Healthy Eating Warm-up Activities

From Vetted KUSPs to give you ideas to incorporate into your warm-ups.

Grades 1–6 Ideas Resource

Alberta Curriculum: Physical Education and Wellness (K–6)
Purpose: Active warm-up activities (5–8 minutes) covering Term 3 Healthy Eating outcomes
Design: Minimal marking, age-appropriate, multi-day friendly

Grade 1

Outcomes:

- Examine decision-making in food selection
- Identify foods that contribute to the growth and development of the body

Key Food Literacy Knowledge: Food literacy includes knowing which foods help our bodies grow; making food decisions within available resources; understanding connections between food and body parts (bones, muscles, energy).

Activity 1: Food Helper Corners (5–7 min)

Setup: Label 4 corners: "Strong Bones & Teeth" / "Strong Muscles" / "Energy to Play" / "Sometimes Food".

How to Play:

1. Show a picture card or name a food (milk, apple, cookie, chicken, bread, candy).
2. Students jog gently in place while thinking.
3. Call "Go!" – students walk/skip to the corner they choose.
4. Ask 1–2 students: "Why did you pick that corner?"
5. Quickly confirm or guide: "Yes! Milk helps bones grow strong!

Teacher Prompts:

- "Which foods help your body grow?"
- "Is this an everyday food or a once-in-a-while food?"

Success: Students can name 2–3 foods that help their bodies grow.

Activity 2: Body Helper Relay (5–7 min)

Setup: Post 3 simple body pictures on the wall (smiling face with brain, bones/skeleton, muscles/arms). Spread food picture cards on the opposite side.

How to Play:

1. Divide into 3–4 small teams.
2. The first person hops/skips to the food cards and picks one.
3. Runs back and tapes/places it near the matching body part.
4. The next person goes.
5. After 3–4 minutes, quickly review: "Did this food go with the right body part?"

Teacher Prompts:

- "Yogurt helps bones – where should it go?"
- "Chicken helps muscles – can you find the muscles picture?"

Success: Students can match 3–4 foods to body parts they help.

Activity 3: Snack Decision Line (5–7 min)

Setup: Mark two lines with cones: "Everyday Food" and "Once-in-a-While Food".

How to Play:

1. Students stand in the centre and jog lightly in place.
2. The teacher calls out a snack (carrot sticks, apple slices, gummy bears, cheese, chips, and orange).
3. Students walk quickly to the line they think is correct.
4. Pause briefly: "Why did you choose that side?"
5. Guide gently: "Great thinking! Carrots are everyday – they help us grow!

Teacher Prompts:

- "What could we eat instead to help our bodies?"
- "When might we have this food?"

Success: Students can identify 3 everyday foods and explain one reason why.

Minimal Marking: Observe participation and listen to 2–3 verbal responses per activity.
Extensions: Add locomotor variety (gallop, slide, bear walk). Use real food props or large laminated pictures.
Adaptations: Pre-teach key words (bones, muscles, energy, grow). Partner with students for support.

Grade 2

Outcomes:

- Explore recommendations from a variety of food guidelines to support nutritional decisions
- Examine personal food preferences
- Identify personal food allergens
- Discuss ways that food provides insights into various cultures, practices, and traditions.

Key Food Literacy Knowledge: Use food guides (like Canada's Food Guide) to make balanced choices; understand personal preferences and allergens; recognize that food connects us to cultures and traditions.

Activity 1: Food Guide Movement Match (5–7 min)

Setup: Review Canada's Food Guide groups: Vegetables & Fruits, Whole Grains, Protein Foods. Assign movements: V&F = jumping jacks / Grains = high knees / Protein = squats.

How to Play:

1. Show a food card or picture (apple, bread, fish, rice, broccoli, chicken, pasta).
2. Students identify the food group.
3. Perform that group's movement for 10 seconds.
4. Pause: "Which food group is missing from my lunch today?

Teacher Prompts:

- "What food guide group is this?"
- "Are we eating from all the groups today?"

