

Tip Sheets

Best Practices for Nutrition in Child Care Settings



Quality nutrition is exceptionally important in the early years. Eating a well-balanced diet and developing

healthy eating habits will positively impact physical and mental development in children. And a well-nourished body is more capable of fighting off colds, flu, and other illnesses.

Breastfeeding and Infant Feeding

- Caregivers need to work collaboratively with the infants' parents and health care provider in establishing an effective feeding plan.
- Caregivers should use responsive feeding techniques when feeding infants, including making eye contact, talking, and responding to infants' reactions during feeding as well as their signs of hunger and fullness.
- Caregivers need to follow [CDC](#) guidelines for safe handling and storage of breast milk and infant formula.
- When infant foods are introduced, avoid foods that contain added salt and sugar.

Toddlers and Preschoolers

Preparation and Safety Recommendations

- Rinse all produce thoroughly under running water before eating, cutting, or cooking.
- Cook foods to the proper internal temperature. Use a thermometer to check temperatures to determine when a meat, fish, poultry, or egg dish is fully cooked.

- Cold food should be held at a temperature below 40°F, and warm foods should be held above 140°F.
- Keep produce and ready-to-eat foods separate from raw meat while shopping, preparing, or storing them to limit the chances of food borne illnesses.
- Supervise young children whenever they're eating or drinking. A choking child, due to an airway obstruction may not be able to make any sound to alert you that they're choking.
- Limit the use of high-sodium foods. Use herbs and spices for flavor instead of adding salt.
- Condiments such as soy sauce, ketchup, and ranch dressing can be high in sodium. If using, offer only small portions.
- Ask parents for- and document any food allergies that their child may have along with a plan of care, if needed. Be mindful that the most common food allergies are peanuts, milk, eggs, soy, wheat, tree nuts, fish, and shellfish.

Feeding Practices

- Praise children for trying new or less-preferred foods. Do not bribe or offer treats to encourage children to try new foods.
- Before removing plates or offering seconds, ask children if they are hungry or full in order to help children understand their feelings of hunger or fullness. Do not require children to clean their plates.
- Use a feeding style that strives to balance encouraging children to eat healthy foods with allowing children to make their own food choices.

Meal Environment

- Provide family-style meals as often as possible so children who are developmentally ready can serve most or all foods themselves.
- Be an enthusiastic role model to children for eating healthy foods during meals and snacks. Avoid eating or drinking unhealthy foods in front of children.
- Utilize a variety of posters, books, healthy play foods, and other learning materials to promote healthy eating.

Additional Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
Breastfeeding

www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding

USDA Food and Nutrition Service

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/feeding-infants-child-and-adult-care-food-program>

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