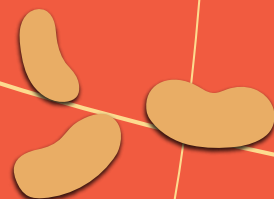




# School Lunches Made Easy





## Healthy Start

Healthy Start is an evidence-based program that increases healthy eating and physical activity opportunities in early learning environments. It provides professional development training and resources for early learning and childcare practitioners and parents.

Healthy Start was developed in Saskatchewan in collaboration with community partners and researchers from the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Sherbrooke, and the University of Moncton.

For more information and resources for parents, please visit our website at:

**[healthystartkids.ca](http://healthystartkids.ca)**

The Healthy Start program is run by the Saskatchewan Network for Health Services in French (Réseau Santé en français de la Saskatchewan) and is funded by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education.

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Book design by Sophie Ouch, 2023.

## About

The purpose of this booklet is to share simple and accessible nutrition information and ideas for healthy school lunches with francophone and bilingual families.

The nutrition information presented here comes from two main sources, *Canada's food guide* and *Food Flair*, an early learning resource used in the Healthy Start program. This booklet is intended for a general audience, and for new Canadian families who are adapting to the North American food environment.

### Note

All food suggestions in this booklet exclude peanuts and tree nuts, as most Canadian schools have a no nuts policy due to the prevalence of nut allergies among children.



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## Healthy Eating Basics

Healthy eating doesn't have to be complicated. Canada's food guide offers this basic advice:

- Have plenty of vegetables and fruits.
- Eat protein foods.
- Choose whole grain foods.
- Make water your drink of choice.
- Limit highly processed foods<sup>1</sup>.

Half of the Canada's food guide plate contains vegetables and fruits. This tells us that vegetables and fruits should make up a large part of what we eat, yet most Canadian children do not eat enough<sup>2</sup>.



**Try these tips for offering more vegetables and fruits to children:**

- Offer raw vegetables to dip in salad dressing or hummus, such as broccoli, celery sticks, baby carrots, sliced cucumber, or red or yellow pepper slices.
- Grate carrots, beets, or zucchini to add to salads, pasta sauce, wraps, muffins, or sandwiches.
- Add frozen green peas, frozen corn, or sliced baby carrots to chicken noodle soup.
- Offer fruit for a snack or dessert (apple slices, melon cubes, grapes, orange slices).
- Add berries or cut-up fruit to cereal or yogurt.
- Use frozen berries, ripe bananas, or canned peaches in smoothies<sup>3</sup>.
- Use pre-bagged vegetables that can be quickly tossed in a salad, stir-fry, soup, or casserole<sup>4</sup>.



To reduce costs, look for vegetables and fruits that are in season or on sale, or buy frozen or canned vegetables and fruits. Choose fruits canned in water or juice (not syrup), and canned vegetables with little or no added sodium<sup>5</sup>.





## School Food

Over the course of the school year, parents will pack over 150 lunches! School lunches are an important source of nutrition for children.

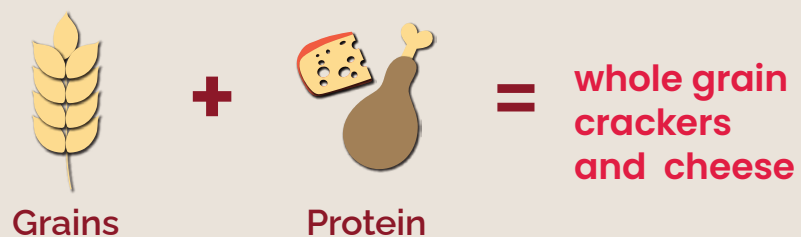
School lunch and snacks:

- Satisfy hunger,
- Provide energy to learn and play,
- Provide nutrients children need to grow and be healthy,
- Are a source of pleasure.

A school lunch bag contains a morning snack, a lunch meal, and an afternoon snack.

### Snacks

For an energizing and satisfying snack, offer foods from two food groups<sup>6</sup>.



### The Lunch Meal

For a filling and nutritious meal, try offering 2-3 food groups at lunch<sup>7</sup>.



### Some examples

A whole grain sandwich with lettuce and luncheon meat, flat bread and falafel with cucumber, rice with chick-pea and vegetable curry, pasta salad, egg frittata, soup in a thermos, or leftovers.

