



MA Children at Play

GUIDELINES FOR HEALTHY EATING



MA Children at Play (MCAP) is part of a broad-based, statewide initiative to reduce childhood obesity and prevent its complications in childhood and, later, in adulthood. Young children need opportunities for movement and healthy eating throughout their entire day. MCAP provides guidance for childcare providers to create healthier childcare environments across the state. With one in eight preschool children in the United States considered obese, there has never been a better time to join the fight against childhood obesity.

This guide provides ideas and resources for families and childcare providers to plan and offer healthy meals and snacks for children.

General Guidelines for Infant Feeding

For Parents:

“Feeding Your Baby in the First Year” Tip Sheet:

<http://wicworks.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Topics/infantfeedingtipsheet.pdf>

Breast milk is the best food for your baby! Breast milk provides the right mix of nutrients your baby needs to grow and develop. If you are away from your baby, you can provide your baby with expressed breast milk. This ensures your baby receives the best nutrition possible. When breast milk is not available, iron-fortified infant formula is an appropriate alternative for your infant’s first year of life.

For Childcare Providers:

“Best Practices for Bottle Feeding in an Early Education and Care Setting” Brochure (developed by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care):

www.mass.gov/edu/docs/eec/laws-regulations-and-policies/20120202-bestpracticesbottlefeeding-.pdf

Helpful Hints for Babies Who Are Breastfed:

- » The baby should be fed as soon as she shows signs that she’s hungry. Look for increased alertness or activity, rooting motions, or mouthing of the hands or fingers. Do not wait until the baby is crying, as she will be frustrated and more difficult to feed.
- » New babies will want to nurse often. Their stomachs are tiny and breast milk is easy to digest.
- » For the first month of life, a baby will nurse at least 8 to 12 times every 24 hours.
- » Infants might not have a predictable feeding schedule in the early weeks. Expect babies to feed in clusters, perhaps several times in a few hours with stretches of sleep in between.



General Nutrition Guidelines for Children

Start with a Healthy Breakfast That Includes Whole Grains

(See more on whole grains in the Q and A section.)

Quick breakfast ideas include:

- » whole grain hot or cold cereal with cut-up fruit and skim milk
- » whole grain mini-bagel with peanut butter and sliced bananas
- » whole grain toaster waffles with blueberries on top
- » a cup of low-fat yogurt mixed with cut-up fruit and a crunchy whole grain cereal
- » unsweetened oatmeal with chopped apples and raisins
- » whole grain English muffin topped with melted low-fat cheese



Snack Smart!

Healthy snack ideas include:

- » ½ banana spread with a tablespoon of peanut butter
- » ½ cup strawberries
- » ½ cup of cantaloupe cut into 1-inch cubes
- » a rice cake with 1 tablespoon of hummus
- » cucumber, celery, carrot and pepper sticks dipped into hummus or low-fat yogurt
- » part-skim string cheese