Success: Students correctly identify food groups 4 out of 5 times and can name one food from each group.

Activity 2: Preference Walk (5–7 min)

Setup: Create an imaginary line across the gym: "I love it!" (left) / "It's okay" (middle) / "No thanks" (right).

How to Play:

1. Call out a food (carrots, strawberries, fish, broccoli, rice).
2. Students walk/hop to their spot on the line.
3. Briefly ask: "Who loves broccoli? Who says 'no thanks'?"
4. Allergen layer: Before starting, remind: "Some foods make people sick – those are allergens. Can everyone eat peanuts? Milk? Eggs?"
5. Skip foods students must avoid or ask: "Can everyone safely eat this?"

Teacher Prompts:

- "It's okay to like different foods!"
- "Who has a food they can't eat because it makes them sick?"

Success: Students show they understand preferences differ and can name 1–2 common allergens.

Activity 3: Culture Circle (5–7 min)

Setup: Open space. Prepare 4–5 culturally diverse foods (bannock, samosa, taco, sushi, pierogi, rice).

How to Play:

1. Play music; students walk/skip in a circle.
2. When music stops, call out a food: "Bannock!"
3. Students freeze and make a simple pose (hands together, arms wide, etc.).

4. Ask: “Which culture or country eats bannock?”
5. “Has anyone eaten this at home or at a celebration?”

Teacher Prompts:

- “Food tells us about different cultures and traditions.”
- “What special foods does your family eat?”

Success: Students recognize that different cultures eat different foods and can name 1–2 examples.

Minimal Marking: Observe participation; ask 2–3 check-in questions per activity.
Extensions: Add photos of cultural celebrations with food. Invite families to share favourite cultural foods (with allergen awareness).
Adaptations: Use picture cards for non-readers. Create a “safe food” list for students with allergies. Partner buddies for support.

Grade 3

Outcome:

- Examine how food-preparation techniques can affect the characteristics of common foods

Key Food Literacy Knowledge: Food-preparation and meal-planning skills are part of food literacy; different cooking methods (raw, boiled, baked, fried, grilled, steamed) change how food looks, tastes, feels, and smells.

Activity 1: Cooking Method Action Game (5–7 min)

Setup: Pre-teach 4–5 methods with matching movements:

- Raw = slow walk (crunchy, cold)
- Boiled = arm circles (like bubbling water)
- Baked = reach up/down (opening oven)
- Fried = fast feet (sizzling pan)
- Grilled = side-to-side slides (flipping food)

How to Play:

1. Call out a food + method: "Baked potato!" / "Raw carrot!" / "Boiled pasta!"
2. Students perform that movement for 10–15 seconds.
3. Pause and ask: "How does baking change a potato?" (soft, warm, fluffy).
4. Rotate through 6–8 combinations.

Teacher Prompts:

- "What happens to carrots when we boil them?"
- "Does frying make food crunchy or soft?"

Success: Students identify 3 preparation methods and describe one change to food (texture, temperature, crunchiness).

Activity 2: Before & After Food Line (5–7 min)

Setup: Mark "Before Cooking" on one wall, "After Cooking" on the opposite wall.

How to Play:

1. Call out a pair: "Frozen peas" vs. "Steamed peas" / "Fresh apple" vs. "Applesauce" / "Bread" vs. "Toast", "Apple Sauce / Apple Pie."
2. Students start in the middle.
3. Slide/jog to "Before" or "After" side, depending on what you call.

4. Ask: “What changed? Soft/hard? Warm/cold? Wet/dry?”

Teacher Prompts:

- “How is toast different from bread?”
- “What cooking made it change?”

Success: Students can describe 2–3 texture or temperature changes caused by cooking.

Activity 3: Transformation Tag (5–7 min)

Setup: Choose 2 “cook” taggers; all others are “raw foods” moving freely.

How to Play:

1. When tagged by a cook, the student becomes “cooked” (you call the method: “Now you’re stir-fried veggies!”).
2. That student changes movement style: stir-fried = fast, small movements; baked = slow, stretchy; boiled = soft, bouncy.
3. After 1–2 minutes, pause and ask: “How did stir-frying change you?”
4. Switch taggers and method.