Your child may also like fruit, a yogurt cup, or a cookie with lunch.

# Choosing School Snacks

## Avoiding Highly Processed Snacks

*Canada's food guide* counsels us to avoid highly processed foods like sugary drinks, fast food, chocolate, and candies. It also advises parents to be aware of how food marketing can influence our food choices. Food marketing is advertising that promotes the sale of certain foods<sup>8</sup>.

Kids are susceptible to food marketing and are highly targeted by advertisers, for example, by using popular cartoon characters on food products<sup>9</sup>. Many foods advertised to children are highly processed and will contribute excess salt, sugars, or saturated fat to their diets<sup>10</sup>.

Highly processed foods are often advertised as convenient lunch box snacks, such as “real” fruit gummies, pudding cups and small bags of chips. These snacks should be considered treats to enjoy sometimes rather than foods to send in a child's lunch everyday.





**Easy, nutritious snacks that are not highly transformed**

- Baby carrots
- Cucumber slices, celery sticks, sliced peppers
- Fruit (apples, oranges, pears, bananas, etc.)
- Fruit canned in juice or water (not syrup)
- Apple sauce cups (unsweetened)
- Cheese cubes
- Hard boiled eggs
- Whole grain crackers

In addition, there are healthier alternatives to highly processed foods that are marketed to children. When buying groceries, look for snacks such as cookies, crackers and granola bars that are lower in salt, sugar and saturated fat.



## Snacks to limit

### Sandwich Cookie

Low in fibre  
Higher in sugar  
Higher in saturated fat

### Chocolate Dipped Granola Bar

Higher in sugar  
A candy bar in disguise

### Cheese Flavoured Crackers

Higher in sodium  
Less fibre

### Pudding Cups

Higher in sugar

### Mini Bag of Chips

Higher in sodium  
Higher in saturated fat

### Fruit Gummies

Higher in sugar  
No fiber or protein  
Candy in disguise

## Healthier Alternatives

### Store Bought Oatmeal Cookie

More fibre  
Less sugar  
Choose a higher fiber brand like *Dare "Simple Pleasures"* or *Peek Freans "LifeStyle"* cookies.

### Undipped Granola Bar, (nut free)

Less sugar  
Wholegrain brands have more fibre  
Some lower sugar brands include:  
*MadeGood* and *Quaker Chewy Chocolate Chip* (undipped).

### Whole Grain Crackers

More fibre  
There are many whole grain options, look for the symbol or words *whole grain*.  
Look for low-sodium options.

### Yogurt Cup

More protein  
Less sugar  
Look for low sugar varieties.

### Popcorn or Crunchy Chickpeas

More fibre  
Lower in saturated fat

### Fruit, Dried Fruit

Contains fiber  
Contains vitamins and nutrients



Whole Grain Symbol

## Food Safety

Alberta Health Services offers the following advice for keeping school lunches safe from food-borne illness:

### Keep Hot Food Hot

When using leftovers for school lunches, refrigerate them right after the original meal. If the lunch is meant to be served hot, reheat food to at least 74 °C (165 °F) before putting it in an insulated container. If using a thermos, preheat the thermos with boiling water for a few minutes, drain the water, and then add the hot lunch food to the thermos<sup>11</sup>.



### Keep Cold Food Cold

- Pack lunches in insulated lunch containers and add ice packs.
- Put lunch items in an insulated lunch bag and chill the whole bag overnight in the refrigerator.
- Remind your child to keep their cold lunch in a cool spot (not in the sun or near a heater<sup>12</sup>).



## How to Read Food Labels

All packaged foods have labels that list the ingredients and a nutrition facts table. You can use food labels to compare your products and choose healthier options.

The nutrition facts table provides information on serving size, calories, and the percentage of daily values of certain nutrients (% DV). The % DV is a quick reference to tell you if a food product contains a little or a lot of a certain nutrient:

- 5% DV or less is **a little**.
- 15% DV or more is **a lot**<sup>13</sup>.

The nutrition facts table can help you to identify nutrients you may want to limit, such as sodium, sugars, and saturated fat. It can also help you to identify nutrients you may want more of, such as iron, fibre, calcium, and potassium<sup>14</sup>.