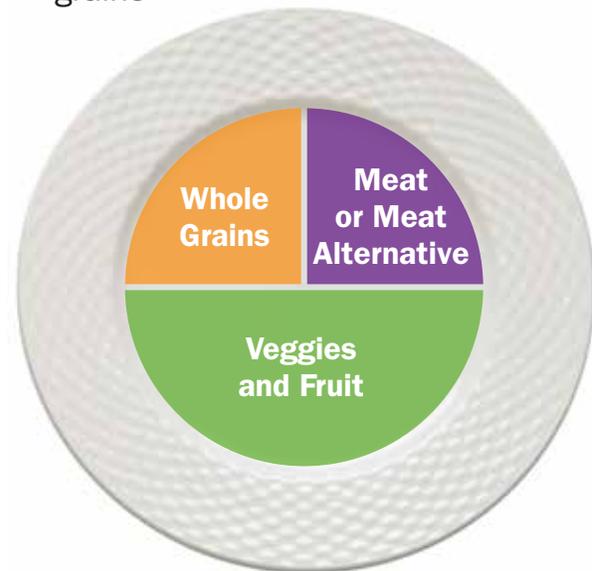


Lunch and Dinner Ideas

- » **English Muffin Pizza:** Top a whole wheat English muffin half with pizza sauce, sliced veggies and low-fat cheese. Toast in the oven until the cheese melts.
- » **Omelets:** Combine eggs and chopped veggies, and top with salsa.
- » **Burrito:** Wrap 1/2 whole wheat tortilla around some canned black beans, chopped veggies, and low-fat cheese.
- » **Mac and Cheese:** Add frozen vegetables (without sauce) and canned tuna or salmon to prepared boxed whole wheat macaroni and cheese.
- » **Potato Pal:** Top half of a small baked potato with low-fat yogurt and then add eyes (peas), a nose (half a cherry tomato), and a smile (low-fat cheese wedge). Be creative – you'll be surprised at how many foods can turn into eyes, noses and smiles!
- » **Chicken Nachos:** Use pre-cooked shredded chicken and high-fiber tortilla chips, add diced tomatoes, peppers and onions, and low-fat shredded cheese and bake in an oven or microwave until the cheese is melted.

Create a Healthy Plate!

- » Use a small plate
- » 1/2 of the plate should include veggies and fruit
- » 1/4 of the plate should include lean meat or a meat alternative
- » 1/4 of the plate should include whole grains



Choose Healthy Grains

- » brown rice
- » whole grain bread
- » whole wheat pasta
- » whole wheat pita or flat bread
- » whole wheat tortillas
- » bulgur, or cracked wheat
- » corn meal

A Word About Sugary Drinks

A sugary drink is one with added sugar. “Sugar” goes by many names, including high-fructose corn syrup, maltose, cane juice, dextrose, lactose, and malt syrup to name a few. Sugary drinks include sodas, juice drinks, flavored milk and milk alternatives, sports drinks, energy drinks, and blended coffees and teas. Children who drink one or more sugary drinks a day have a higher risk of being overweight, and sweetened drinks can lead to tooth decay. Here are some ideas to help the children you care for cut down on sugary drinks:

- » Serve water – there’s no limit and it’s the best choice!
- » Stick to 1% low-fat and fat-free milk for children over the age of 2.
- » Make “just a little juice” a rule – if juice is served it should be 100% juice and limited to no more than 4 ounces a day. Eating the whole fruit provides more nutrients and fiber.
- » Say “No” to soda, energy drinks and sports drinks.
- » Serve less – don’t supersize your drinks!

Drink Healthfully!

Healthy drink choices include:

- » plain water
- » water or seltzer with natural flavorings, but with no added sugars, sweeteners or artificial sweeteners
- » 100% fruit juice should be provided in 4-ounce servings; servings should be limited to no more than 4 ounces a day
- » 1% low-fat and fat-free milk; servings should be no more than 8 ounces



When Planning Meals for Children, Some Things to Think About...

- » **Try cutting food into fun shapes** or making faces out of fruit and vegetables.
- » **Make it fun!** See how many different kinds of fruits and vegetables each member of your family can try. The person who samples the most in a week or a month wins a meal featuring his or her favorites.
- » **Eat meals with children.** Let them see that you enjoy fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products and whole grains at meals and snacks.
- » **Encourage preschoolers to help you prepare meals and snacks.** Teach children to tear lettuce or add veggie toppings to pizza. Cooking together can mean more “mommy (or daddy) and me” time on busy days.



- » **On the go?** Put fruit or raw vegetables in your bag for quick snacks. Let children see that you like to munch on vegetables when you're on the go.
- » **Jazz up produce:** try hummus or a homemade salad dressing as a dip for veggies, spread some peanut butter on apple slices, or create a selection of fruits and vegetables with the colors of the rainbow.
- » **Add fruits and vegetables to foods your child already likes:** put blueberries in pancakes, chopped fruit on cereal, or chopped broccoli in macaroni and cheese.
- » **Make nutritious food convenient:** put out rinsed and cut fruits and vegetables in a bowl, or keep them on a shelf in your refrigerator where your child can see them and easily reach them.



