



**STAFF REPORT
INFORMATION ONLY**

***Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide – Assessment
and Service Implications***

Date:	February 12, 2007
To:	Board of Health
From:	Medical Officer of Health
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

On February 5, 2007, Health Canada released *Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide* (see Attachment 1), an updated version of the 1992 *Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating*. The purpose of this report is to update the Board of Health on *Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide*, and to outline the steps that Toronto Public Health (TPH) will take to update resources, programs and services to incorporate the new Food Guide.

Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide is an improvement over the previous version because it provides clearer advice on the types and amounts of food to consume and is better tailored to meet the needs of Toronto’s diverse ethno-cultural population.

As a result of the release of *Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide*, Toronto Public Health will review resources and program materials containing nutrition information to assess the need for revision. Those resources identified as a high priority will be revised in the very near future. In addition, there will be a need for staff training and for training and consultation with external partners. The implementation of *Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide* will be an important focus in Toronto Public Health nutrition programs and services over the next year.

Financial Impact

Any costs associated with revising resources and providing training pertaining to *Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide* will be addressed through the TPH 2007 Operating Budget.

DECISION HISTORY

Health Canada has been in the process of revising Canada's Food Guide for several years, and Toronto Public Health participated in the extensive stakeholder consultation process. This report is intended to provide information to the Board of Health on *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*, and to report on Toronto Public Health's plans to incorporate the new Food Guide into programs and services.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Health Canada released a new Food Guide for Canadians, *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* (the Food Guide), on February 5, 2007. The Food Guide is a consumer education tool that provides guidance to Canadians on healthy eating. Health Canada has been providing dietary guidance to Canadians since 1942. *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* updates the 1992 *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*.

The Food Guide recommends a pattern of eating that promotes health, reduces the risk of chronic disease and meets nutrient needs. It is based on the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs), "a common set of reference values for Canada and the United States that are based on scientifically grounded relationships between nutrients and indicators of adequacy, as well as the prevention of chronic diseases, in apparently healthy populations"¹. These values were developed by the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Academies' Institute of Medicine with support from the Canadian and American governments and others. The DRI's replace the U.S. Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs) and the Canadian Recommended Nutrient Intakes (RNIs) which served as the foundation of nutrition policy in each country.

In addition to the DRIs, the pattern of eating recommended in the Food Guide is based on data collected through national and provincial surveys that reflects the Canadian food supply. Health Canada developed the recommended pattern using Statistics Canada's 2001 Food Expenditure Survey (FoodEx) data as well as data from four provincial nutrition surveys.

The Food Guide incorporates many significant changes over the previous version:

- Advice is tailored by age and gender;
- There is more specific advice about the types and amount of food to consume;
- Vegetables and fruit are given more prominence;
- The "Milk Products" food group has been changed to "Milk and Alternatives" and includes fortified soy beverage as an alternative to milk for people who do not drink milk;
- There is greater emphasis on whole grains (e.g., brown rice, bulgur, pot barley, whole oats or oatmeal, whole grain wheat and wild rice);

¹ Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. Dietary Reference Intakes The Essential Guide to Nutrient Requirements. 2006. The National Academies Press.

- There is clear guidance around fat consumption, with a recommendation to consume small amounts of unsaturated fat each day (e.g., canola oil, olive oil and soybean oil) while choosing foods that are low in saturated and trans fat;
- There is a recommendation for adults over 50 years of age to take a daily vitamin D supplement (400 IU);
- There are clear messages about limiting foods and beverages high in calories, fat, sugar and salt (sodium) and using the Nutrition Facts table on foods to choose products that contain less fat, saturated fat, trans fat, sugar and sodium;
- There is a greater emphasis on being active every day as a step towards better health and a healthy body weight
- Health Canada has launched an interactive web-based component - My Food Guide – which allows users to personalize Food Guide information based on their age, gender, food preferences and activity choices (www.canadasfoodguide.net);
- The Food Guide recommends people consume at least two Food Guide Servings of fish each week, but advises limiting exposure to mercury from certain types of fish (information available at www.healthcanada.gc.ca).