<b>Valeur nutritive</b>	
<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
pour 1 tasse (250 mL) Per 1 cup (250 mL)	
<b>Calories 110</b>	% valeur quotidienne* % Daily Value*
<b>Lipides / Fat 0 g</b>	0 %
saturés / Saturated 0 g	0 %
+ trans / Trans 0 g	
<b>Glucides / Carbohydrate 26 g</b>	
Fibres / Fibre 0 g	0 %
Sucres / Sugars 22 g	22 %
<b>Protéines / Protein 2 g</b>	
<b>Cholestérol / Cholesterol 0 mg</b>	
<b>Sodium 0 mg</b>	0 %
<b>Potassium 450 mg</b>	10 %
<b>Calcium 30 mg</b>	2 %
<b>Fer / Iron 0 mg</b>	0 %
*5% ou moins c'est peu, 15% ou plus c'est beaucoup *5% or less is a little, 15% or more is a lot	

For example, the nutrition fact label above shows a food product for which a 1 cup serving has 22% DV for sugar. Since 15% DV or more is a lot, this product contains a lot of sugar.

# Helping Children Eat Well

Feeding children can be stressful when there is pressure and power struggles. A positive approach to eating can help children learn to eat a variety of nutritious foods over time<sup>15</sup>. The advice below comes from *Food Flair*.

## Picky Eating

It is normal for a young child to eat well one day and very little the next. Most children go through periods when they are choosy about the foods they will eat. Other children simply refuse to try new foods<sup>16</sup>. Children may not want to eat if they are:

- Tired
- Distracted
- Not hungry
- Not familiar with a new food.
- Not able to have their favourite food.
- In a slow growth period<sup>17</sup>.

When dealing with picky eating, follow the “Adults provide, children decide” approach.

- Make every bite count by offering healthy, tasty, and appealing food. It is up to the child to decide what and how much to eat of the food you have provided.
- Avoid pressuring children to *finish their plate* or eat all the food you send in their school lunch.
- Avoid making deals with children to “eat one more bite”, or “if you eat your vegetables, you will get dessert.” Let the child’s fullness cues guide you<sup>18</sup>.

Over time, a child will learn to eat a larger variety of foods if they are given the chance to try new foods without pressure. Eventually, they will learn to eat the same food their family eats<sup>19</sup>.

## Introducing New Foods

### Be Positive

Children learn to accept food when it is offered to them without pressure.

Introduce a new food in an upbeat way and expect that the new food will be liked<sup>20</sup>.

### Be a Role Model

Sit and eat with your child and show them how you enjoy the new food.

Serve a new food with a familiar food that your child enjoys.

Give food fun names like *apple moons* or *broccoli trees*<sup>21</sup>.



### Keep Trying

If your child rejects a food, don't make a big deal about it. Simply serve the same food again another day.

A child may need to see a food up to twenty times before accepting it!

If the food is not popular after several tries, change the way it is prepared or served<sup>22</sup>.





### More Tips to Help Children Eat Well

- Set regular meal and snack times.
- Offer water to satisfy their thirst between meals without spoiling their appetite.
- Give hugs or gold stars instead of food rewards.
- Serve one family meal for everybody that includes at least one food your child enjoys (i.e., bread or rice).
- Offer new foods often. Even if your child wants the same sandwich for lunch, change the vegetable, fruit, or soup you serve with it.
- When possible, let your child help you make meals and snacks<sup>23</sup>.



# Simple Snack Ideas

These easy snack ideas that can be made in big batches and used throughout the school week. →



Nut free trail mix is a good alternative to granola bars, which can contain a lot of sugar. This is a flexible recipe that you can make using ingredients you have on hand in your cupboard. Children can help measure out the ingredients and mix them in a big bowl.

