

Should I be concerned about serving hot dogs at school?

Hot dogs tend to be popular among students for their taste and convenience. Questions have recently come up about whether there are health concerns in serving hot dogs at school. This article responds to frequently asked questions when choosing foods to support student health.

What are processed meats?

Processed meats are meats that have been transformed through commercial processes to enhance flavor or improve preservation. Hot dog wieners, sausage, ham, bacon, salami, pepperoni sticks, and deli meats are some examples of processed meats. Lower-fat processed meats such as turkey sausage, turkey bacon, and chicken hot dogs are also considered processed meats.

Is it harmful to serve hot dogs?

No one food alone is unhealthy – our overall pattern of eating is most important for health. Processed meats are high in sodium and saturated fat. Eating many foods high in sodium and saturated fats can increase the risk for heart disease. Research links eating processed meats to an increased risk of colon cancer, but it is unclear how much can be safely consumed. Reducing the consumption of processed meats while offering a variety of foods reduces the risk of chronic disease and cancer.

Tips – If you offer processed meat at school, try to:

- offer them less often
- offer them in smaller amounts
- serve them with other nutritious options

Focus on providing a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and sources of fibre from [Canada's Food Guide](#). In place of hot dogs, try offering instead chili with a bun, veggie burgers, kabobs, tomato-cheese pizza, falafel, or stew. Other alternatives of non-processed protein foods include cooked chicken or turkey, cheese, nut or seed butters, egg salad, tuna or salmon salad, hummus, and other bean-based alternatives.

It is important not to shame individual's food choices. Many factors drive food decisions, such as culture, convenience, food access, and finances, often shaped by factors beyond our control.

Resources:

- VCH's "[Supporting Healthy Eating at School](#)"
- "[Lunches to Go](#)" handout with snack and lunch ideas
- [Canada's Food Guide](#)
- [HealthlinkBC Dietitian Services \(8-1-1\)](#)