

# Nutrition Guidelines for Food and Beverages in AHS Facilities



## Introduction

The Nutrition Guidelines for Food and Beverages in Alberta Health Services (AHS) Facilities provide retail food operators with direction on how to create a retail environment that promotes the health and well-being of AHS staff and visitors. It is aligned with the objectives and principles of the [AHS Healthy Eating Environment Policy](#).

The Guidelines supports Health Canada’s recommendation that food and beverages sold in hospitals should align with [Canada’s Dietary Guidelines](#). Having healthier foods available makes it easier for AHS staff and visitors to eat in a way that supports their goals and preferences.

The Guidelines outline the minimum expectations operators should meet. It also includes resources to help operators identify and promote healthier food and beverage options. The Guidelines are updated periodically to reflect current recommendations and market trends.

## Applicability

The Guidelines apply to all AHS retail food services, vending machines, and gift shops. They apply to services offered by AHS staff, volunteers, and third-party operators.

### Table of Contents

Applicability .....	1
Minimum Criteria .....	2
Food .....	2
Beverage .....	3
Product Placement & Promotion .....	3
Continuous Improvement .....	3
<b>Appendix</b>	
A: Identifying Items with Unapproved Health Claims, Added Vitamins, Minerals, and Herbal Ingredients .....	4
B: Sell More Criteria .....	5
C: How to Make a Healthier Recipes Using Canada's Food Guide Plate .....	7
D: Product Placement & Promotion .....	9

## Minimum Criteria

The following two tables outline the minimum expectations for food and beverages sold in AHS. Operators are expected to increase the number of healthier options offered over time (see the continuous improvement section on page 3 for targets). Healthier options are identified using the ‘**Sell More**’ Nutrient Criteria” (see Appendix B).



**Table 1. Criteria for Food**

✓ <b>Sell</b>	✗ <b>Do Not Sell</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sell healthier options which emphasize vegetables, fruits, and whole grains, and have lower amounts of sugar, sodium, and unhealthy fat (see Appendix C).</li> <li>• Offer the option of small or half portions for adjusted price (e.g. meals, entrées, sandwiches and baked goods).</li> <li>• If offered, highly processed snacks (e.g. chips, baked goods, desserts, chocolate and candy) high in sugar, salt or fat should be sold in small portions and limited varieties.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ These items should be placed next to at least the same number of healthier options ‘<b>Sell More</b>’ to give customers choice (e.g. if you have 4 varieties of chips, at least 2 must meet <b>Sell More</b> Nutrient Criteria).</li> <li>○ Portion sizes are determined based on calories. The upper limits for each type of snacks are listed in the ‘do not sell’ list below.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Market healthier options using product placement and promotion strategies (see page 3).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deep fried foods (i.e. no deep fryer)</li> <li>• Large portions of food:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Entrees &gt; 800 calories</li> <li>○ Cooked pasta, rice, couscous &gt; 2 cups</li> <li>○ Side dishes and snacks &gt;350 calories</li> <li>○ Baked goods (e.g. loaves, muffin, scones, cinnamon bun) &gt;350 calories</li> <li>○ Highly processed snacks (e.g. chips and salty snacks) &gt;250 calories</li> <li>○ Desserts (e.g. cakes and squares) &gt;250 calories</li> <li>○ Candy, chocolate bars, other foods mostly made from sugar (e.g. yogurt or chocolate coated nuts or fruit, candied popcorn, caramels) &gt;150 calories</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Items with unapproved health claims or added vitamins, mineral or herbal ingredients (see Appendix A for guidance)</li> </ul>



Highly processed snacks are processed or prepared foods and drinks that add excess sodium, sugars, or saturated fat to the diets of Canadians ([Health Canada 2022](#)).” Examples include chips, chocolate, candy, baked goods and desserts.

If selling, offer in small portions and limited varieties according to information in table 1 and 2.

<b>Table 2. Criteria for Beverages</b>	
 <b>Sell</b>	 <b>Do not sell</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sell plain water and carbonated or flavoured water in any portion size when they have no added sugar, sodium, amino acids, herbs, vitamins or minerals</li> <li>• Sell 100% fruit and vegetable juices in the smallest portion available (e.g. &lt;355 mL)</li> <li>• If selling sugar-sweetened beverages (e.g. soft drinks, ice tea, and juice), offer them in the smallest portion available.</li> <li>• Promote water, milk, and unsweetened fortified plant-based beverages:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Place these beverages where it is easy to see and reach (e.g. countertop coolers, cash register displays)</li> <li>○ Include these beverages in combo- meals (e.g. sandwich + side dish + water)</li> <li>○ Where possible, dedicate an entire cooler to these beverages</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large portions of beverages (i.e. &gt;500 mL) except for water or sparkling water with no sugar or sugar substitute.</li> <li>• Beverages that contain more than:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 12 g of fat</li> <li>○ 42 g of sugar</li> <li>○ 500 mg of sodium</li> <li>○ 330 mg of caffeine</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Vitamin waters, energy drinks, or kombucha.</li> <li>• Items with unapproved health claims or added vitamins, mineral or herbal ingredients (see Appendix A)</li> </ul>

