

Healthy Classroom Celebrations

Making the case for healthy celebrations

Classroom celebrations often include foods with Minimum Nutritional Value, such as cakes, chips, candy, pop or fruit drinks. Celebrations are fun; however, the type of food offered can be a concern. Instead of discouraging classroom parties, decide how often celebrations will occur and how they can feature fun activities. Celebrations are also a great way to learn about the diversity of cultural traditions. Music, arts and crafts, games, stories and songs, along with food preparation and tasting, help make cultures come alive for children. When school celebrations do involve food, provide healthy options and ensure that the food is safe, wholesome and served in appropriate portion sizes. You will be amazed to see that children quickly join in once they see their friends enjoying fruit kabobs or veggie sticks.

What are healthy classroom celebrations?

Healthy classroom celebrations emphasize foods and beverages with Maximum Nutritional Value, and offer no foods or beverages with Minimum Nutritional Value. Ensure that, if serving foods with Moderate Nutritional Value, they are offered with foods with Maximum Nutrition Value.



Nutrition Tools for Schools

Benefits of healthy classroom celebrations

Offering healthy foods and beverages during classroom celebrations:

- Reinforces the classroom healthy eating education
- Teaches students that healthy food can be 'fun food'
- Promotes healthy eating within families
- Fosters a school environment that values and supports healthy eating
- Keeps students' teeth healthy
- Links to the 'whole school approach' to creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment
- Shows parents and the local community that the school takes the health of its students seriously

Success to share

The parents of the children who attend Summitview Public School in Stouffville, Ontario, were encouraged to bring in healthy snacks for classroom Halloween parties. One parent of a grade 3 student made fresh vegetables into a 'scary' snack. She prepared a *vegetable skeleton with a brain dip*. Along with *Mr Vegetable Skeleton*, she took extra bowls of vegetables for the kids to snack on. The students loved it and not one vegetable was left over for any goblins to get!

Submitted by Lucy Valleau, Public Health Nutritionist, York Region Health Services

Ideas for healthy classroom celebrations Nutrition Tools for Schools

Classroom celebrations emphasize foods and beverages with Maximum Nutritional Value and offer no foods or beverages with Minimum Nutritional Value. Ensure that, if serving foods with Moderate Nutritional Value, they are offered with foods with Maximum Nutritional Value.

Common foods used for classroom celebrations

| Maximum Nutritional Value | Moderate Nutritional Value | Minimum Nutritional Value |
|---|--|--|
| Whole wheat wrap, pitas, bagels, bread and buns | Plain white or flavoured wraps, white bread, bagels, buns or pitas | Croissants, doughnuts, Danish and other pastries |
| Pizza on whole wheat crust with vegetable and lean meat toppings | Pizza on white crust with vegetable and lean meat toppings | Crackers that contain more than 2 grams saturated + trans fat or more than 480 mg sodium |
| Fresh fruit or fruit salad | 100% unsweetened fruit juice | Chewy fruit snacks |
| Unsweetened canned fruit or frozen fruit | Sweetened frozen or canned fruit | Processed cheese spread with more than 480 mg sodium per 30 gram serving |
| Fresh vegetables | Processed cheese slices (reduced fat, fat-free or made from skim milk) | Cream cheese |
| Lower-fat cheese - block or strings (15 - 20% MF) | Cheese – block or strings (no more than 32% MF) | Sausage-type meats, such as salami, for making wraps and sandwiches |
| Hummus dip | Fruit-filled bars (eg, fig) | Pepperoni pizza on white crust |
| Lean deli meat, eg, turkey, ham, roast beef slices for making wraps or sandwiches | Plain soda crackers and melba toast | Hot dogs and sausages |
| Lower-fat yogurt (2% MF or less) with added vitamin D | Plain popcorn | Fruit punch/drinks |
| 100% whole wheat crackers, melba toast, crisp bread | Lower-fat yogurt in tubes (no more than 2.5% MF) | Sports drinks |
| Plain or flavoured milk (skim, 1% or 2% MF) | | Pop |
| | | Cookies |

Contact a public health dietitian for more examples of foods with Maximum, Moderate and Minimum Nutritional Value.

Menu ideas for classroom celebrations

- Lower-fat yogurt (2% MF or less) and fresh fruit such as melon wedges and pineapple chunks
- Lower-fat muffins made with whole wheat flour and 100% fruit juice
- Vegetable sticks with low-fat dip or salsa and chocolate or white milk (skim, 1% or 2% MF)
- Fruit kabobs with lower-fat vanilla yogurt (2% MF or less) for dipping and chocolate or white milk (skim, 1% or 2% MF)
- Baked chips/pretzels/air-popped popcorn, and water and fresh fruit
- Apple wedges sprinkled with cinnamon and served with yogurt cups (2% MF or less)
- Whole grain crackers and lower-fat mozzarella cheese cubes
- Lower-fat frozen yogurt with fresh or frozen unsweetened raspberries or blueberries



Does your school have a Healthy School Nutrition Environment?

A Healthy School Nutrition Environment exists when a school promotes healthy eating through words *and* actions. Students get the same message about food, nutrition and healthy eating wherever food is served – in the classroom, in the school and at home. The following nine Essential Elements¹ are recommended for a school to have a healthy nutrition environment.

| Whole School Approach | Essential Elements |
|---|---|
| In the School | <p>Does your school offer healthy, reasonably priced and culturally-appropriate food choices? For example does your school have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • healthy fundraising? • a school milk program? • a healthy tuck shop? • healthy 'special food' days? • non-food rewards in the classroom? • healthy classroom celebrations? • healthy refreshments at school meetings and events? |
| | Do parents, teachers and volunteers role model healthy eating and body image behaviours at school? |
| | Does your school have a Student Nutrition Program (eg, breakfast, snack and lunch)? |
| | Does your school practise safe food practices and have an allergy-safe environment? |
| | Are nutrition breaks at school appropriately scheduled? |
| | Does your school have a food and nutrition policy? |
| | In the Classroom |
| Do teachers have up-to-date nutrition resources to support the healthy eating expectations in the curriculum? | |
| In Homes and In the Community | Does your school provide student, parent and community education about healthy eating? |

¹ Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health School Nutrition Workgroup. 2004 *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment*.

Need more information?

Public health offers *Nutrition Tools for Schools - a toolkit for elementary schools*. Whether you're a teacher, parent, school administrator or volunteer, this toolkit will lead you through a step-by-step process to creating a healthy nutrition environment in your school. *Nutrition Tools for Schools* contains a variety of resources and tools to implement the nine Essential Elements listed above. For more information about this toolkit, please contact your public health unit/department.

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2008 March 6