

Wellness Articles

Attached are weekly health and wellness articles provided by Alberta Health Services. As a way to help all Albertans live a healthy life, we welcome and encourage weekly newspapers, community newsletters and other publications to reproduce this information free of charge.

Please credit Alberta Health Services or the identified content provider.

Proposed publication date: Jan. 1, 2024

Content provided by: Alberta Health Services

Ring in the new year with a healthy relationship with food

Consuming a varied diet can provide our bodies with essential nutrients needed to function optimally. Proper nutrition can also lower our risk of chronic disease and support our overall physical health, including the development and maintenance of strong bones, a robust immune system, and efficient organ function.

We know that food plays a central role in our customs, traditions, and celebrations. What we eat is also influenced by education, income, and access to food.

Having a healthy connection with food can also impact our physical and mental well-being.

What does a healthy relationship with food look like?

A healthy relationship with food and eating is an important part of a healthy eating pattern. It can be different for everyone. Some ways you can develop a healthy relationship with food are:

- Enjoying the taste, social, traditional, and cultural aspects of food
- Being aware of how, why, and where you eat.
- Listening to your body signals for hunger and fullness.
- Welcoming all foods without fear or guilt
- Looking at food as a source of energy, nourishment, and enjoyment.
- Knowing that eating will change based on appetite, emotions, routines, and many other factors.
- Slowing down and taking time to eat. Our lives are busy and often we have places to go, activities to do, or errands to run. When building a connection with food, it's important to pay attention to textures and flavours of the food you are eating, which can be hard to do when you are rushing your meals and snacks.
- Limiting the use of phones, devices, televisions, or distractions while you are eating. Mindless eating is easy to do when we have a screen in front of us!
- Noticing when you are hungry or full, and reconnecting to the eating experience by creating awareness of your thoughts, feelings, emotions and behaviours.
- Planning what you would like to eat and involving others in planning and preparing.

Healthy relationships with food start at a young age

Classrooms and school lunchrooms are locations where teachers have an opportunity to promote a healthy relationship with food amongst students. Parents and caregivers can also provide an environment to foster healthy relationships with food.

For this reason, public health dietitians at AHS have created resources to support an inclusive learning environment that is sensitive to diverse backgrounds.

Some tips for teachers, parents, caregivers, or mentors include:

- Emphasizing the positive aspects of eating while helping children and teens recognize that food supports our physical, social, cognitive, and mental well-being.
- Referring to foods by their name or their type, such as a fruit or a protein or a dessert, instead of labelling them as “good,” “bad,” “clean,” or “junk.” Referring to foods with negative or positive connotations can lead to shame and stress around eating which can contribute to unhealthy relationships with food, which may be harmful to health.

If you are a teacher, parent, or care provider and want to learn more about supporting a healthy relationship with food, please visit ahs.ca and search *healthy relationship with food*.

Start slow and celebrate progress!

If you are thinking about making changes to the way you eat and improve your relationship with food, the new year can be a good time to start.

- **Take a look at where you are now.** Reflect on how you think and talk about food, **Choose a small goal that is important to you.** For example, maybe you often think about foods as good or bad. It may help to reframe how you think about or refer to food.

For more information including nutrition educations, workshops and classes, visit albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition.