

# Healthy Choices:

## Foods & Beverages in NWT Health Facilities

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### 1. What are the *Guidelines for Food and Beverages in NWT Health Facilities*?

The *Guidelines* provide information about healthy food and beverage options that will be available in health and social services facilities. There are 13 food categories and each category has a range of food choices. Northern residents particularly need access to nutrient dense foods. The *Guidelines* are based on the same type of work that has been done in other parts of Canada, particularly British Columbia.

The goals of the *Guidelines* are to:

- Define the types of foods available in the NWT that meet the definition of a 'healthy choice'.
- Educate people about the range of healthy options in food and beverages that are available in health and social service facilities.
- Ensure that healthier meals, beverages and snacks are made available in Health and Social Services facilities throughout the NWT.
- Encourage people to consider their options and develop habits for making the healthy choice.

#### 2. Why do we have the *Guidelines for Food and Beverages in Health and Social Services Facilities*?

Good nutrition is one of the factors in a healthy lifestyle that can result in decreased risk of heart disease, cancer and many other conditions. Healthy eating is one of the priority issues outlined in the Healthy Choices Framework, Department of Health and Social Services and GNWT. In June 2005, the Minister of Health and Social Services issued a directive to make available and promote healthy food and beverage choices in health and social facilities that are publically funded through the Department of Health and Social Services, such as hospitals and health centres. The *Guidelines for Food and Beverages* were developed in response to this directive.

#### 3. Why are these *Guidelines* important at this time?

These *Guidelines* link to several GNWT, departmental, and regional activities, goals and strategies. For example, creating healthy environments in the NWT supports the goal of creating healthy Northerners. Further information can be found in the strategic plan and Departmental Healthy Choices Framework, which in turn is part of the territorial Integrated Services Delivery Model priorities. For more information, contact your Health and Social Services Authority or contact [healthpromotion@gov.nt.ca](mailto:healthpromotion@gov.nt.ca).

#### 4. How is the nutritional health of northerners?

Information on the nutritional health of Northerners is limited, but we know that there are several areas with room for improvement. For example, according to the most recent Health Status Report (2005), 66% of NWT residents 12 years of age and older do not consume the minimum five or more servings of fruit and vegetables daily as recommended by the Canada or the NWT Food Guides.

We also know that many chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and poor dental health are associated with poor eating habits. Developing healthy eating habits can improve overall health as well as decrease the costs associated with the treatment of preventable diseases.



# Healthy Choices:

## Foods & Beverages in NWT Health Facilities

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### 5. What kind of timetable is planned for the *Guidelines*?

Health and Social Services facilities in the NWT are gradually removing foods and beverages that do not promote health. The majority of the foods, beverages and snacks in cafeterias and vending machines in publicly funded Health and Social Services facilities will be healthy choices, for example, unsweetened juice instead of soft drinks.

The *Guidelines for Food and Beverages* places foods into the 4 main categories outlined below. Eventually, Health and Social Services facilities will select only foods and beverages from each category as follows:

- 50% or more items from the *Choose Most* category;
- 40%-50% items from the *Choose Sometimes* category;
- 10% or less items from the *Choose Least* category; and
- No items from the *Not Recommended* category.

The goal is to provide access to only healthy meals, snacks and beverages in all the Health and Social Services facilities, that is, all the hospitals and health centres in the NWT.

#### 6. Where can facilities get help or information about the *Guidelines*?

- Health facilities can contact their local Health and Social Services Authority with any questions or concerns. In particular, consult your Regional Nutritionist or Dietitian (refer to the Health and Social Service Authority directories on the GNWT website).
- The *Guidelines* will also be posted on the Department of Health and Social Services website under Health Promotion. The department can be contacted through [healthpromotion@gov.nt.ca](mailto:healthpromotion@gov.nt.ca)
- The *Guidelines* document lists references, resources and other website links in the "References and Resources" section of the *Guidelines* booklet.

#### 7. What facilities in the NWT do the *Guidelines* apply to?

At this time, the *Guidelines* apply only to publicly funded Health and Social Services facilities, and the Department of Health and Social Services in Yellowknife.

#### 8. Can we apply the *Guidelines* to other organizations?

At this time, there are no plans to apply the *Guidelines for Food and Beverages* beyond Health and Social Services facilities; however, the *Guidelines* could be used in other departments or organizations in the future.

#### 9. Is the Department of Health & Social Services (DHSS) monitoring the clients, visitors and employees in Health and Social Services facilities to assess their compliance with the *Guidelines for Food and Beverages*?

Although the Department of Health & Social Services (DHSS) has made a commitment to promote healthy eating in Health and Social Services facilities, their role is not to "police" residents, visitors and/or employees for the types of foods, beverages and snacks that they bring into the facility or buy and/or eat in the facility or anywhere else.

For meetings being held in Health and Social Services facilities, a list of healthy options may be developed and used as guidelines. When the list is produced it will also be posted on the Department of Health and Social Services website.



# Healthy Choices:

## Foods & Beverages in NWT Health Facilities

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### 10. The *Guidelines* seem very detailed. Why?

The *Guidelines* provide technical and scientific information. The nutrition value for many packaged/processed foods is hard to calculate, even when using the NWT or Canada's Food Guide as a reference. The detailed nutrition information is designed to help identify foods in the categories based on a set of established nutrition criteria. (The nutrition *Guidelines* were developed by dietitians and nutritionists in British Columbia, and adapted, with permission, by the NWT working group).

#### 11. Are not recommended foods "junk-foods"?

Some *Not Recommended* items, such as pop and candy, are commonly referred to as "junk food". These foods are usually eaten in small amounts from time to time. The absence of these products in Health and Social Services facilities is a way to provide supportive, healthy environments and promote healthy choices to clients, visitors, and employees.

#### 12. What is Health Check?

Health Check™ is the Heart and Stroke Foundation's food information program that we often refer to in the *Guidelines*. Every food in the program is evaluated by registered dietitians according to *Canada's Food Guide*. The Health Check symbol is an easy way to recognize foods and beverages that will contribute to an overall healthy diet. For more information on Health Check, visit:

[www.healthcheck.ca](http://www.healthcheck.ca)

#### 13. Some Health and Social Services facilities work with vendors and suppliers. How does that work?

These days, most vendors and food suppliers are able to provide Health and Social Services facilities with a wide selection of healthy choices among beverages, foods, and snacks.

#### 14. What information about this new initiative will be available in Health and Social Services facilities and staff?

Along with the *Guidelines* on the website, the initial materials will consist of general awareness information – posters and tent cards, to be used in all Health and Social Services facilities to encourage healthier choices. Feedback on this first step is welcomed at anytime. Contact your Health and Social Services Authority or Department of Health & Social Services.

