

# Helping Your Child Eat Well in Hospital

Your child needs enough food and good nutrition to get better.

## Eating well in hospital can help your child:

- get energy and maintain strength
- heal and recover
- avoid weight and muscle loss
- reduce the length of stay in the hospital

## Nutrition while in hospital

Your child's healthcare team will order a diet based on your child's needs. This 'diet order' may depend on how your child was eating at home. Talk to your healthcare team about how your child usually eats:

- **how often** and **how much** they are eating (meal and snack routine, or tube feeding)
- **what** they are eating (allergies, formula, special diets, texture of solids, and favourite foods)

### Tip:

Show photos to your healthcare team of what you offer your child at home. This provides details that may be hard to remember, such as:

- formula brands
- supplements (vitamins, minerals)

## Preparing for tests and surgery

There may be times in the hospital when your child is not able to have food. **Talk to your team about:**

- food or drink that your child can have before a test or procedure
- the last time your child can eat or drink before a test or procedure
- when and what is safe for your child to start eating after a test or procedure
- when and what your child can eat if their test or procedure gets cancelled or delayed
- when your child can have meals if they have not eaten for 24 hours

## Eating well in hospital

Try the tips below to help your child get enough nutrition while in the hospital.

- Be present at mealtimes to offer help if needed.
- Make sure your child is comfortable. Try to support them so they can sit upright.
- Ask your healthcare team if you would like a highchair for your child.
- If needed, help your child by:
  - opening food packages
  - cutting foods into smaller pieces
  - providing help with eating
- Ask for larger servings at meals if your child is hungry after meals.
- Ask for condiments such as ketchup, margarine, gravy, or sour cream. These may make foods more appealing to your child.
- Avoid adding medication to your child's food at meals. This can change the taste or texture.



Talk to your healthcare team if your child is having trouble chewing or swallowing.

## If your child is not eating well

- You can encourage your child to try to eat small amounts at mealtimes.
- Your child can drink liquids between or after meals to have more room for food at mealtimes.
- Ask your healthcare team if you can bring your child's favourite foods from home.
  - Your healthcare team can tell you how to label and safely store foods brought from home.



## Nutrition supplements

Nutrition supplements provide extra calories, protein, and nutrients. These come in many forms: drinks, bars, puddings, and powders. They may help if your child:

- has a poor appetite
- is unable to eat enough of their food at meals and snacks

Examples that you may see in the hospital:

- PediaSure®
- Ensure®

## Ordering meals in the hospital

Some hospitals have a program where patients can order their meals. Ask your healthcare team if your hospital has this program. If they do, these tips may help:

- Fill out your menu before lunch. This can ensure your child gets the food they want for the next day.
- Choose foods from each group on the menu. This makes sure your child gets a variety of foods and nutrients.
- You can help your child choose foods that are familiar to them.
- Write "X 2" on any item on your menu to get double portions.
- Ask your healthcare team if there is food on the unit for your child between meals.

**Note:** If you do not fill out a menu, your child will still get meals.



Please circle items of your choice	
<b>Friday</b>	<b>Supper</b>
<b>Entree</b>	
029 Meatballs/Gravy	
031 Salmon/Lemon Dill Sauce	
<b>Side Dish</b>	
045 Coleslaw	
051 Peas	
036 Mashed Potato	
012 Brown Dinner Roll	
058 Gravy	
<b>Dessert</b>	
047 Mandarin Orange Cup	
049 Vanilla Pudding	
<b>Beverage</b>	
014 1% Milk	
016 2% Milk X 2	
<b>Condiment</b>	
062 Pepper	023 Mustard
064 Mrs. Dash	025 Ketchup
018 Margarine X 2	027 Low Sodium Soya Sauce
<b>Your Diet Order: Pediatric (example)</b>	

## For more support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on ahs.ca/811.
- Visit [ahs.ca/nutrition](https://ahs.ca/nutrition).

