.	<input type="checkbox"/>



## MENU ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

### Food and Beverage Choices

VEGETABLES AND FRUIT	
8. Dark green vegetables (e.g., broccoli, romaine lettuce, asparagus, spinach, green peppers, edamame, peas and zucchini) are served <b>once per day</b> or more.	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Orange vegetables or fruits (e.g., carrots, sweet potatoes, squash, cantaloupe, canned peaches (drained), and mangoes) are served <b>once per day</b> or more.	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Battered, deep fried (or par-fried) vegetables (e.g., French fries, hash browns, fried zucchini, vegetable or fruit chips) are <b>not served</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Canned fruit in light or heavy syrup is <b>not served</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Fruit or vegetable juices are <b>not served</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/>
GRAIN PRODUCTS	
13. Whole grains (e.g., barley, brown rice, oats, quinoa, whole grain pasta, whole grain tortilla, whole grain pita, whole grain crackers or cereals) are served <b>once per day</b> or more.	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Tortilla/corn chips and chip-like snack food, pretzels, and baked goods with chocolate, caramel or candy pieces are <b>not served</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/>
MILK AND ALTERNATIVES	
15. For children between 9 months and 2 years, whole, plain 3.25% M.F. cow's milk or whole milk powder (reconstituted) is served.	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Fluid cow's milk (for children 9 months and older) or unsweetened, fortified soy beverage (for children older than 2 years of age) is served <b>once per day</b> or more.	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Flavoured milk or flavoured soy beverages (e.g., chocolate milk, vanilla soy beverage, hot chocolate) are <b>not served</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Processed cheese products (e.g., processed cheese slices and cheese spread) are <b>not served</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Iced dairy desserts (e.g., ice cream, frozen yogurt) and homemade, instant or pre-packaged puddings are <b>not served</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/>
MEAT AND ALTERNATIVES	
20. Meat alternatives such as beans, eggs, lentils, tofu and nut, legume and seed butters are served at least <b>once per week</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Fresh, frozen, or canned fish that is low in mercury (e.g., cod, sole, haddock, salmon, tilapia, trout, canned light tuna or whitefish) is served at least <b>once per week</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Food choices that contain high amounts of fat and/or sodium such as deli meats, pepperoni, bacon, wieners, sausages, canned baked beans, prepared store-bought breaded or battered fried chicken or fish and ham are <b>not served</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/>
OTHER	
23. The menu includes a variety of foods from each food group.	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. The menu includes foods with different colours, shapes (shredded, in strips, cubes or slices), temperatures, and textures.	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. The menu includes foods that promote and support diversity by including dishes that reflect various cultures and traditions (e.g., vegetarian choices).	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. Tap water is available to children at all times, including in-between meal and snack times.	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. Foods that contain few or no nutrients and/or contain high amounts of salt, sugar or unhealthy fats (e.g., cupcakes, pies, jelly desserts, croissants, marshmallows and frozen treats) are <b>not served</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/>

## MENU ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

<p>28. Foods which are choking hazards (for children under 4 years of age) are <b>not served</b>, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whole nuts and seeds (larger than sesame seeds) and chunky peanut or nut butter;</li> <li>• popcorn;</li> <li>• wieners (hot dogs)*, sausages* and pepperoni sticks*;</li> <li>• fish with bones;</li> <li>• candy (including yogurt covered, gummy-type, licorice)*, gum*, marshmallows* and cough drops*;</li> <li>• snacks using toothpicks or skewers;</li> <li>• raw vegetables or hard fruit (unless grated, thinly sliced, or diced); and,</li> <li>• whole grapes and cherry tomatoes, unless cut into quarters.</li> </ul> <p>*These items should <b>not be served</b> in child care settings.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>29. Dried fruits, including raisins and cranberries are served in limited amounts only in baking or as part of a recipe.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Response Guide

<p><b>FEW boxes are checked</b> (5 or more checkmarks are missing)</p>	<p>Your meal pattern, snack pattern and/or food and beverage choices <b>DO NOT</b> meet the requirements under the <b>Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014</b>. Review the requirements that are missing checkmarks. Refer to the <b>Practical Guide</b> to help you develop a plan to implement changes that will allow these requirements to be met.</p>
<p><b>MOST boxes are checked</b> (1 to 4 checkmarks missing)</p>	<p>You are almost there! Your meal pattern, snack pattern and food and beverage choices are good, but there is still room for improvement. Review the requirements that are missing checkmarks. Refer to the <b>Practical Guide</b> to help you develop a plan to implement changes that will allow these requirements to be met.</p>
<p><b>ALL boxes are checked</b></p>	<p>Congratulations! Your meal pattern, snack pattern and food and beverage choices all meet the requirements under the <b>Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014</b>.</p>



# SUPPORTIVE NUTRITION ENVIRONMENT CHECKLIST

## Create Positive Mealtimes

During meals and snacks, child care providers:	
1. Eat and talk with children to encourage social skills.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Provide appropriate child-size utensils (e.g., plates, bowls, serving dishes/utensils) and dining furniture.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Remove distractions such as toys, books, and screens.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Encourage children to use a spoon, hold and drink from an open cup, and eat finger foods.	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Model Positive Attitudes and Healthy Behaviours

Child care providers set a good example when they:	
5. Avoid bringing in personal food and beverages that are inconsistent with the food choices offered to children.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Do not use personal electronics (e.g., cell phones) during snack and meal times.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Do not make negative comments about the food and beverage choices offered.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Do not talk about body size, amount of food eaten, dieting and weight loss.	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Treat all children the same way regardless of their body size or shape.	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Avoid making judgments on the amount of food a child chooses to eat.	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Do not make comments about how well or poorly a child eats based on their body size.	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Follow the Child's Lead and Respond to their Hunger and Fullness Cues

Child care providers:	
12. Decide <b>what</b> food is offered, <b>when</b> it is offered and <b>where</b> it is offered.	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Let the children decide <b>which</b> foods to eat of the foods served and <b>how much</b> to eat (if at all).	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Avoid the Use of Pressure to Influence Food Intake

Child care providers:	
14. Do not bribe, coax or force children to eat <sup>1</sup> .	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Do not play games to increase food intake.	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Do not praise children for finishing all the food on their plate.	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Do not offer food or beverages to reward performance or reinforce good behaviour.	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Do not withhold food or beverages as a consequence for inappropriate behaviours <sup>1</sup> .	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Do not withhold food at meals or snacks, if a child asks for more.	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Do not delay access to food or beverages (e.g., serving a certain child last or withholding snack).	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Do not provide food to comfort children who are upset.	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Do not serve some foods before others to have children eat more of them (e.g., withhold fruit or grains until vegetables are eaten).	<input type="checkbox"/>

<sup>1</sup> Forcing a child to eat or depriving a child from food is a prohibited practice under O. Reg 137/15, s. 48 (e, f).

# SUPPORTIVE NUTRITION ENVIRONMENT CHECKLIST

## Response Guide

ALL boxes are checked	Congratulations! The nutrition environment meets the requirements under the <b>Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014</b> , and the <b>Practical Guide</b> .
1 OR MORE missing checkmarks	Review the requirements that are missing checkmarks. Refer to the <b>Practical Guide</b> to help you develop a plan to implement changes that will allow these requirements to be met.

Adapted from the *Menu Assessment Tool for Child Care Settings* with the permission of the Eastern Ontario Health Unit.

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For more information, please visit our website at [www.odph.ca/child-care-resources](http://www.odph.ca/child-care-resources) or contact us by email at [info@odph.ca](mailto:info@odph.ca).

