



History of Canada's food guides

from
1942 to 2007



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Introduction

Canada's first food guide, the Official Food Rules, was introduced to the public in July 1942. This guide acknowledged wartime food rationing, while endeavoring to prevent nutritional deficiencies and to improve the health of Canadians. Since 1942, the food guide has been transformed many times—it has adopted new names, new looks, and new messages, yet has never wavered from its original purpose of guiding food selection and promoting the nutritional health of Canadians.

Role of food guides

Food guides are basic education tools that are designed to help people follow a healthy diet. They embody sophisticated dietary analysis, and merge national nutrition goals, data from food consumption surveys, and issues of food supply and production. They translate the science of nutrient requirements into a practical pattern of food choices, incorporating variety and flexibility.

Process to develop the food guides

Little is recorded about the process used to develop the earliest food guides for Canada. We do know that they were developed by the Nutrition Division of the federal Department of Pensions and National Health. Further, the Canadian Council on Nutrition contributed to the development of the early food guides, with each publication from 1942 to 1961 displaying a statement declaring that the guide was “Approved by the Canadian Council on Nutrition”. Appointed by the government in 1938 and remaining in existence until 1969, this group consisted of “scientists, medical experts, and welfare workers brought together from university departments, welfare and health organizations and the government, to discover, study and discuss nutritional problems of national and regional significance in Canada and to make recommendations as to their solution”.¹

In addition to approving the food guides, the Council spearheaded the development of the first Dietary Standard for Canada (1938) and subsequent revisions to that Standard. Dietary Standards described “the amounts of essential nutrients considered adequate to meet the needs of practically all healthy persons”.² These Standards were translated into foods and thus became part of the science that underpinned food guide recommendations.

We also know that the federal Nutrition Division linked with provincial counterparts, as it does today. In 1945, the Canadian Council on Nutrition established the Dominion Provincial Nutrition Committee, a group mandated to assist in the coordination and cooperation of nutrition activities between the provinces and the federal government. This enhanced communication between the front-line and enabled practitioners within the provinces to become a source of advice when revising the food guide. There is evidence that the Council did indeed listen to the requests of the practitioners. For example, in a discussion of the 1949 food guide revision, the Council credits one change to the suggestions of numerous doctors and nutritionists.³

This kind of expert input has formed a fundamental part of all food guide revisions. Some revisions emerged from a small nucleus of people, who gathered input from others in informal, yet effective, ways. Today, the process is more structured, complex, and far-reaching, as evidenced by the most recent 2019 food guide revision. Many stakeholders were consulted to ensure that, in addition to the research being conducted, the views of a broad base of Food Guide users were considered.

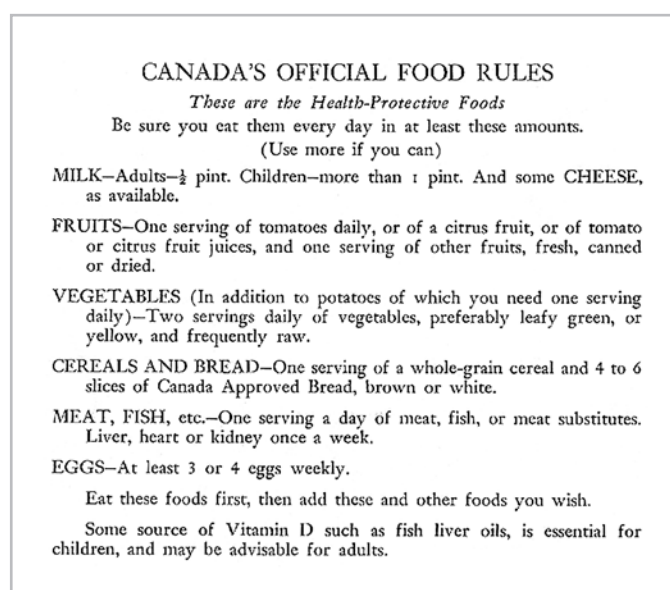
Food guides then and now

The title of Canada's food guides has changed over time. Canada's Official Food Rules (1942) became Canada's Food Rules (1944, 1949), then Canada's Food Guide (1961, 1977, 1982). Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating (1992) evolved to Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide (2007). The title changes signify an evolution in the positioning and philosophy of the food guide. This report documents the processes and influences that shaped the development of Canada's food guides, the changes that occurred from the 1942 Official Food Rules to the 2007 Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide, and the strategies that were used to encourage Canadians to follow the guides.