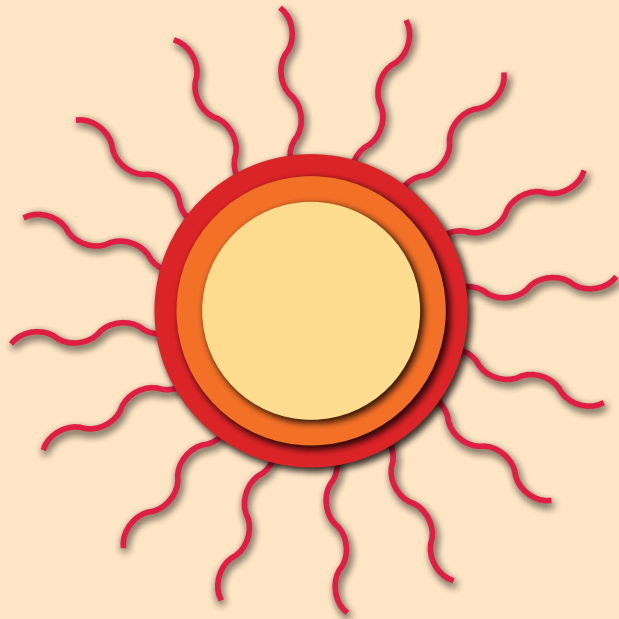
### Ingredients

- 2 cups toasted O cereal
- 2 cups shredded wheat cereal
- 2 cups rice square cereal, or any other low-sugar, whole grain cereal
- 1 cup raisins
- ½ cup dried cranberries or apricots
- ½ cup pumpkin seeds or sunflower seeds (optional)
- ½ cup semi-sweet chocolate chips (optional)
- ½ cup pretzels (optional)

### Directions

- 1** Mix ingredients together in a big bowl.
- 2** Store the trail mix in a large airtight container and pack snack sized portions in baggies or small reusable containers.





# Roasted Chick Peas

## Ingredients

- 2 cans of chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 3 tbsp (45 ml) of canola oil
- 3-4 tsp preferred spices (Cajun, curry, garlic powder, etc.)
- ½ tsp salt

### Tip

Some ovens may run hotter than others; adjust the heat and baking time as needed.

## Directions

- 1** Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C).
- 2** Pat the drained chickpeas dry with a paper towel or clean kitchen towel.
- 3** Combine all ingredients in a large bowl and mix until the chickpeas are well coated. Spread onto a parchment paper lined or greased cookie sheet.
- 4** Bake for 30 minutes. Stir.
- 5** Bake another 20 minutes, stirring every 5 minutes.
- 6** Cool thoroughly before storing in an airtight container<sup>24</sup>.



# Sample Lunches

The following recipes offer ideas for kid-friendly lunches that incorporate a variety of foods. Adapt the recipes to suit your child or use them as inspiration to create your own versions. →



# Pasta Salad

The following recipe is for one serving of lunch box pasta salad. Adjust the ingredients to make a larger amount.

## Ingredients

- ⅓ cup pasta shapes (bow tie, fusilli, shells, etc.)
- 3 tbsp frozen peas
- 3 tbsp frozen corn
- 1 tbsp plain yogurt
- 1 tbsp store bought salad dressing
- 1 tbsp mayonnaise (optional)

## Directions

- 1** Cook pasta according to instructions; add the frozen peas and corn during the last minute of cooking. Drain and rinse.
- 2** Mix salad dressing, plain yogurt, and mayonnaise.
- 3** Stir the dressing into the pasta and add tomatoes if desired.
- 4** Package into a lunch container. Chill overnight or add an icepack to keep the salad cold<sup>25</sup>.

