

Healthy Eating Environments Guideline

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Why does the WRHA need a healthy eating environments guideline?

Research has shown that the foods we eat can significantly influence our health. It has the power to protect us from many chronic diseases. However, over the last couple of decades, the foods that are available in the marketplace have also changed drastically. We are now surrounded by a multitude of ultra-processed foods that are high in calories, fat, sugar and salt, and low in other health protecting nutrients. It has become much more difficult to find and choose foods that promote health.

At the WRHA, health is at the core of what we do. We want to support our staff, visitors, volunteers and students in promoting health and preventing chronic disease through providing food environments where it is easy to find and choose foods that protect their health. The Healthy Eating Environments Guideline was developed for this reason.

The guideline is aimed at:

- further positioning the WRHA as a role model in supporting healthy eating environments and positive nutrition choices;
- supporting WRHA staff and visitors in their efforts to achieve optimal health by providing healthy food choices;
- aligning the WRHA with other health regions in its commitment to healthy eating environments. By “walking the talk,” the WRHA increases the credibility of its external efforts to promote healthy eating.

When will the guideline come into effect?

The guideline will be implemented in three phases over the next 10-15 years to allow staff and vendors ample time to adjust. The first phase takes place over the next 5 years and will focus on the promotion of healthy foods and increasing their availability. Subsequent phases include decreasing the portion sizes of foods that don't meet the nutrition standards, removing some of them and continually increasing the variety of healthy foods available.

To whom does the guideline apply?

The guideline will apply to commercial food services (retail, vending and catering) in all WRHA facilities and sites. Guidelines are also provided for staff celebrations.

What is the ultimate goal of a Healthy Eating Guideline?

Several years down the road when the guideline has been fully implemented throughout the WRHA, we hope to have food environments that offer tasty, fresh, visually appealing foods that are healthy as the predominant option, making the healthy choice the easy choice for all staff, visitors, volunteers and students.

I'm a grown adult. Why are you trying to control what I eat?

We respect the fact that you are an adult and make your own food choices. Even with a healthy eating environments guideline in place, you will maintain ultimate control over what you choose to eat. At its heart, this guideline is about choice. It stems from the belief that healthy food choices should be available to everyone who eats at WRHA facilities. By having a guideline in place, we hope to help make the healthy choice an easy choice for staff, volunteers, students and visitors who choose to purchase food at our facilities.

There is room in this guideline for foods that don't fit in the healthy eating category and they will continue to be sold in our facilities. There are also no limits on the type or amount of food that people purchase elsewhere with their own funds and bring to our facilities.

Who decides what qualifies as healthy food?

For the purposes of the guideline, healthy food is defined as foods and beverages listed in [Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide](#), which emphasizes vegetables, fruit, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, dairy, lean meats, fish, and poultry, prepared with healthy methods in the recommended serving sizes. These foods are prepared in ways that support national and international recommendations for sugar, sodium and fats.

How was this guideline developed? Who was consulted?

In developing the guideline, the project team actively sought out the input of key stakeholder groups including staff, students/trainees, food service vendors, dietitians, volunteers and visitors. [Input from these groups](#) has been carefully considered, and helped inform the guideline's development.

Do other health regions have healthy eating environments guidelines?

In adopting these guidelines, the WRHA joins other health authorities across Canada in taking a proactive role in providing healthy food choices as the norm in health care facilities. The Nova Scotia Health Authority and Alberta Health Services both have policies related to the healthy eating environments in their facilities, while the Champlain Local Health Integration Network's Healthy Food in Champlain Hospitals program has resulted in numerous changes to the food environments in all 20 hospitals in its region. In all regions, leadership has recognized and accepted the responsibility that creating and ensuring healthy food environments in health care facilities is the right thing to do.