1942 | Canada's Official Food Rules

Canada at war cannot afford to ignore the power that is obtainable by eating the right foods.⁴

Canada's Official Food Rules were developed by the Nutrition Division of the federal government in collaboration with the Canadian Council on Nutrition. Food consumption surveys, although limited at the time, revealed problems such as poor access to food, insufficient money for food, and malnutrition in some populations. Thus, the Official Food Rules were intended to be a focal point for a wartime nutrition program to improve the health of Canadians by maximizing nutrition in the context of food rationing and poverty.^{1,4,5,6,7} The publication identified six food groups (Milk; Fruit; Vegetables; Cereals and Breads; Meat, Fish, etc.; and Eggs) for which specific amounts of foods were suggested for daily consumption. Limited supplies of certain foods, such as milk, prompted the Council to base the Food Rules on 70% of the Dietary Standard.⁸ The foods listed in the Rules were considered to be "health-protective", a term we are more likely to associate with current nutrition debates.



Canada's Official Food Rules—1942

Implementation

The resource support given in the 1940's to the promotion of healthy eating is impressive. In 1943, the Nutrition Division of the Department of Pensions and National Health launched the Canada Nutrition Program, which, among other tasks, handled public education on the new Food Rules. The Canada Nutrition Program was billed as a long-term and comprehensive approach to "help everyone in Canada toward the health that comes from eating the right foods".⁴ To help people eat the right foods through the implementation of the Food Rules, the government enlisted many strategies. For instance, an extensive media campaign to encourage people to put the Food Rules into action used radio spots, weekly press

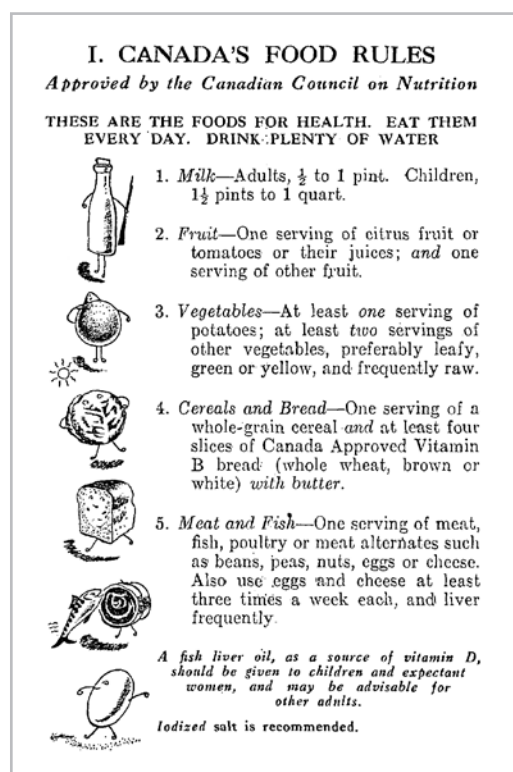
releases, and articles in magazines. Print materials were used to reinforce the media messages; for example, materials included a one-page Score Sheet for One Day's Meals, six lesson plans for teachers called Healthful Eating, and a food shopping list series. A series of 10 leaflets, produced under the title Check Your War Efficiency and inserted into weekly pay envelopes, covered topics such as breakfast, lunch, and the role of milk in healthy eating. All materials were available in both French and English.⁹