Health Canada has taken steps to have the new Food Guide reflect the changing socio-demographic profile of the Canadian population. The depiction on the cover of the Food Guide and the illustrations of food inside include choices such as bok choy, couscous, wild rice, flatbread, fortified soy beverage, shellfish and legumes. In addition, the interactive web-based component - My Food Guide – allows users to personalize information based on their age, gender, food preferences and activity choices. Among the food preferences are a variety of ethnic food choices not previously found in the Food Guide such as okra, bitter melon, bok choy, mango, bulgar, quinoa, congee, naan, paneer, kefir, shellfish, cooked legumes, and tofu. In addition, the Health Canada web site contains examples of how people can count servings in a meal. The meals described illustrate how the Food Guide can be used to plan a variety of meals incorporating food from different cultures (eg. beef lo mein, dal, fajita, Brazilian seafood stew and vegetable curry).

Health Canada will be translating the interactive web component – My Food Guide - into many other languages to allow users to tailor the Food Guide in their own language. In addition, Health Canada will translate and culturally adapt the Food Guide. Cultural adaptation is important because it goes beyond translation, to tailor the Food Guide more specifically to ethno-cultural groups. However, it must be noted that the recommended pattern of eating is based on population-level data, and is not based on any one particular ethno-cultural group. Health Canada is also in the process of developing an aboriginal adaptation of the Food Guide.

Health Canada carried out a cost analysis of patterns of eating recommended in the Food Guide. They found that the cost of adopting the pattern of eating recommended in the Food Guide is no higher than the cost associated with the 1992 version of *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*. The Toronto Board of Health Nutritious Food Basket Report (January 29, 2007) identified that Toronto residents on low incomes are unable to follow either Food Guide. The difficulty experienced by many Toronto residents in meeting

daily nutritional needs to maintain health is a result of the combined effect of the rising cost of food, inadequate income due to low minimum wage and inadequate social assistance rates and the high cost of other essential needs such as housing.

In the development of *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* the challenge of addressing the increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity in the Canadian population was a strong focus. Health Canada addressed this challenge in a number of ways:

- The pattern of eating recommended in the Food Guide is based on energy (or calorie) requirements for sedentary individuals so that it is designed to provide the necessary nutrients for people within a calorie level that will not increase the risk of overweight or obesity.
- The new Food Guide provides much more specific advice about the types and amounts of food to choose. For example, the 1992 Food Guide recommended much broader ranges of servings (e.g., 5-12 Grain Products a day) whereas the recommendations in *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* are more specific based on age and gender (e.g., 7 food guide servings of Grain Products a day are recommended for males 51+). The 1992 Food Guide also contained ranges for serving sizes but in the new Guide, there is less ambiguity.
- There are clear messages in the Guide about limiting foods and beverages high in calories and using the Nutrition Facts table on foods to help choose foods lower in calories.
- The Food Guide emphasizes physical activity by providing clear advice on being active every day.

Health Canada sought advice throughout the development of the *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*. Several committees, including the DRI Expert Advisory Committee, and interdepartmental work group, and the Food Guide Advisory Committee were struck by Health Canada to provide on-going advice. In addition, a broad stakeholder consultation was undertaken in November 2005 in which Health Canada received input from over 6,000 stakeholders.

COMMENTS

Overall, Health Canada has taken a very positive step forward in making the new Food Guide more relevant to the Toronto population. Many of the comments submitted to Health Canada from Toronto Public Health in the consultation phase were incorporated into *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*. For example, Toronto Public Health recommended that the "Milk Products" food group be re-named "Milk and Alternatives" in order to recognize that many people do not drink milk. Depictions of different ethnic foods have been added to the Food Guide to make it more culturally relevant and specific advice about physical activity was added to the Guide after the consultation.

Health Canada has released the Food Guide on-line and will be sending copies to all Registered Dietitians in Ontario. Public health units will play an important role in

disseminating the Food Guide through educational resources, programs and services. Toronto Public Health resources with nutrition information have been reviewed to assess the need for revision. Those resources identified as a high priority for revision will be revised in the very near future. Internal staff training on the new food guide has already begun; external training will commence shortly. School boards in Toronto will be offered teacher training and consultation; community leaders and other stakeholders will also be offered training. Information on the new Food Guide will be incorporated into the Student Nutrition Program workshops. Introducing the new Food Guide will be an important focus in Toronto Public Health nutrition programs and services over the next year and provides an exciting opportunity for further outreach in the community.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*