

Healthy Classroom Celebrations for the Holiday Season

The holidays are a time for celebration with family, friends and classmates. There is excitement in the air, students look forward to change in the usual school routine and enjoy celebrating special occasions in the classroom!

Holiday classroom celebrations provide a unique opportunity to make healthy eating fun and exciting for children. These celebrations and parties often include food and drinks that may not fit within Canada's Food Guide food groups or the Provincial School Food Guidelines. Schools can take advantage of these events to serve food that tastes good, is nutritious, while providing an opportunity for nutrition education experiences. Healthy food and drinks support the health and learning of students while exposing them to a variety of food and flavors. Classroom celebrations can act to set positive examples for healthy eating, providing a school food environment where the healthy choice is the easy choice. Also, offering healthy food demonstrates that nutritious food can be "fun food." It encourages students to taste new, healthy foods because they see their peers eating and enjoying these foods.

In addition to all of these fantastic reasons, it has also been shown that offering healthy food choices can increase the number of food guide servings eaten. This is important because according to the Canadian Community Health Survey (2013-2014), in Newfoundland and Labrador, only 25% of children aged 12-19 years are eating vegetables or fruit five times a day. In the Western region, only 32% meet this recommendation. Canada's Food Guide recommends young children consume 5 servings of Vegetables and Fruit each day with teenagers needing as many as 8 servings. When healthy choices are offered in schools, children and youth are more likely to meet the number of food guide servings of Vegetables and Fruit; also, youth are more likely to meet the number of servings of Milk and Alternatives.

Parents also have a role to play! They can reinforce the healthy eating message by offering fun and nutritious foods for holiday celebrations either in the classroom or elsewhere. It's a great idea to get children involved in creating the snacks; children are more likely to eat foods that they help prepare themselves. With a few easy changes, most food and drinks can support the health and learning of students while exposing them to a variety of new food and flavors. When sending food to school for your child's holiday party, please consider sending fun and nutritious food. To get you started, here are some good examples:

- Festive fruit kabobs made with bananas and strawberries, or other fruit!
- Fruit salad or fruit tray (made with red, green and white fruit) with vanilla yogurt as the topping.
- Holiday smoothies- made with red or green fruit or vegetables such as raspberries, strawberries, kiwis, etc.
- Apple cinnamon wreaths made of apples and cinnamon.
- Multigrain tortillas with salsa.
- Create a vegetable tree: cheese (as the star), sugar snap peas or broccoli as the tree limbs and pretzel sticks as the trunk.
- Air-popped popcorn (if age appropriate) or pretzels.*

**before offering any snacks in the classroom, please check with your school in regards to potential food allergies.*

For more healthy holiday snack ideas or to view the School Food Guidelines, check out the living healthy schools website: www.livinghealthyschools.com. Additional information can be found in the Healthy Eating section of the Western Health website: <http://westernhealth.nl.ca/>.

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