

MEMO / NOTE DE SERVICE



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TO: Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Public Health Unit

DESTINATAIRE : Conseil de santé de la circonscription sanitaire de la Ville d'Ottawa

**FROM: Dr. Vera Etches,
Medical Officer of Health
Ottawa Public Health**

**Contact :
Gillian Connelly
Healthy Communities – Ottawa Public
Health
613-580-6744 x 28971
Gillian.Connelly@ottawa.ca**

**EXPÉDITEUR : D^{re} Vera Etches,
Médecin chef en santé
Santé publique Ottawa**

**Personne ressource :
Gillian Connelly,
Communauté en santé – Santé
publique Ottawa
613-580-6744 poste 28971
Gillian.Connelly@ottawa.ca**

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SUBJECT: UPDATE: THE NEW CANADA'S FOOD GUIDE

OBJET : MISE A JOUR: LE NOUVEAU GUIDE ALIMENTAIRE CANADIEN

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memo is to provide the Ottawa Board of Health with information on Health Canada's new Food Guide. It also provides an overview of Ottawa Public Health's (OPH) future work to increase Ottawa residents' awareness of the new food guide and work to support healthy food environments, as recommended in the Food Guide.

BACKGROUND

In 2016, Health Canada outlined a [‘Vision for a Healthy Canada’](#), which includes actions to help people achieve and maintain good physical and mental health. A key element of this vision is Health Canada’s multi-year [Healthy Eating Strategy](#), which includes initiatives on the following topics:

- **Improving healthy eating information**, including revising Canada’s Food Guide;
- **Protecting vulnerable populations**, including restricting the commercial marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to children;
- **Strengthening labelling and health claims**, including changes to the nutrition facts table, list of ingredient requirements, and consulting on front-of-package labelling for sugars, sodium and saturated fat;
- **Improving nutrition quality standards**, including reducing sodium in prepackaged and restaurant foods and consulting on eliminating the use of industrially produced trans fat in foods; and
- **Supporting increased access to and availability** of nutritious foods through the Nutrition North Canada program.

Between 2016 and 2018, Health Canada created a number of opportunities to provide input into shaping the future of public health nutrition policies at the federal level. In this regard, three open consultations were completed on: (1) the revision of Canada’s food guide, (2) front-of-pack nutrition labelling, and (3) banning partially hydrogenated oils in foods. As these initiatives aligned with OPH’s Strategic Direction (2014-2018) to Inspire and Support Healthy Eating and Active Living, OPH engaged in these consultation processes. Specifically, OPH participated in Health Canada’s consultation regarding the revision of Canada’s Food Guide. This was shared with the Board on January 4th, 2017 through a memo entitled “[Federal Government Proposed Healthy Eating Strategy](#)”, which was listed on the February 13, 2017 Board Agenda as Information Previously Distributed (IPD). The following overarching principles guided OPH’s input into Health Canada’s Healthy Eating Strategy:

- **Creating Supportive Environments:** Policies are required to create supportive environments that enable people to make healthy choices. Policies focused on improving the food environments can help improve Canadian eating habits as there is a consensus that nutrition education alone is not enough to change

behaviourⁱ. This includes regulations pertaining to marketing to children, stronger regulations to eliminate trans fats and to reduce salt in processed foods.

- **Supporting Informed Food Choices:** Nutrition information must be clear and easily accessible in order for people to make informed food choices for themselves and their families. This includes front of package and clearer labelling on added sugars.
- **Strengthening Food Industry Regulations:** This includes regulations that support Canadians to eat healthy, such as banning the use of trans fats, decreasing elevated sodium levels in food supply, and protecting vulnerable populations by prohibiting marketing to children.

As noted in the memo, shared with the Board in January 2017, OPH recommended that Canada's new Food Guide include:

- Greater emphasis on a total diet approach, shifting from a nutrient-based to a whole food-based approach;
- Encourage the selection of “minimally processed foods” and less “ultra-processed foods”;
- Focus on aspects of healthy eating beyond types and amounts of foods, including habits like building food skills and eating together as a family;
- Shift from meat as a primary source of protein to include more plant-based sources;
- Limits on industry involvement in setting dietary guidelines.