1944 | Canada's Food Rules

The Food Rules should serve as a guide to the selection of foods which would provide the necessary nutrients from day to day.¹⁰

In 1944, the Canadian Council on Nutrition approved Canada's Food Rules, removing the term "official". At this time, numerous changes to the content of the publication were made. The basis of the Rules shifted from 70% of the Dietary Standard as was the case in 1942 to a "fully adequate figure".¹¹

In order to encourage Canadians to meet riboflavin requirements, the 1944 Rules advocated the consumption of a greater quantity of milk. However, the scarcity of milk that was evident at the time prompted the Department of Agriculture to object to this recommendation.⁸ Other specific changes included replacing the term "substitute" with "alternate" in the Meat and Fish group to guard against misinterpretation. Also, due to a limited supply of kidney and heart, references to these meats were removed from the Meat and Fish group. However, due to its "distinct nutritional characteristics", liver was retained in the examples of foods.¹⁰ Cheese and eggs were incorporated into the Meat and Fish group on the basis of their protein content. Butter was mentioned in the Bread and Cereals group. Further, a statement recommending the consumption of water and iodized salt was added to underline their importance in the Canadian diet.^{8,9,11,12}



Canada's Food Rules—1944

Implementation

A restricted federal budget meant finding creative ways to reach the Canadian public. Therefore, a significant part of the education campaign for the 1944 Food Rules was centered around work with provinces and communities. Through these contacts, more people could be reached with healthy eating information.

News clips were continued, as was the distribution of support materials that were designed earlier. For example, the one-page Score Sheet for One Day's Meals remained popular, necessitating several reprints.⁹

Other resources were modified, such as the Healthful Eating 36- page booklet of lesson plans for teachers which was revised in 1944. Interestingly, this booklet included a copy of Canada's Food Rules featuring pictures of food alongside the food groups. Perhaps this was our first graphically supported food guide.

The food shopping list series was also updated and broadened. These information sheets highlighted food buying based on the food groups in the Rules, and were geared to different age groups. A fact sheet devoted to food budgeting was added, as well as a sheet on

how to avoid excess intake. The need to deal with excess stemmed partly from food shortages in other parts of the world. A compelling message published in the 1946 federal government newsletter, Canadian Nutrition Notes, underscores the awareness for famine elsewhere:

**Food is urgently needed in Europe and the Far East.
Do your bit for hungry humanity by conserving food.
Buy less Use less Waste nothing.¹³**

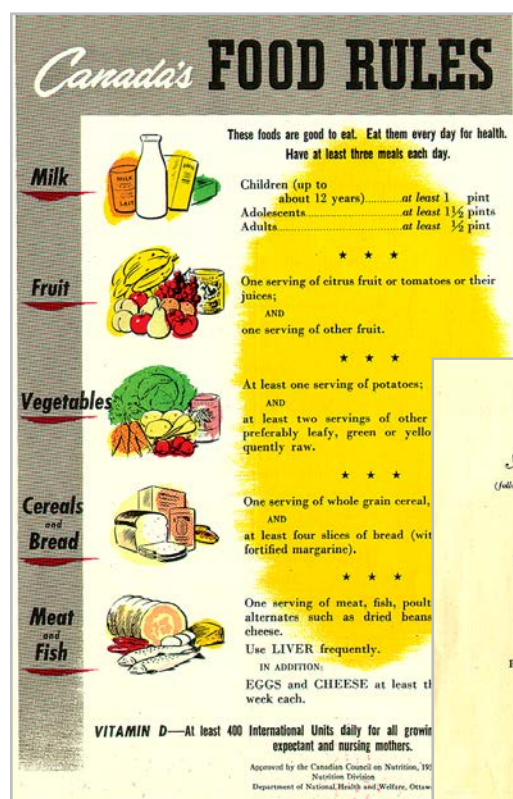
At the time, this departmental newsletter reached over 500 people, and was one vehicle used to promote new and revised education materials. In 1946, it was used to announce the availability of Canada's Food Rules in a 24" x 35" heavy print poster form, as well as the Feeding Fifty Campers manual, and recent nutrition film additions to local libraries.¹³