Teacher Prompts:

- “What happens when we grill vegetables?”
- “Does steaming make broccoli softer or harder?”

Success: Students act out and explain how one cooking method changes food characteristics.

Minimal Marking: Observe participation and listen to 2–3 descriptions of food changes.
Extensions: Bring real examples (raw vs. cooked carrot, fresh vs. toasted bread) for sensory comparison. Create a class chart of methods.
Adaptations: Use picture cards showing before/after. Offer word bank (soft, hard, crunchy, warm, cold, squishy).

Grade 4

Outcomes:

- Explain the effect of nutrition on well-being
- Explore the benefits associated with various foods
- Investigate food choices that require alternative sources of nutrition

Key Food Literacy Knowledge: Credible sources (dietitians, food guides, government agencies) provide reliable nutrition info; balanced food choices support health; factors like culture, preferences, cost, and access influence choices; some people need alternative nutrition sources.

Activity 1: Nutrient Power Charades (5–7 min)

Setup: Assign small groups (3–4 students) a nutrient focus: Calcium / Protein / Fibre / Healthy Fats / Vitamins.

How to Play:

1. Each group creates a 10-second movement or charade showing what their nutrient does:
    a. Calcium = strong bone poses (stand tall, flex).
    b. Protein = muscle builder (bicep curls, push-up position).
    c. Fibre = good digestion (stomach circles, smooth movements).
    d. Healthy Fats = brain power (point to head, thinking pose).
2. Groups perform; others guess the nutrient.
3. Performing group names 1–2 food sources (milk, fish, nuts, vegetables).

Teacher Prompts:

- "How does this nutrient help our well-being?"
- "What foods give us protein/calcium/fibre?"

Success: Students explain one benefit of their nutrient and name two food sources.

Activity 2: Energy Swap Challenge (5–7 min)

Setup: Open space; prepare 6–8 common snack/meal scenarios.

How to Play:

1. Students jog in place.
2. Call out a food choice: "Pop and chips!" / "Candy bar!" / "White bread!".Students freeze.
3. One student suggests a higher-nutrition swap: "Water and apple!" / "Yogurt and berries!" / "Whole-grain bread!"
4. Everyone acts out eating the swap (crunching, chewing, drinking).

Teacher Prompts:

- "How might you feel in gym class after the swap?"
- "Which choice gives you longer-lasting energy?"

Success: Students suggest 3 healthier swaps and connect nutrition to feeling good during activity.

Activity 3: Alternative Options Circuit (5–7 min)

Setup: Post 4 station signs: "Dairy-Free" / "Gluten-Free" / "Nut-Free" / "Plant-Based Protein".

How to Play:

1. Students rotate to each station (30–45 seconds per station).
2. At each station, do a simple exercise (jumping jacks, wall sit, high knees, squats).
3. While exercising, call out a scenario: "Someone can't have milk – what could they drink?" / "Someone allergic to peanuts – what protein?".One student at that station quickly names an alternative (soy milk, chickpeas, tofu, etc.).

Teacher Prompts:

- "Why do some people need alternative nutrition sources?"
- "What are other ways to get protein besides meat?"

Success: Students name 2–3 alternative food options for common restrictions/preferences.

Minimal Marking: Observe participation; check verbal responses from 3–4 students per activity.
Extensions: Create a class "Swap It" poster. Discuss cultural foods that are naturally alternative (e.g., rice milk, lentil dal).
Adaptations: Provide alternative option cards at stations. Pre-teach key terms (dairy-free, gluten-free allergen, plant-based).

Grade 5

Outcomes:

- Research the effects of nutrition and hydration on body systems
- Describe how nutrition can affect physical and mental health and well-being
- Discuss sources of nutrition from various cultures and traditions
- Investigate how various personal factors can influence nutrition and hydration requirements

Key Food Literacy Knowledge: Nutrition and hydration support body systems (muscles, bones, brain, heart); factors influencing choices include culture, cost, access, media/advertising, personal preferences, activity level; nutritional requirements change across life stages.

