SFUCCS Food FAQ’s

SFUCCS has created this quick reference for parents to help answer some of the more common questions or concerns that we have addressed from time to time over the years. We appreciate hearing from you and your questions have provided the incentive to create this FAQ sheet for our new families joining SFU Childcare Society (SFUCCS) or for any parent that would like more information on our food program.

**What influences or guides the food choices that we make?**
We follow the recommended healthy food choices from the updated Canada’s Food Guide as well as our Nutrition Policy. Lunch and snacks at SFU Childcare are intended to compliment the meals that children receive at home.

For more information, please visit the Canada Food Guide: [https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/](https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/).

Our Chef, Brad Janes, has obtained his *Red Seal* certification. The Red Seal Program is recognized as the interprovincial standard of excellence in the skilled trades and is the highest level of government certified endorsement available. As a Red Seal chef, education on menu planning and nutrition has been incorporated into the many thousands of hours of training and supervised practical experience necessary to obtain this recognition. We feel very fortunate to have the benefit of his experience, knowledge, and expertise.
What is the charge to the parent for the food program?

The food program is offered as a complimentary service to parents. We do not charge extra for this service and there is no opt-in or out option related to the fees. This means there are no cost savings for any child who does not participate in the program. Breakfast is not served but lunch and snacks are provided (lunch is provided in Infant/Toddler & 3-5 programs only). Our fees remain well within the norm as compared to other childcare organizations. Offering parents the convenience of a lunch program is simply one of the benefits associated with attending SFUCCS.

What if my child has allergies or special dietary needs?

If your child has allergies please inform the educators in your child’s program. Depending on the severity of the allergy, different options may be suggested to make sure that your child is kept safe. If your child has an allergy, please notify your program. Additionally, we ask that you email Kathy Hart, SFUCCS Office Assistant (kathyh@sfu.ca) with the details, your child’s full name, and the program you are in. This information will then be kept on your child’s file and your child’s program will notify our chef each month. This information follows your child to each program as they move through SFUCCS.

Please also let us know of other dietary considerations (e.g., vegetarian, cultural, religious, lactose intolerant, or similar). When making food choices we do try to avoid common allergens, however it is important to be aware that we are not able to guarantee against cross-contamination. Depending on your child’s allergies, other arrangements may have to be made for your child’s food other than participating in the lunch program. We rotate menu items to create variety for children attending part time. The menu identifies possible allergies. Additionally, almost all foods that are served at SFUCCS have trace amounts of peanuts. Unless the packaging states otherwise most food products cannot claim to be made or packaged in a peanut free zone (e.g., cereals, cookies, pastas, whole grain bread products, etc.).

How do we determine portion size?

Portion size is set by what is recommended by dieticians. Educators in the programs have been given instruction on what a typical serving size should look like and contain. However, our childcare licensing regulations clearly state that it is the child who decides when they are no longer hungry; the educator does not put limitations on how much a child may eat. If the child requests more food we are obliged by childcare licensing regulations to offer it to them.
What are some limitations to what food choices can be offered?

There are a number of factors that influence the food choices that we offer at SFUCCS:

1) We have a budget. It should be emphasized that we have a limited food budget that does not produce income for the Society. Our food program is in place as a complimentary and convenient service to parents. Although there is a commitment to providing the most health friendly foods possible, we incorporate budgetary considerations when making food choices.

2) There is limited freezer and fridge space in our cooking facility and this affects the food options chosen because food must be stored according to Food Safe guidelines between deliveries.

3) Allergy considerations mean that certain foods are not served. This is particularly true of anything that contains nuts or berries as these are the most common allergies in the children at SFUCCS. Many breads, snacks, and food options that we can order from our suppliers have these in them so we are unable to utilize these options in order to provide as safe an environment as possible for children with allergies.

4) Each day we serve upwards of 300 children lunch and snacks. There are many different needs for both the children and the parents. In this environment, and we do our best to strike a balance between all of the varied requests that we receive in relation to foods and nutritional choices. We strive to incorporate as many perspectives as possible, and the reality is that the spectrum is wide and sometimes we are not able to meet the needs of every parent and every child.
5) The foods that are served each day must be appropriate for children primarily aged 1-5 years of age. Children of different ages have different preferences and different dietary requirements. We try to strike a balance and find choices that are appropriate for all age groups.

**Do we serve white rice and white bread?**

Sometimes. All breads, loaves, and baked goods – other than the focaccia and French rolls, are made from rye, bran, or most commonly, whole wheat. The only white flour used is for focaccia bread which is served occasionally. For example, the dinner buns are whole wheat and the pancakes are whole grain. The rice that we serve is not plain white, it is either white jasmine or basmati.