1949 | Canada's Food Rules

Nutrition workers from the investigator to the interpreter state that the best way to be well fed is to eat a variety of food.¹⁴

In 1949, the Canadian Council on Nutrition clarified the Food Rules. Slight changes were made in wording in accordance with the recommendations submitted by the provincial nutritionists. [which] “were based on experience gained from using the food rules in their teaching”.³ Further, the 1949 New Dietary Standard for Canada reflected the expanding knowledge on nutrient requirements and formed the scientific backdrop for certain revisions to Canada's Food Rules. A plea to avoid excess intakes crept into the 1949 Dietary Standard with a strong point that “more” is not necessarily “better”. This was partly related to the issue of world scarcity as in previous years, but also in recognition of the fact that excesses may be harmful to individuals in certain circumstances.

The five food groups remained in the 1949 version of the Food Rules, but several changes were made. For example, “at least” was added to the Milk group to accommodate the greater energy needs of some individuals. Bread was no longer limited to Canada Approved Vitamin B bread choices, and the butter reference grew to include “or fortified margarine”. The advice about fish oil was replaced with an explicit recommendation for a Vitamin D supplement since dietary surveys of children had uncovered inadequate intakes of this vitamin. The new Rules stated “At least 400 International Units daily for all growing persons and expectant and nursing mothers”.

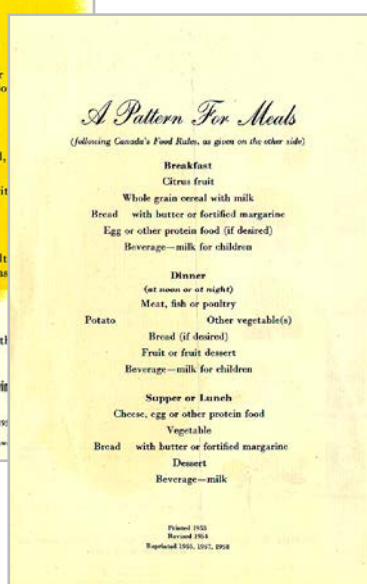


Canada's Food Rules—1949

Implementation

The popular Score Sheet for Each Day's Meals was updated, once again in both French and English. It now accommodated a week's worth of meals to allow a person to track progress and compare days. Also, various print sizes of the food guide remained available, including one designed specifically to fit in a standard business envelope, and the Rules appeared in their

revised form in several of the publications distributed by the Nutrition Division of the federal government. Most of the previously discussed print material was still available, and a new resource, Canada's Food Rules—A Dietary Framework for All, outlined a day's eating plan for various age groups. The intent of this chart was to encourage greater and more consistent use of Canada's Food Rules.¹⁵



A Pattern for Meals—1949

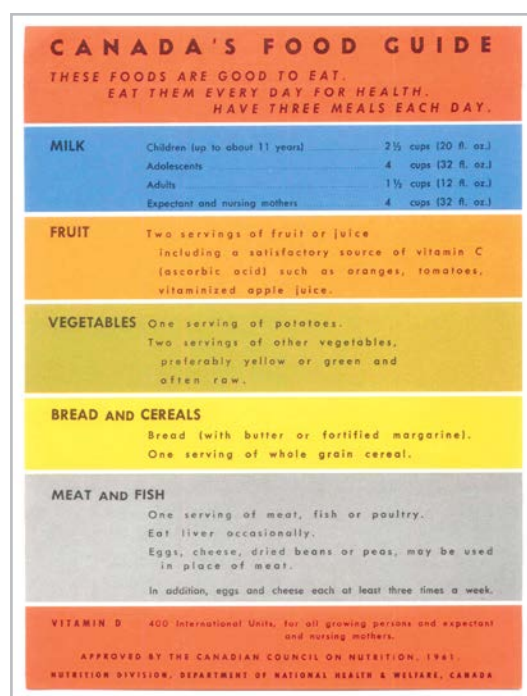
1961 | Canada's Food Guide

There have been changes in methods of food processing, storage, and transportation, which in turn have changed the types of food available to Canadians throughout the year.¹⁶