Activity 1: Body System Power Stations (6–8 min)

Setup: Label 4 corners: "Muscles" / "Bones" / "Brain" / "Heart & Lungs".

How to Play:

1. Students jog around the gym.
2. Call out a food/drink: "Water!" / "Milk!" / "Salmon!" / "Spinach!" / "Whole-grain bread!"
3. Students move quickly to the body system that it supports most.
4. At that corner, perform an exercise (muscles = squats; bones = wall sit; brain = balance pose; heart = jumping jacks) for 15 seconds.
5. Ask: "How does water help your brain and muscles during PE?"

Teacher Prompts:

- "What happens to your muscles without enough water?"
- "How does nutrition affect your mood and focus?"

Success: Students connect 4–5 foods/drinks to specific body systems and explain one physical or mental health effect.

Activity 2: Hydration Status Shuffle (5–7 min)

Setup: Open space; prepare 6–7 hydration scenarios.

How to Play:

1. Students walk/jog lightly.
2. Call out scenarios:
    a. "Had water at breakfast, refilled bottle twice" (energized sprint).
    b. "Only pop today, feeling sluggish" (slow walk).
    c. "Forgot water bottle, dry mouth" (dragging feet).
    d. "Water + fruit at snack, ready for gym!" (medium jog).
3. Students adjust movement to match how they'd feel.

4. Pause: "What changes how much water we need?" (activity level, weather, age, food eaten).

Teacher Prompts:

- "Why does your body need more water on hot days or during sports?"
- "How does hydration affect energy and thinking?"

Success: Students describe 2–3 effects of hydration on body systems and name 2 personal factors affecting hydration needs.

Activity 3: Culture & Factors Corners (6–8 min)

Setup: Mark 4 "influence" corners: "Family/Culture" / "Cost/Money" / "Ads/Social Media" / "Access (What's Nearby)".

How to Play:

1. Call out scenarios:
    a. "Buying lunch at a convenience store".
    b. "Family celebration meal with traditional foods".
    c. "Trying a snack you saw on TikTok".
    d. "Choosing food at the grocery store that your family can afford".
    e. "Eating bannock, wild rice, or foods from the land".
2. Students move to the corner, showing the main influence.
3. At that corner, do 8–10 reps of an exercise (high knees, arm circles, lunges).
4. Ask one student: "Why did you pick this corner?"

Teacher Prompts:

- "How does culture shape what we eat?"
- "What personal factors make it hard or easy to eat healthy?"

Success: Students identify 3–4 factors influencing nutrition choices and discuss one cultural source of nutrition.

Minimal Marking: Observe participation; ask 3–4 check-in questions per activity.
Extensions: Invite students to share a cultural food tradition. Create a "Hydration Challenge" chart for one week.
Adaptations: Post visual reminders of body systems. Provide scenario cards that students can read. Offer partner discussions before answering.

Grade 6

Outcomes:

- Discuss the effects of limited nutritional food choices on physical and mental well-being
- Examine how access affects nutritional choices in a variety of contexts
- Compare the cost of food in a variety of contexts

Key Food Literacy Knowledge: Local food environments include food deserts (limited access to affordable, nutrient-rich foods) and food swamps (highly processed foods are more available); access, affordability, and market forces affect food choices; inadequate nutrition affects physical/mental health; sustainability practices improve food environments.

Activity 1: Food Desert vs Food Swamp Sprint (6–8 min)

Setup: Designate gym sides: "Food Desert" (limited options) / "Balanced Access" (centre) / "Food Swamp" (fast food everywhere).

How to Play:

1. Call out scenarios:

    a. “You live beside a grocery store with fresh produce”.
    b. “Nearest store is 30 min away, only sells packaged snacks”.
    c. “Your neighbourhood has 5 fast-food places, no grocery store”.
    d. “Community has a farmers market, garden, and food bank”.
2. Students move quickly to the matching side using a locomotor pattern (skip, side shuffle, jog).
3. At that spot, hold a balance pose.
4. Ask: “How might this affect your nutrition and mood over time?”

