

# Daycare gives kids crackers, fines mom for unhealthy lunch <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** National Post

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 19 Nov 2013

## EXCERPTS:

Kristen Bartkiw thought she'd packed her children a pretty good meal when she sent them off to daycare: roast beef, potatoes and carrots with a cup of milk and an orange for dessert.

But Logan and Natalie didn't come home with just their empty dishware that day - they handed their mom the lunch police equivalent of a speeding ticket: A "Lunchbox Supplement Note," that admonished her for failing to send her children to school with a grain. Ms. Bartkiw's account would be charged \$10 - \$5 for each child. The daycare fed them Ritz crackers to make up for the oversight.

"It was frustrating," she said in an interview from her home in Rosscurn, Man., about 110km northwest of Brandon. "I actually phoned the daycare afterwards and said 'Really? Am I actually getting charged for this?'"

As schools and daycares have sharpened their focus on nutrition in recent years, parents in many parts of the country are finding the onus is on them to navigate a maze of requirements and find themselves sometimes at odds with an individual school's take on provincial policy.

It's consistent with a broader move toward "big brothering lunches," said Sylvain Charlebois, professor of food distribution and policy at the University of Guelph's College of Management and Economics.

"Schools have become better risk mitigators [around allergens such as peanuts], but as a result of that, the mandate has expanded beyond the scope of mitigating risk," he said. "We're looking at health, we're looking at safety, quality of life, sustainability - It's going beyond trying to make sure people survive lunch hour."

It makes things more complicated for parents, he said, and not all parents have the means to ensure lunches are healthy. Either that, or they don't have the motivation to try.

This was the spirit of the policy at Little Cub's Den, a provincially licensed daycare in the tiny community of about 550 people. Ms. Bartkiw was even on the board of directors that helped craft the fine-giving policy after a new director wanted to do more to ensure parents met the provincially mandated guidelines, which encourages daycares to serve the four food groups listed in Canada's Food Guide.

"There's been mornings where I wake up and it's Monday morning and I literally don't have a piece of fruit in the house, and it's like 'well,'" she said. She'd received warnings, but never an actual fine slip. Other parents, she said, did receive them and refused to pay.

But Ms. Bartkiw refuses to blame the daycare. She is more concerned with the provincial directive to follow Canada's Food Guide, something she said the daycare was only trying to do.

"I want to really encourage people to question the food guide first of all because it says a juice is a fruit - it's just not," she said. "But people trust the Canada Food Guide, that it's providing healthy recommendations. It's not."

She sent a photo of the fine slip to Yoni Freedhoff, a professor of family medicine at the University of Ottawa, and medical director of the Bariatric Medical Institute. He runs the popular Weighty Matters blog, which takes aim at sly marketing to children and families by companies hawking processed food, along with other matters related to obesity. He unearthed it from his email and posted there Monday. It quickly went viral.

Dr. Freedhoff has been among one of the more vocal critics of Canada's Food Guide, which he and Ms. Bartkiw believe is too heavily influenced by lobbyists and shareholders of companies that sell processed foods.

He said Tuesday that Canada's Food Guide is a "non-evidenced based document" that provinces shouldn't be encouraging daycares to follow. Instead, governments should focus on education that works. "We would rather, instead, download it on parents and suggest that this is all up to you to fight this awful world we live in, from a food perspective," he said. "And yet here we are, basically serving garbage to your kids and suggesting to you that we are doing better than you are."

Most provinces have long required that children enrolled in daycare eat well-balanced meals, and Canada's Food Guide is written in most provincial legislation as a guide (either that, or providers need to serve all four food groups). In a 2012 brochure for daycare providers, Alberta's government wrote that "licensed childcare centres must follow Canada's Food Guide."

The government of Manitoba said it told all licensed daycares on Tuesday that they don't need to take the Canada's Food Guide so literally - so long as children are getting healthful, balanced foods, that is enough.

"Charging for Ritz crackers is ridiculous and unacceptable," spokesperson Rachel Morgan said. "We know most parents are doing the best they can to provide their kids with nutritious meals at school."

Little Cub's Den has since shifted to a hot meals program, which parents pay into. Ms. Bartkiw loves it - her children are exposed to (and actually eat) foods like grapefruit and broccoli.

And another bonus: She never had to pay the fine.

-reprinted from the National Post

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

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

health <sup>[4]</sup>

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