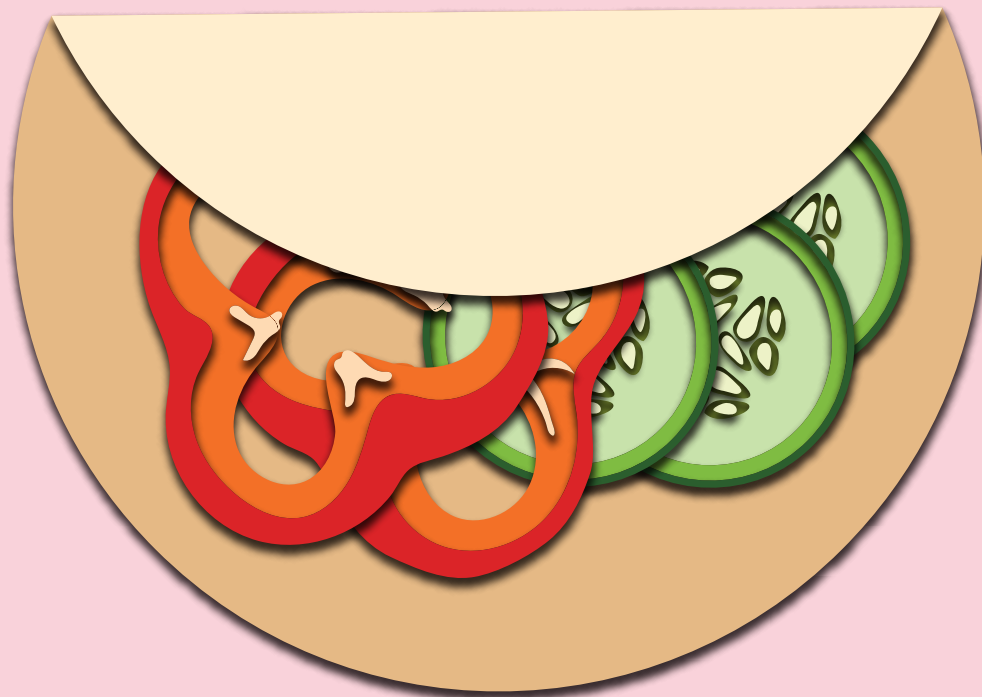
### Tip

Use whole wheat pasta or pasta brands with added fibre like *Catelli Smart Pasta* or *PC Blue Menu pasta + fiber*.



# Sandwich Wrap

You can make a variety of wraps using the *grain + protein + vegetable* formula.



## Ingredients

- 1 small whole wheat tortilla
- Mayonnaise
- Mustard
- 2-3 slices of luncheon meat
- Grated cheese
- Lettuce
- Cucumber
- Red pepper

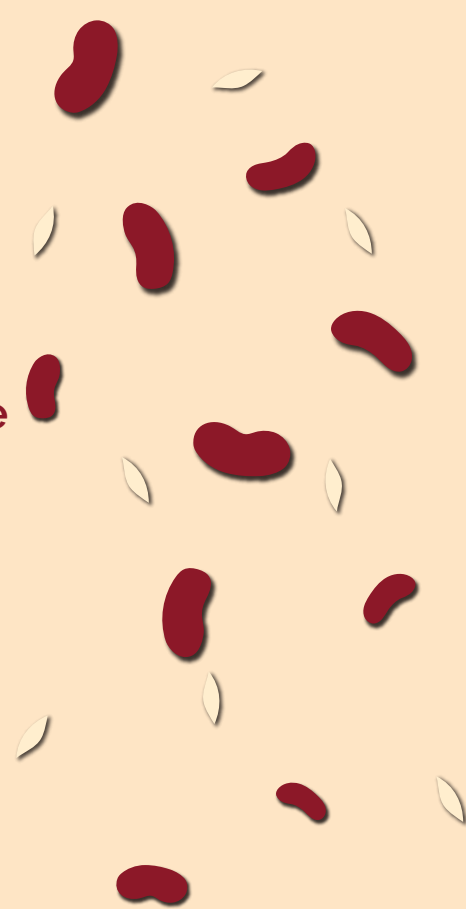
## Directions

- 1 Take 1 small whole wheat tortilla.
- 2 Spread with mayo and mustard if desired.
- 3 Add 2-3 slices of luncheon meat (turkey, chicken, or ham) or 2 tbsp of hummus.
- 4 Sprinkle grated cheese.
- 5 Add lettuce or other sliced veggies such as sliced cucumber or red pepper.
- 6 Roll-up the tortilla and cut it in half.

# Burrito Bowl

Rice and beans are staple foods in many cultures and can make for an easy and nutritious school lunch. Some global examples are African bean stew, Indian dahl, and Filipino mung bean stew, served on rice.

With some leftover cooked rice and canned beans, you can put together a quick lunch by adding chopped vegetable and sauce.



## Ingredients

- Leftover rice
- Canned black beans
- Shredded cheese
- Tomatoes
- Sour cream
- Salsa

## Directions

- 1 In a lunch box container, top leftover rice with some canned black beans, shredded cheese, tomatoes, sour cream, and salsa.

### Tip

Plant-based protein foods like beans, lentils, nuts, seeds, and tofu can provide more fibre and less saturated fat than other types of protein<sup>26</sup>.

# Nut Free Sandwich

Peanut butter and jam sandwiches were a North American school lunch favorite, but nowadays most schools have a no nuts policy, as peanuts and tree nuts are common food allergens among children. Parents can offer nut-free alternatives instead, such as *Wowbutter* which is made from roasted soya beans.

On days when you are pressed for time, this easy sandwich can be ready in minutes.