Teacher Prompts:

- “What is a food desert? Food swamp?”
- “How does access limit or help nutritional choices?”

Success: Students define food desert/swamp and describe one effect of limited access on well-being.

Activity 2: Budget Snack Decisions (5–7 min)

Setup: Place 3 cones labelled: “Lower Cost” / “Medium Cost” / “Higher Cost”.

How to Play:

1. Call out snack/meal options with relative cost hints:
    a. “Fresh strawberries in winter” (higher).
    b. “Bag of apples in fall” (lower).
    c. “Fast-food combo meal” (medium–higher).
    d. “Homemade sandwich” (lower).
    e. “Pre-cut veggie tray” (higher).
    f. “Bulk rice and beans” (lower).
2. Students jog to the matching cone.
3. Ask: “Which option gives the best nutrition for the cost?”.

Teacher Prompts:

- "Why does cost matter when choosing food?".
- How can families afford nutritious food?".

Success: Students compare costs of 4–5 foods and identify one strategy for affordable, nutritious eating.

Activity 3: Walk the Week - Access Story (6–8 min)

Setup: Mark 3 areas: "Most Nutritious Choice" / "Quick but Less Nutritious" / "No Food Available".

How to Play:

1. Students walk/jog lightly while you narrate a "week in the life" story:
    a. "Monday: Family is busy, no time to shop. Only gas station nearby."
    b. "Wednesday: No money until payday. Food bank closed."
    c. "Friday: Payday! Grocery store trip, fresh vegetables available."
    d. "Weekend: Community dinner with traditional foods from the land."
2. At each pause, students move to the area matching the likely food choice in that scenario.
3. At that spot, perform a quick exercise (squats, arm circles, plank hold).
4. Debrief: "What happens to physical and mental health if Monday/Wednesday keep repeating?"

Teacher Prompts:

- "How does limited access affect well-being?"
- "What could help improve this person's food environment?"

Success: Students describe 2–3 effects of limited nutritional choices on physical/mental well-being and identify one way to increase access.

Minimal Marking: Observe participation; facilitate 2–3 whole-class discussion prompts per activity.

Extensions: Research local food security initiatives (food banks, community gardens, Good Food Box). Map local food environment (grocery stores, fast food, farmers' markets).
Adaptations: Use scenario cards with pictures. Pre-teach key terms (food desert, food swamp, access, affordability, sustainability). Allow think–pair–share before full-class responses.

Quick Reference Guide

Equipment Needed

Powerpoint with signs and vocabulary

- Cones or markers (4–6)
- Food picture cards or laminated photos
- Music player (optional, Grades 2–3)
- Simple body system posters (Grades 1, 5)
- Whiteboard for quick notes (optional)

Implementation Tips

- Repeat activities across multiple days with different food examples.
- Rotate through the 3 activities throughout the term.
- Adapt movements based on space and class size.
- Pre-teach vocabulary in a 2-minute intro before the warm-up.
- Use visuals liberally—especially for younger grades and ELL students.

Assessment Strategy (Minimal Marking)

- Participation observed.
- Listen to 2–4 verbal responses per activity.

- Quick thumbs up/down checks.
- No formal written work required during warm-ups.

Cross-Curricular Connections

- **Math:** Comparing costs (Grade 6), counting food groups (Grade 2).
- **Social Studies:** Cultural foods and traditions (Grades 2, 5).
- **Science:** Body systems, nutrition effects (Grades 1, 4, 5).
- **Language Arts:** Vocabulary building, oral communication.

Resource compiled from:

- Term 3 Healthy Eating outcomes (Grades 1–6, Alberta PE&W)
- Food Literacy Pullout (knowledge and understanding, food literacy concepts)
- Supporting Canadian Resources (Canada's Food Guide, PHE Canada activities, Alberta Health Services nutrition education)