In the 1961 version of the food guide, food choices broadened and language softened. “Guide” replaced “Rules” in the title. Canada’s Food Guide, still the ubiquitous, easy-to-use leaflet, now stressed its flexibility and wide-ranging application for healthy eating, recognizing that many different dietary patterns could satisfy nutrient needs. The original look of the food guide, complete with grey border and yellow splash, underwent a visual dressing up as the five food groups were arranged into horizontal bars of colour.

The revised guide retained five food groups, although much debate had taken place about reducing it to four. In the end, Vegetables and Fruit remained separate, if for no other reason than because the groupings worked well in teaching.¹⁶ The Cereals and Bread group was renamed as Bread and Cereals, and the quantity message for bread was discarded. However, the emphasis on whole grain cereal prevailed.

Other small changes occurred. For example, the new guide now listed examples of citrus fruit. The term “at least” was dropped from the Bread and Cereals, Vegetables, and Milk groups. Also, for the first time, the Milk group specified intakes for expectant and nursing mothers. An added statement related to the Meat and Fish group clarified the role of meat alternates—“Eggs, cheese, dried beans or peas may be used in place of meat”. Liver began to lose its foothold, as demonstrated by the new statement, “Eat liver occasionally”, which replaced “Use liver frequently”. Another change was the shift in serving sizes for milk to common household measurements, such as cups, instead of pints. As in previous versions, serving sizes were not provided for the other food groups.



Canada's Food Guide—1961

Implementation

The availability of many of the previous support materials continued. The Food Guide was available in leaflet, poster and pamphlet form, with the pamphlet providing details on how to use the Guide. For example, charts on shopping wisely, feeding babies, and meal planning were part of the expanded information. Food group descriptions emphasized the unique nutrient contributions of each group, thereby strengthening the connection between the science base and the food recommendations.

1977 | Canada's Food Guide

Canada's Food Guide is an educational tool which, to be applied successfully, requires interpretation.¹⁸

The dramatic new look of the 1977 Canada's Food Guide sparked much interest. For the first time, colorful pictures of foods were grouped in wheel-like fashion around a sun graphic. This Guide boasted several other innovations in addition to the dynamic design change. For instance, four food groups, instead of five, appeared—fruits and vegetables were combined since their nutrient contributions overlapped. Ranges were added to the serving suggestions, bolstering the flexible nature of the Guide. In addition, metric units made their way into the serving size suggestions to align with Canada's move to the metric system.

More than 30 textual changes occurred with the 1977 revision. For example, the milk group became Milk and Milk Products, paving the way for the inclusion of other dairy food choices. Meat and Alternates replaced Meat and Fish, and a statement regarding the Bread and Cereals group established that “enriched” products could be used in place of whole grain. Further, Fruit and Vegetables were combined into one group, and the recommendation to eat one serving of potatoes was deleted.

The 1977 revision was guided by reports from the Nutrition Canada National Survey (1973),¹⁹ which represents the largest, most comprehensive nutritional study of the Canadian population to date. Data from the survey reports, in particular the Food Consumption Patterns Report, provided current information on regional and national food choices, significant since earlier food guide revisions had been hampered by the limited knowledge on national food consumption patterns. Similarly, the revision was influenced by a think piece, released in 1974 by the Minister of National Health and Welfare, entitled *A New Perspective on the Health of Canadians*.²⁰ This document provided an insightful analysis of what contributes to health, including the role of good nutrition. The 1977 revision was also influenced by the contributions of many health professional groups and organizations.