## Product Placement & Promotion

Promote healthier food and beverage choices by positioning these options in highly visible and easy-to-access locations within food outlets. The following principles should be considered when placing product:

- First in sight = first in hand.
- Cluster healthier products together.
- Place healthier items on impulse racks or displays by the cash register.
- Promote only foods that meet the **‘Sell More’** Nutrient Criteria when offering meal deals, multi-buy discount or daily specials.

For more information, see Appendix D.

## Continuous Improvement

Operators are expected to improve the availability of healthier food choices overtime. They are encouraged to develop a plan for how they will achieve the targets below.

### Targets

- Compliance with the minimum food and beverage criteria above, including no items listed under ‘Do not sell’.
- 50% of food and beverages options should meet the criteria for ‘Sell More’ (Appendix B).
  - This percentage is calculated separately for food and beverages. It is based on total number of unique items offered for sale.

These targets are based on an assessment of product availability and guidelines from other Canadian jurisdictions. They will be reviewed and updated periodically

## Appendix A: Identifying Items with Unapproved Health Claims, Added Vitamins, Minerals, or Herbal Ingredients

Items with unapproved health claims or added vitamin, mineral, or herbal ingredients.

- Items that do not comply with the [Food & Drugs Act](#) or are prohibited substances or other ingredients inappropriate for consumption as foods.
- Products with added herbal or botanical ingredients. Including
  - Ashwagandha
  - Bee pollen
  - Echinacea
  - Gingko biloba
  - Guarana
  - Ginseng, Panax and Siberian
  - Kava kava
  - Maca
  - Saw palmetto
  - Sarsaparilla
  - Valerian root
  - Yohimbe
- Items with added vitamins or minerals that exceed 100% of the [Daily Value](#).
- Products with a cautionary or warning statement on the label.
- Products displaying claims that do not meet the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's requirements for [General Health Claims](#).

## Appendix B: ‘Sell More’ Criteria

The food and beverage rating system uses ingredient and nutrient information to determine whether foods and beverages are ‘Sell More’. The rating system applies to all pre-packaged or pre-portioned meals, combination dishes, salads, side dishes, snacks, and soups. Ratings are based on recommended portion sizes within calorie limits and the nutrient criteria focus on saturated fat, sodium, and sugar.

How to use: Different types of food and beverages have different nutrient criteria. Determine if the item is rated ‘Sell More’ by comparing the nutrient content with the nutrient criteria below. The rating is based on portion sold.

The AHS Nutrition Guidelines Calculator is available to help you complete this analysis.

<b>‘Sell More’ Nutrient Criteria: Food (per portion size sold)</b>					
<b>Category</b>	<b>Examples</b>	<b>Calories</b>	<b>Saturated fat</b>	<b>Sodium</b>	<b>Sugar</b>
<b>Entrees*</b>	Stir-fry, pasta, stews, curries, chili burrito, burgers, entrée salad, sandwiches, pizza, breakfast bagel,	351–800 kcal	≤ 8 g	<700 mg	N/A
<b>Side dishes &amp; snacks</b>	Salads, hot side dishes, noodle sides, yogurt parfaits	≤ 350 kcal	≤ 3.5 g	≤ 500 mg	≤ 20 g
<b>Soups</b>	Chicken noodle soup, cream of tomato soup *chili and stews are analyzed based on entrée criteria	≤ 300 kcal	≤ 2g	≤ 400 mg	N/A
<b>Baked goods (not deep fried)</b>	Bagels, muffins, cake, cookies, loaves, scones	≤ 350 kcal	≤ 4 g	≤ 400 mg	≤ 24 g
<b>Packaged snacks</b>	Baked chips, rice chips, granola bars, protein bars	≤ 250 kcal	≤ 2.5 g	≤ 230 mg	≤ 10 g
<b>Nuts, trail mix, fruit &amp; nut bar</b>	Peanuts, mixed nuts, trail mixes, fruit & nut bar	≤ 350 kcal	≤ 6 g	≤ 230 mg	≤ 10 g *Exemption for products with dried fruit as primary ingredient.

\*Entrees should contain vegetables or fruit, protein food and a grain product in proportions that look like the Canada’s food guide plate.

