

# Healthy diet for children belongs on daycare menu <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** Toronto Star

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 8 Jan 2008

## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS It's time for the City of Toronto to put its food where its mouth is. The city cares for, and feeds, more than 3,000 children in its daycares. Our daughter is one of those children, and we are often dismayed at the food our child is served in the city's care. In the fall, Mayor David Miller proclaimed Oct. 16, 2007, "World Food Day" for Toronto, and professed support for "local and sustainable foods." ... While the staff at our daughter's daycare provide a wonderful, loving environment, we have so far seen little evidence of these healthy, ethical and sustainable food selection principles in the quality of our daughter's daycare food. In the next few months, city daycares will be selecting new food suppliers, and they are currently setting the standards for the new food contract proposals. In its last request for proposals from suppliers, the city placed a higher emphasis on price than on almost any other standard on which it judged the proposals. Price ranked as more important than ensuring our children received hormone-free meats and dairy, locally produced food, and even fresh fruits and vegetables. The contracted menu included fish filets imported from China, frozen eggs and a surprising amount of canned fruit. Over the past two years, focused efforts by city daycare parents have resulted in trans-fats being removed from their children's food & a move that should have been made a decade ago. Further efforts have somewhat decreased the amounts of canned fruits, juice and white bread, and eliminated some of the other more egregious items, such as fried beef patties. These changes, while important, do not bring us anywhere near the standard professed by city council. The city's decisions around our children's food should be at the forefront of movements to promote healthy and ethical food choices, not lag a decade behind. City of Toronto daycares spend only \$3.58 per toddler and \$3.89 per preschool child per day on catered food, out of the \$57 to \$77 per day we pay for our children's care. Amazingly, it would take, on average, less than 50 cents more per child per day to make these changes. For \$4.09 per child per day, the YMCA's Toronto daycares serve naturally raised and hormone-free meats and dairy, buy locally whenever possible, serve as many fresh fruits and vegetables as possible, and even favour organic over conventionally grown produce. There is good evidence for the health benefits of a health- and ethics-based approach to food purchasing. Locally sourced food reduces smog and global warming. Sustainably produced food (using less pesticides, antibiotics, and hormones) improves water and air quality, and reduces our children's exposure to growth- and development-affecting chemicals. Buying locally and ethically also promotes local economic development and stronger local communities. There is a social justice element to this argument as well. City-run daycares serve more low income children than any other daycare system in Toronto. Setting high standards for the food these children receive at daycare would send a strong message that we are willing to go the extra step to providing our city's most vulnerable children with the strongest possible foundation in healthy eating at the most formative moments in their lives. This is an opportunity for our city to take the lead in improving our children's health, and the health of our communities, for minimal added cost. The City of Toronto's daycares should set the standard when it comes to such critical areas, not play catch-up with the private sector.

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** health <sup>[3]</sup>

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