

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority's Position Statement on Healthy Eating

Healthy Eating Description

Healthy eating refers to a way of eating that emphasizes healthy food choices, variety and portion sizes consistent with Canada's Food Guide (Health Canada 2007). Healthy eating promotes the maintenance of health and vitality, and supports optimal growth and development in children. It means getting enough nutritious and palatable food to provide energy and nutrients for everyday living, and to support physical and mental health, culture, and wellness.

The national guidelines for healthy eating for Canadians promote adequacy, moderation, variety, and balance in food choices. In particular, Canadians are encouraged to eat a variety of foods each day from the four food groups: Vegetables & Fruit, Grain Products, Milk & Alternatives, and Meat & Alternatives. The recommended number of servings each day varies by age and gender, and activity level, to meet the unique energy and nutrient needs along the lifecycle.

Context

Overall, Canadians are not eating well. According to a Statistics Canada report on diet quality in Canada (Garriguet 2009), less than 1% of Canadians followed a diet consistent with Canada's Food Guide, with one in six having diets classified as 'poor'. The average Canadian diet was much closer to the 'poor diet' category than to the 'good diet' category. In particular, trouble spots that were identified were low consumption of dark green vegetables, orange vegetables, whole fruits, and whole grains. It was also identified that a higher percentage of calories are being consumed from 'other foods' (foods not included within the four food groups).

Food choices are more complex than knowing the right amount and type of food to eat. Industrialization has influenced the way we eat, facilitating our choice of foods with high salt, fat and sugar content. We also eat based on availability and accessibility, with emotion and social connectedness as driving forces. With unhealthy food options readily available and convenient, we are more likely to choose them. In part due to these conditions, Canada is now recognized to be facing an obesity epidemic, as are other high income countries throughout the world.

Choices may also fall outside of the control of individuals, particularly those who do not have the socioeconomic resources to access food that promotes better health. In addition, some cultural groups have barriers to accessing their preferred foods, which may not support their cultural identity and choices for healthy eating. For example, Indigenous peoples are often unable to access traditional foods (such as wild game) due to geographic barriers. Consequently, both universal and targeted approaches that address the social determinants of health across household, community and system boundaries are the best chance of enabling healthy eating for all.

The WRHA recognizes that:

- Healthy eating is fundamental to the overall health of individuals, families and communities. Across an individual's lifespan, it supports daily living by promoting physical, mental and social well-being.
- For healthy eating to support healthy communities, food is sourced locally as much as practical, produced in sustainable ways, and is affordable and accessible.
- An unhealthy diet is a major risk factor for many chronic diseases and conditions, such as osteoporosis, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, anemia, diabetes and obesity.
- The chronic diseases and conditions that have their etiology in an unhealthy diet are growing.
- Diet is a modifiable risk factor for most people.
- Evidence-informed strategies exist to promote healthy eating, including policy development and supporting a healthy built environment.

The WRHA Commitment

The WRHA is committed to optimize health and wellness and improve quality of life for residents of the Winnipeg Health Region by promoting healthy eating through working with individuals, families, communities and partners to support and promote:

- The right of all to achieve healthy eating within a food secure environment, including policy that supports access to healthy food.
- Physical and social environments, programs and policies that support healthy eating along the continuum of life, including in our workplaces.
- An approach to healthy eating that encourages positive relationships with food and eating, and positive body image, and respects that decisions about food choices are personal.

The WRHA will enable healthy eating by:

- Promoting a comprehensive approach to healthy eating that considers nutrition, food, eating competence (positive attitudes towards eating where needs and wants are in harmony), food systems, community food security, pleasure and traditions, and how these factors intersect to influence healthy eating.

- ❑ Leading by example, and developing internal policies, programs, and initiatives to create supportive environments to promote healthy eating within our sites.
- ❑ Collaborating with external partners to support community level, systemic change to enable the development and maintenance of sustainable food systems and healthy eating environments where people live, learn, work and play.

Links:

WRHA Position Statement on Food Security

<http://www.wrha.mb.ca/community/publichealth/files/position-statements/FSPositionStat.pdf>

References:

Garriguet, D. 2009. Diet Quality in Canada. Statistics Canada Health Reports 20 (3): 1-12. [Catalogue no. 82-003-XPE] Available online: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-003-x/2009003/article/10914-eng.pdf>. Accessed 31 Dec 2014.

Health Canada. 2007. Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide. Available online: <http://hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php>. Accessed 31 Dec 2014.