Diet is an important risk factor contributing to death and disabilityⁱⁱ. The burden of chronic disease is likely to continue increasing if our current diets and dietary habits do not changeⁱⁱⁱ. In Canada, fruit and vegetable intake remains consistently low^{iv}, despite the demonstrated health benefits of plant-based diets^v. Locally, in 2015-2016, more than half of Ottawa residents aged 12 years and older did not meet the previous food guide's recommendations of consuming five or more servings of vegetables and fruits per day,^{vi} which decreases the likelihood of being overweight or obese^{vii}. Furthermore, dietary patterns have shifted towards highly processed foods,^{viii} which contribute to a higher intake of sodium, free sugars, and saturated fats^{ix}. In Ottawa, 48% of adults eat at restaurants, order takeout, eat fast food, or pick up ready-to eat foods 3 to 7 times or more per week^x. Also, 27% of adults reported drinking sugar-sweetened beverages

daily^{xi}. A higher consumption of processed foods has contributed to the increased rates of obesity worldwide,^{xii,xiii} which is a risk factor for cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, type 2 diabetes and some cancers^{xiv}.

Our food environment plays an important role in our diets and health. Marketing of unhealthy food and beverages to kids influences Canadians' dietary choices, affecting children's food preferences, purchase requests and consumption patterns^{xv}. In Ottawa, 9 in 10 residents (18 years or older) agree that children and youth are targeted by marketing and this affects their food choices^{xvi}. Dietary habits such as eating together can also impact dietary intake. Research worldwide has shown that "Family meals" are associated with increased intake of vegetables, fruit, calcium-rich foods and decreased intake of soft drinks. They are also associated with lower risk of being overweight and have some protective effects against eating disorders^{xvii}. Finally, in 2015/16, 86% of Ottawa residents reported being aware of Canada's Food Guide^{xviii}, highlighting the potential beneficial implications of this tool in shifting dietary risk factors in Ottawa.

UPDATE

On January 22, 2019, Health Canada released the revised Canada's Food Guide. The new Food Guide is based on Health Canada's review of evidence, scientific reports and studies from world-leading organizations and data gathered through public consultation. The new food guide aligns with all of OPH's recommendations provided through the consultation period.

The new guide encourages Canadians to eat a variety of healthy foods every day.

Specifically, the new Canada's food guide encourages Canadians to:

- Make it a habit to eat a variety of healthy foods each day. Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits, whole grain and protein foods. Choose protein foods that come from plants more often and make water your drink of choice.
- Use food labels. Limit foods high in sugar, sodium or saturated fat.
- Be aware that food marketing can influence your choices.
- Be mindful of eating habits. Healthy eating is more than the foods we eat. It is also about where, when, why and how we eat. Cook more often. Enjoy food. Eat meals with others.

- Limit highly processed foods. If choosing these foods, eat them less often and in small amounts.
- Focus on quality versus quantity of food and focus on the proportions of the foods rather than a set number of food items.

The recommendations put forward in Canada's New Food Guide align with OPH's current programming, these include:

- I Love to Cook and Play: A program that aims to increase children and youth's food skills and physical literacy through building capacity of children and youth leaders to deliver such programming. This program is provided to children and youth in school settings and afterschool programs.
- Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) guidelines: Building staff capacity to implement evidence-based nutrition and physical activity guidelines and resources in childcare centres, afterschool programs, shelters and retirement homes.
- Marketing of Unhealthy Food and Beverages to Children and Youth (M2CY): OPH's work with partners to increase awareness and explore policy options to limit impacts of marketing to children and youth.
- Good Food Corner stores: OPH's work with local corner stores to increase access to healthy and fresh foods in corner stores.