<b>'Sell More' Nutrient Criteria: Beverages (per can or bottle sold)</b>						
<b>Category*</b>	<b>Serving Size</b>	<b>Fat</b>	<b>Sugar</b>	<b>Sodium</b>	<b>Caffeine</b>	<b>Vitamins &amp; Minerals</b>
<b>Water and carbonated (bubbly) water</b>	Any size	N/A	No added sugar or sugar substitutes.	≤ 200 mg	N/A	Added vitamins & minerals do not exceed 100% Daily Value.
<b>All beverages</b>	≤ 355 mL	≤ 7.5 g	No added sugar. May include sugar substitutes.	≤ 200 mg	≤ 330 mg	Added vitamins & minerals do not exceed 100% Daily Value.

\*Beverages must not contain any herbs or botanicals, cautionary, or warning statements on label.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How do I use the food and beverage rating system if I sell small or half portions?

If a full-size item meets the **'Sell More'** criteria, a smaller portion of that same item is the same rating. For example: a half portion of a sandwich whose full serving meets the **'Sell More'** criteria is automatically rated Sell More.

### What category would granola bars and protein bars fit in?

They are assessed using the **packaged snacks** category. Bars that are predominately made with nuts and dried fruit can be assessed using the **nuts, trail mix and fruit & nut bar** category.

### Can I sell diet soft drinks?

Diet soft drinks can be sold if the portion size is ≤ 500 mL. Diet soft drinks in ≤ 355 mL portion size meet the **'Sell More'** criteria.

### Can I sell milk?

Yes. Milk can be sold if portion size is ≤ 500 mL. Portion sizes that are ≤ 355 mL (such as 250 mL carton of milk) meet the **'Sell More'** criteria.

# Appendix C: How to Make Healthier Recipes Using Canada's Food Guide Plate

Use the proportions of foods on the Canada's food guide plate as a tool to help you create healthier meals.

**Step 1:** Make half the recipe vegetables and fruits.

**Step 2:** Make one-quarter of the recipe whole grain foods.

**Step 3:** Make one-quarter of the recipe protein foods.

Use the plate proportions as a reference tool whether the meal or snack is served:

- In a bowl.
- On a plate.
- In a 'grab and go' container



## Example: Stir-fry

- Make half of the ingredients vegetables or fruits, such as:
  - Bok choy
  - Mushrooms
  - Sliced peppers
- Add a lean protein food, such as sliced tofu or ground chicken.
- Add a whole grain food, such as brown rice or quinoa.

## Sodium

Common sources of sodium in recipes and food items are:

- Sauces, seasonings
- Cheeses
- Breaded meat products
- Breads and baked goods

Work towards lowering the total sodium content, ideally < 900 mg. Try to:

- Reduce the amount of high-sodium sauces, seasonings.
- Reduce ingredients such as cheese and brined meats and poultry.
- Flavour food with herbs and spices.
- Rinse canned beans, legumes, and vegetables with water.
- Work with manufactures to source lower sodium breads and baked goods.

## Whole grain and whole wheat

Use whole grain and whole wheat products, such as whole grain pasta, whole grain pizza crust, whole grain bread for sandwiches, brown or wild rice, oats, or quinoa.

## Dressings and sauces

Offer dressings and sauces on the side in the smallest quantities possible. These are not included in the nutrient analysis of food items when offered separately.

Adapted from Government of Canada (2021). Make healthy meals with Canada's food guide plate. Retrieved from: <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/tips-for-healthy-eating/make-healthy-meals-with-the-eat-well-plate/>

Photo: Government of Canada (2022). Mapo tofu with chicken. Retrieved from: <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/recipes/mapo-tofu-chicken/>



## Appendix D: Product Placement and Promotion Guidelines

Within AHS retail food outlets, the goal of product placement is to promote healthier food and beverage choices<sup>1</sup> by positioning these options in highly visible and easy-to-access locations within food outlets. The following principles should be considered when placing product:




- First in sight = first in hand.
- Cluster healthier products together.
- Feature healthier item on impulse racks and displays by cash registers.
- Promote only foods that meet the 'Sell More' Criteria (e.g. meal deals, multi-buy discount, loyalty card, daily specials).

Additional information are below:

### First in Sight = First in Hand

Consider the physical stature of the customer group when setting up planograms to guide the placement of healthy products. Customers focus their attention on the items between the height of their waist and the top of their head because these are the easiest to see and reach.



 = Healthy items (Highest Sales)  
 = Healthy items (Medium Sales)  
 = Other items

<sup>1</sup> As defined by the **Sell More** Criteria (page 5–6).

## Cluster Healthier Products Together

Create a visual block of healthy products to draw customer attention to these items. There are many ways to achieve this effect, such as placing complementary products next to one another in the same space (Figure 2) or dedicating an entire refrigerator, cooler or vending machine to one type of healthy option (Figure 3).

**Figure 2:** Create a visual block by clustering similar products together at eye level.



**Figure 3:** Dedicate an entire space to one type of healthy product, such as water.