**Do we serve white pasta?**

The pasta is in fact semolina durum pasta rather than plain white pasta. In the past, we did try to serve whole wheat pasta but unfortunately most children refused to eat it, and the food ended up in the garbage. Parents felt disappointed that their children would come home hungry. For these reasons, we switched back to durum semolina pasta as a more realistic alternative that still offers a high nutritional value since it is a whole grain.

**Fast Facts:**
- Durum wheat is valued for its high protein content and is most well-known for its use in pasta.
- Durum wheat is a coarsely ground whole grain but is not as dark as something labelled ‘whole wheat’. Whole wheat of any variety is wheat that contains all three parts of the wheat grain – germ, bran, and endosperm. Whole wheat, whether it is durum or another variety, is more nutritious than its refined counterparts.

**What are some other factors that influence the choices we make in regards to the flour used for baking?**

Over time, and with trial and error, we have worked to find a balance between the maximum nutritional density of the foods and finding foods that the children will enjoy. Although we strive to help children have the most nutritious food options possible, we have noted certain things. For example, children tend to enjoy breads that are softer. Buns made from harder grains are harder to chew, especially for the younger children, and therefore do not get eaten.

**There is so much discussion these days about carbohydrates. What is the difference between simple and complex carbohydrates?**

**Answer:** Carbohydrates are divided into two types, simple and complex. The classification is based on the chemical structure and reflects how quickly they are digested and absorbed. Simple carbohydrates are often considered simple sugars and are chemically made of one or two sugars. Simple carbs are absorbed quickly and increase the glucose level in the blood quickly. A simple sugar could be just what the name implies -the sugar in your sugar bowl - but is also included in foods such as fruit and milk. However, fruit or milk are better sources of simple carbohydrates because they contain vitamins and fiber, and also important nutrients that your body needs, like calcium.
Complex carbohydrates are made of three or more linked sugars. Whole grains, and bread or pasta made from less processed grains, as well as oatmeal and rice are complex carbohydrates. Also, some vegetables like broccoli, corn, and legumes such as kidney beans and chick peas are considered complex carbohydrates. They take the longest to digest and therefore do not raise the glucose level in the blood to the same extent but, as a result, do not give a person the quicker shot of energy that simple carbohydrates provide. Instead, due to their slower digestion rate, complex carbohydrates offer a more slowly accessible but longer lasting energy boost for the body.


What about other sugars like jams?
Items like jams and sugars are used and ordered in moderation. A small container is meant to last for a significant amount of time. Educators know that sweeteners are meant to be limited and make an effort to only allow small portion sizes. As well, sugars are decreased by providing plain yogurt and fruit as a snack as opposed to flavored yogurt that tends to be sweetened, or having apple sauce not jam as a topping for pancakes.

We realize that kids love treats but these types of items are meant to only be served in small quantities. The amount of sugar in individual foods and in the overall meal plan is something we continue to monitor.

How much of the food is prepared in house?
Fifty percent of the food served for lunch is prepared in house. (e.g., soups and pasta). When preparing food in house our chef considers the following:
1. .....we purchase fresh fruits and vegetables
2. .....local ingredients when possible
3. .....best quality seasonal items when possible

We purchase prepackaged food where we do not have the capacity to prepare it in house. When purchasing prepackaged food our chef considers the following:
1. .....that the sugar and salt content is kept as low as possible
2. .....meat items we serve are simply, meat
3..... tries to purchase products with the least amount of preservatives/additives within the budget
Where can I find information about which snacks and lunches are being served each week?

On the Parent Resources page of our website there is a link to the current week’s menu. Parents are able to check the menu for the week and decide if they would like to send extra or alternate food to their program for their child as well as think about dinner plans for the week that work well with what their child has already eaten for the day. Each program has a binder with common menu items which have ingredient lists for the educators and parents.

Do the food choices ever change?

We are always evolving and open to trying new options within the limitations that have been outlined. We are willing to try new things but if they don’t work, children won’t eat them, or if there are other problems, then we are forced to either try something new or go back to the options we have offered previously. Our Chef works closely with our suppliers to find new options for food choices that work for SFUCCS and its members. As well, feedback from families, children, and the staff are incorporated into the decisions we make regarding the meal plan. Menus are also influenced by seasonal choices.

I have voiced my concerns regarding food choices in the lunch program but have not seen significant change. Why?

We do our best to accommodate the needs of as many people as possible. It should be kept in mind that specific needs must be considered in the context of the needs of the wider community and the limitations that we have outlined above. This said, if there are ideas that people have regarding the replacement of a food item with one that compares in terms of nutrition, price, and prep time we welcome these suggestions. We are happy to address any concerns on a one-on-one basis and will always take the time to speak with parents individually. Please contact your Senior Educator and/or Program Director for more information on our food program.