NEXT STEPS

To support Ottawa residents to eat healthy, OPH will work with partners to increase awareness of the Food Guide, along with incorporating the recommendations into OPH programming. Next steps include:

- Disseminating the new Canada's Food Guide to the public and community partners through education sessions and interactive social media activities.
- Reviewing current programs and resources and adapting them to align with the new Canada's Food Guide recommendations. Such programs include: HEAL guidelines in childcare centres, afterschool programs, shelters, and retirement homes and the I love to Cook and Play program.
- Continuing work on M2CY activities, supporting federal policy, increasing awareness municipally and exploring policy options to reduce the impacts of

marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to children in Ottawa.

- Continuing to monitor progress on Health Canada's Healthy Eating Strategy initiatives.

Dr./ Dre Vera Etches

Medical Officer of Health/ Médecin chef en santé publique

Ottawa Public Health/ Santé publique Ottawa

ⁱ Why We Need to Stop Marketing to Kids. (May 2016). Public Health and Education Journal. 82(1). Available at: <http://journal.phecanada.ca/issues/143/volume-82-issue-1/why-we-need-stop-marketing-kids>

ⁱⁱ Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation [Internet]. Seattle: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation; 2018 [cited 2019 Jan 25]. Global burden of disease (GBD) profile: Canada.

ⁱⁱⁱ Health Canada. Canada's Dietary Guidelines for Health Professionals and Policy Makers [Internet]. Ottawa: Health Canada; 2019 [cited 2018 Jan 25].

^{iv} Colapinto CK, Graham J, St-Pierre S. Trends and correlates of frequency of fruit and vegetable consumption, 2007 to 2014. Health Rep. 2018;29(1):9–14.

^v Health Canada. Canada's Dietary Guidelines for Health Professionals and Policy Makers [Internet]. Ottawa: Health Canada; 2019 [cited 2018 Jan 25].

^{vi} Ottawa Public Health. Canadian Community Health Survey 2015/16. Ontario Share File. Statistics Canada. [cited 2018 Jan 25].

^{vii} Rolls B, Ello-Martin MS, Tohill BC. (2004). What can intervention studies tell us about the relationship between fruit and vegetable consumption and weight management? Nutrition Reviews; 62(1):1-17.

^{viii} Moubarac JC, Batal M, Martins AP, Claro R, Levy RB, Cannon G, et al. Processed and ultra-processed food products: Consumption trends in Canada from 1938 to 2011. Can J Diet Pract Res. 2014;75(1):15–21.

^{ix} Health Canada. Canada's Dietary Guidelines for Health Professionals and Policy Makers [Internet]. Ottawa: Health Canada; 2019 [cited 2018 Jan 25].

^x Ottawa Public Health. Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2016 [cited 2018 Jan 25].

^{xi} Ottawa Public Health. Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2016 [cited 2018 Jan 25].

^{xii} Popkin BM, Gordon-Larsen P. The nutrition transition: worldwide obesity dynamics and their determinants. Int J Obes Relat Metab Disord. 2004;28(Suppl 3):S2-S9.

^{xiii} Swinburn BA, Sacks G, Hall KD, McPherson K, Finegood DT, Moodie ML, et al. The global obesity pandemic: shaped by global drivers and local environments. Lancet. 2011;378(9793):804–814.

^{xiv} Health Canada. Canada's Dietary Guidelines for Health Professionals and Policy Makers [Internet]. Ottawa: Health Canada; 2019 [cited 2018 Jan 25].

^{xv} Heart and Stroke Foundation. The Kids are not alright. 2017. Report on Health of Canadians. [cited 2018 Jan 25]

^{xvi} Ottawa Public Health. Results of Consultations for Marketing of Unhealthy Foods and Beverages to Children and Youth in Ottawa, 2017

^{xvii} Dietitians of Canada. Healthy Lifestyle – Eating Together. In: Practice-based Evidence in Nutrition [PEN]. Last Updated: 2012-03-09. [cited 2018 Jan 25]

^{xviii} Ottawa Public Health. Canadian Community Health Survey 2015/16. Ontario Share File. Statistics Canada.