Canada's Food Guide—1977 | Front

Implementation

A second page presented practical information to support implementation of the Guide, such as food choices for each food group. Also, the 1977 version of Canada's Food Guide was supported by the premiere edition of *Canada's Food Guide Handbook*, considered by many to be a nutrition education milestone. The Handbook

explained the concepts underlying the Guide, illustrated examples, and discussed nutrient functions. The handbook remained a staple food guide resource and underwent revisions alongside the next two iterations of Canada's Food Guide.



Canada's Food Guide—1977 | Back

1982 | Canada's Food Guide

... after reviewing the information available on the relationship between diet and cardiovascular disease, [the committee] believes that there is an adequate basis for recommending changes in the Canadian diet.²¹

The landmark Report of the Committee on Diet and Cardiovascular Disease,²¹ submitted to Health Canada in 1977 by an appointed committee of experts, advised the government to take action to prevent diet-related chronic diseases. This Report contributed to the development of four national Nutrition Recommendations for Canadians. In 1977, these recommendations were approved and adopted by many government departments, professional groups, health organizations, and food processors.²² The Report and Recommendations, together with findings from an evaluation of the 1977 Food Guide and Handbook,²³ prompted the 1982 revision. In the evaluation, health professionals expressed interest in the integration of the national nutrition recommendations into the Food Guide.

Two significant modifications resulted. While the emphasis on the “variety” message continued, the “energy balance” message was expanded to stress balancing energy intake with energy output. Further, a new “moderation” message appeared. On the surface, the changes appeared to be minor. In fact, they signified a major shift in dietary advice. The previous food guide goals of preventing nutrient deficiencies were now being integrated with the goal of reducing chronic diseases. In particular, the moderation statement, which encouraged Canadians to limit fat, sugar, salt, and alcohol, was an attempt to curb the rising rate of diet-related chronic diseases by influencing eating habits.

The four food groups remained the same. However, the name of the meat group was changed to Meat, Fish, Poultry and Alternates—longer but perhaps more inclusive.

Implementation

The Canada's Food Guide Handbook was revised to support the food guide changes. Sections and chapters expanded to include more on the Nutrition Recommendations for Canadians and the new thrust of dietary advice.



Canada's Food Guide—1982 | Front



Canada's Food Guide—1982 | Back

1992 | Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating

The revised Canada's Food Guide... marks a new era in nutrition guidance in Canada.²⁴

Historic changes accompanied the 1992 revision. The title was changed to reflect the overarching goal of the Guide, becoming Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. The design changed—a rainbow graphic now displayed the four food groups, all of which bore new names:—Grain Products, Vegetables and Fruit, Milk Products, and Meat and Alternatives. The biggest change was a shift in the philosophy of the Food Guide in that the 1992 Guide embraced a total diet approach to choosing foods. Previous food guides were based on a foundation diet concept—they identified minimum requirements, necessitating those with higher needs to self-select more food. The total diet approach aimed to meet both energy and nutrient requirements, recognizing that energy needs vary. With the total diet approach came large ranges in the number of servings from the four food groups to accommodate the wide range of energy needs for different ages, body sizes, activity levels, genders and conditions such as pregnancy and nursing. The Guide also introduced the Other Foods category which included foods and beverages that did not fit into any of the four food groups and, although part of the diets of many Canadians, would traditionally not have been mentioned in a food guide.

To meet higher energy needs, the rainbow schematic encouraged selection of more servings from the Grain Products and Vegetables and Fruit groups, a concept that was graphically presented through larger bands of the rainbow compared to those used to illustrate the Milk Products and Meat and Alternatives groups. The 1992 Food Guide also introduced the notion of directional statements to give more guidance on choosing foods.

The process to develop the 1992 Guide was considered to be revolutionary in food guide history. Information was assembled from experts, consumers, literature reviews, food consumption surveys, consumer research, and commissioned scientific reviews. Consultation was an integral part of the process.