## Ingredients

- Whole grain or whole wheat bread
- *Wowbutter* (or other non-nut butter spread)
- Jam

## Directions

- 1** Spread *Wowbutter* on one piece of bread and jam on the other. Assemble.
- 2** For young children, cut sandwich into fun shapes with cookie cutters if desired.
- 3** Add a note to let the school know you used *Wowbutter* NOT peanut butter.



# Pita pizza

## Ingredients

- 1 small whole wheat pita per child
- 2-3 tbsp store bought pasta sauce or pizza sauce
- Toppings of your choice such as sliced peppers and sliced olives
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup Grated cheese

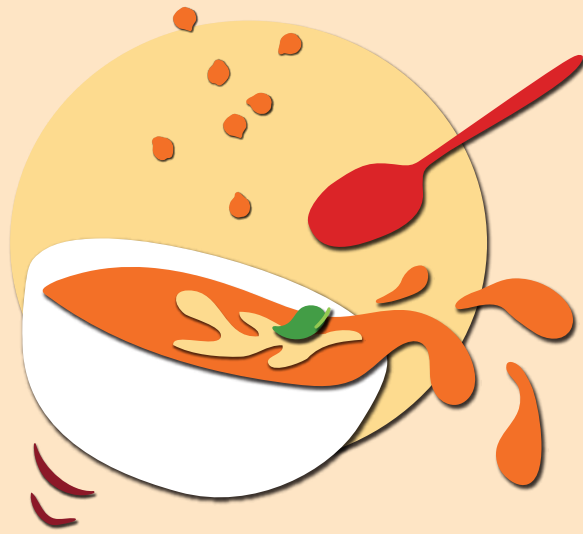
## Directions

- 1** Spread the pita with sauce, add toppings and cheese.
- 2** Cook or broil the pita pizza in the oven until the cheese is melted.
- 3** Allow the pizza to cool before cutting it into four slices.

### Tip

For pizza bagels, follow the same steps with a whole wheat or whole grain bagel.





# Sweet Potato & Chickpea Soup

This quick soup could be made in advance or in the morning before school if you have the time. The recipe serves two; double the ingredients for more portions.

## Tip

If you don't have a hand blender, you can blend soup in a regular blender once it's cooled or leave the soup chunky.

## Ingredients

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, finely diced
- 1-2 sliced garlic cloves
- ½ tsp each of ground cumin and ground coriander (or spices of your choice)
- 1 sweet potato, cut into small cubes
- 2.5 cups stock or water
- 1 can drained chickpeas
- ½ cup milk
- Salt and pepper to taste

## Directions

- 1 Heat 1 tbsp olive oil in a pot; cook diced onion until soft.
- 2 Add sliced garlic and cook for a few minutes more.
- 3 Add spices.
- 4 Add 1 sweet potato, cut into 1cm cubes. Fry for a few minutes, then pour in the stock or water.
- 5 Boil for 10 mins until sweet potato is tender.
- 6 Add drained chickpeas.
- 7 Whiz until smooth with a hand blender (immersion blender).
- 8 Stir in ½ milk<sup>27</sup>.

# Muffin-tin Frittatas

A frittata is an egg dish similar to an omelette. For a child's school lunch, serve the frittata cold. This recipe is adapted from the Canada's food guide online recipe section.

## Tips

Use any leftover vegetables you have in your fridge. Try adding spinach, finely chopped broccoli, cauliflower, or onions at step 2.

If you do not have a 6-tin muffin pan, use a 12-tin pan and fill the empty tins with a small amount of water. This can help protect your pan.

Make a double batch and refrigerate extras for 3 to 4 days or freeze for up to 2 to 3 months.

## Ingredients

- 6 eggs
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup milk
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp pepper
- 2 tomatoes, diced
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup grated cheese

## Directions

- 1** Preheat the oven to 200 °C (400 °F). Lightly spray or paper-line 6 muffin tins.
- 2** In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, milk, salt, and pepper. Add tomatoes and whisk well.
- 3** Using a  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup measuring cup, scoop batter into muffin tins until divided evenly. Add 1 tbsp of grated cheese on top of each frittata.
- 4** Cook frittatas in the oven for about 15 minutes.
- 5** Let cool for 3 to 5 minutes before removing from muffin tins<sup>28</sup>.



# Endnotes

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