Choking Hazards

Some healthy snacks for older children and adults can be choking hazards for young children. Infants and children under the age of 4 should not eat:

- » dried fruit
- » certain raw vegetables (raw carrots, whole grapes, or whole cherry or grape tomatoes)
- » popcorn
- » nuts or seeds
- » peanut butter from a spoon



Did You Know...

- » Studies have found that women who breastfeed are less likely to develop diabetes as well as some types of breast and ovarian cancer.
- » Breast milk is the perfect food for babies and contains all the nutrients they need to grow, develop and thrive. Breast milk is also easier to digest than formula, so breastfed babies may have fewer “fussy” periods.
- » Kids don’t always like new foods right away. Offer new foods many times and in different forms. For example, offer steamed broccoli dipped in parmesan cheese, and other times offer it in soup, in a casserole or even raw. It may take up to a dozen times for a child to accept a new food.
- » Children and adults who eat breakfast daily are less likely to be overweight. Eating breakfast helps children start their day in a healthy way. Include fruit, whole grains and low-fat or fat-free dairy products.
- » Help children make the right food and drink choices from an early age. Allow them to help with decision making. It’s a great way to get them to take charge of their health and they will be more excited about what they eat.

A Few Q's and A's

Q: Why all the talk about whole grains?

A: Whole grains contain all the essential parts and naturally occurring nutrients of the entire grain seed. The process of refining the grain takes away the protein and many key nutrients. Processors add back some vitamins and minerals to enrich refined grain (for example, white flour), so refined products still contribute some nutrients. However, whole grains are healthier, and have more protein, more fiber and many important vitamins and trace minerals that refined products do not provide. That is why it is important that children and adults get most of their grains from foods rich in whole grains.

In addition, people who consume whole grains on a regular basis may be at lower risk for cardiovascular disease than those who do not. And whole grains take longer to digest, leaving people feeling full longer and less likely to overeat.

Q. Why limit 100% fruit juice?

A: While fruit juice is a good source of vitamin C, it is high in calories and doesn't provide the fiber and other nutrients found in the whole fruit.

The American Academy of Pediatrics notes that drinking juice might make people overweight and also can lead to cavities. The Academy recommends giving children more whole fruits and limiting the amount of juice they drink.

Q: What do you recommend for picky eaters?

A: Head Start's "I Am Moving, I Am Learning" nutrition and physical activity education program teaches parents and caregivers that, when it comes to meals and snacks, they have the "responsibility to provide healthy, wholesome food in a pleasant environment," and "the child's responsibility is to decide which foods to eat and how much." Some childcare providers and families have made it a rule or created a game, for example, that everyone gets to taste new foods but they also get to decide whether or not they will eat them. For some children it can take over a dozen tries before they will accept a new food. Children's appetites vary from day to day and meal to meal, so patience is the rule here. For more ideas, check out the resources at the end of this guide.

For Help Planning Meals and Snacks for Children, Please See:

Recommended Daily Meal Patterns with Description of Allowable Foods (IOM Child and Adult Care Food Program):

www.iom.edu/Reports/2010/Child-and-Adult-Care-Food-Program-Aligning-Dietary-Guidance-for-All/Recommended-Daily-Meal-Patterns.aspx

Let's Move Child Care provides tools for parents and child care providers to help reach healthy nutrition and physical activity goals from infancy to preschool:

www.healthykidshealthyfuture.org/welcome.html

www.healthykidshealthyfuture.org/home/nutrition/planning.html

Best Practices for Healthy Eating – A Guide to Help Children Grow Up Healthy (Nemours Health and Prevention Services):

www.nemours.org/content/dam/nemours/www/filebox/service/preventive/nhps/heguide.pdf

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www.mass.gov/dph/mcap