Implementation

A number of Food Guide materials were created, the most popular being the Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating tearsheet. A 16-page booklet intended to help consumers to understand and use the Food Guide was also developed.

In addition, Food Guide Facts—Background for Educators and Communicators was developed to assist educators in teaching and disseminating information about the Guide. Two additional resources were produced to help educators and communicators use Canada's Food Guide to promote healthy eating among preschool children aged two to five years, and children aged 6 to 12 years. As in earlier days, resources were developed in both French and English. An important change was the availability of the Food Guide and its accompanying support materials through the internet. In fact, Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating consistently was the most popular destination on the Health Canada Web site.



Canada's Food Guide—
1992 | Front

Canada's Food Guide—1992 | Back

2007 | Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide

Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide

In 2007 a revised Food Guide was released with many new features and a new title—*Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*.

Rationale for Food Guide Revisions

The revisions to the Food Guide were based on several factors.^{25,26}

- Updated nutrient reference values for healthy populations through the Dietary Reference Intake (DRI) reports.
- Rising rates of nutrition-related chronic illness and a scientific review of the association with food choices.
- Findings from extensive consultation with a range of stakeholders regarding the 1992 Food Guide and related support tools.
- Extensive food pattern modeling to evaluate various age- and gender-specific food patterns relative to the DRI nutrient standards.
- Focus testing of Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide, the Food Guide website and resources for educators and communicators.
- An evolving food supply and the ever-changing environment that affects the lifestyles of Canadians and their food choices.

Three Advisory Groups provided guidance and advice throughout the revision process—the DRI Expert Advisory Committee, an Interdepartmental Working Group and the Food Guide Advisory Committee.



Inside Fold-out for Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide

Designed as an “all-in-one tool,” the 2007 version of the Food Guide addressed some of the challenges identified in the 1992 Guide while building on its strengths of flexibility, simplicity, visual appeal, wide-spread awareness and consistency with the then current science.²⁵

- A new format as a six-page fold-out booklet.
- The Vegetables and Fruit food group positioned as the most prominent arc in the rainbow design, representing the important role that this group plays in a healthy eating pattern.
- More guidance on the *quality* of food choices that focuses on risk reduction for chronic illness and obesity while meeting nutrient requirements for most Canadians.
- Food intake patterns for nine age and sex groups, providing specific guidance on number of servings for children over 2 years, adults over 50 years, and women (pregnant, breastfeeding and those who could become pregnant).
- The name of the Milk Products group changed to Milk and Alternatives to acknowledge other food sources of calcium such as fortified soy beverage for non-milk drinkers.
- Guidance on the amount and type of added oils and fats to consume. Encourages the reduction in trans fats and the replacement of saturated with unsaturated fats.
- For Canadians over age 50 a daily vitamin D supplement recommended.
- Encourages regular physical activity as a benefit along with eating well.
- A tailored Food Guide for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people recognizing the importance of both traditional and store-bought foods in contemporary food patterns of Aboriginal people.
- A greater variety and more ethnically diverse choices of foods pictured in print and web-based resources.
- Specific information on using the food label to choose healthy foods.



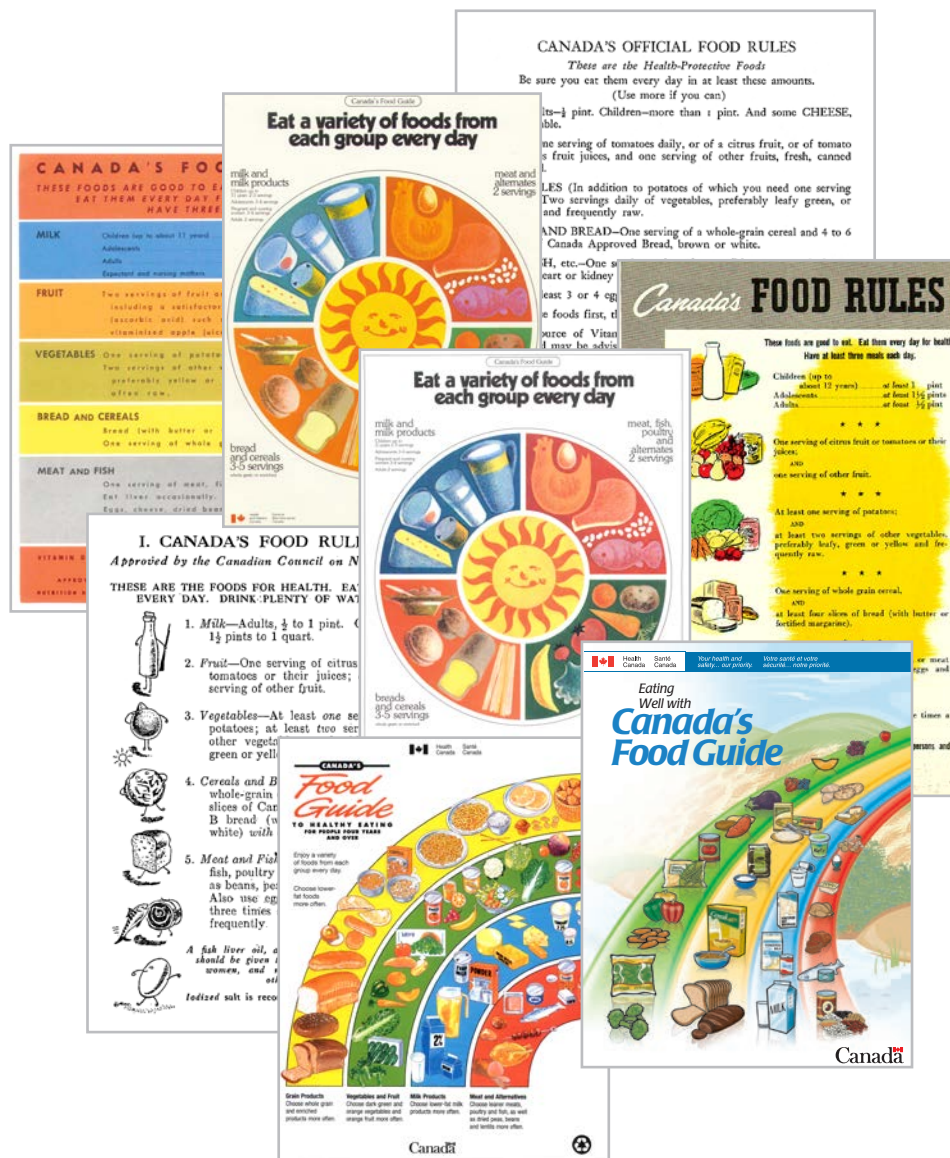
Implementation

To support implementation, the 2007 Food Guide was translated into 10 different languages in addition to English and French. The tailored Food Guide for First Nations, Inuit and Métis was translated into Cree, Ojibwe and Inuktitut in addition to English and French. A significant Internet component was developed with many resources and interactive tools such as:

- My Food Guide—allowed users to personalize Food Guide information based on age, sex, food preferences and activity choices.
- My Food Guide Mobile App.
- My Food Guide—Questions and Answers for Educators.
- My Food Guide Servings Tracker.
- Eat Well Plate.
- Eating Well With Canada's Food Guide—A Resource for Educators and Communicators.
- Eat Well and Be Active Educators' Toolkit includes posters, images, ready-to-go presentations and activity plans.
- Nutrition Labelling Educator Section.
- Interactive Nutrition Labelling Quiz.
- Ready-to-Use Presentations.

Conclusion

In some ways, the Food Guide that we use today (released 2019) has evolved and is quite different from the 1942 Canada's Official Food Rules. In other ways, it is not. The same intent underlies all of the guides between 1942 and the present version: guiding food selection to promote the nutritional health of Canadians.



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