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Nutrition: Food and Fitness for Young Children

Children’s nutritional needs must be met while they are in child care. Nutritious snacks and lunches fuel children’s bodies and deliver the nutrients needed for growth and development. Healthy eating and exercise habits established early in life can reduce the risk of developing adult diseases such as type II diabetes and heart disease. Child care providers help children get off to a healthy start in life by offering a variety of nutritious foods and many opportunities for active play.

Many child care programs depend on the food pyramid for nutrition guidance. In the spring of 2005, the US Department of Agriculture redesigned the food pyramid and renamed it MyPyramid. It emphasizes the need to exercise and to individualize diets for specific ages and health needs. A children’s version of the MyPyramid graphic and activities were designed to use with children ages 6-11. They can be adapted to use with younger children.

MyPyramid has vertical, color-coded bands of different widths. The wider the band of color, the more food a person should eat from that food group. The different colors stress the benefits of a varied diet. Five vegetables and fruits, from dark leafy greens to red apples, should be eaten each day. A variety of whole grains, from oats to whole wheat, provide essential nutrients and fiber. Protein can come from fish, beans and tofu as well as beef and chicken. Low fat yogurt, cheese and milk provide calcium and protein.

Physical activity is highlighted by an active figure climbing a stairway up the side of the pyramid. The small steps suggest making changes slowly, one step at a time. Increase the amount of exercise each day until the recommended 60 minutes per day is achieved. Food habits can be changed slowly too. Whole wheat bread and oatmeal can be introduced gradually until half of all grains are whole grains. New fruits and vegetables can be introduced one at a time. Children younger than two need the fat in whole milk and other dairy products for healthy growth and development. Children older than two can begin the transition to fat free milk by switching to 2% milk, then to 1% and possibly to skim milk.

Sweets are no longer mentioned. Instead, the concept of discretionary calories is introduced. The number of calories a person should consume each day, without becoming overweight, depends on his or her physical development, age and activity level. When people are active and eat foods rich in nutrients and low in calories, they may still have calories left for treats like cookies and ice cream or second helpings of favorite foods.

MyPyramid focuses on the nutritional needs of children and adults age two and up. Infant and toddler nutrition will be covered in the following pages along with more information about the nutritional needs of preschoolers. Food is basic to human survival. Offering a variety of nutritious foods helps children develop eating habits that promote health and offer protection from preventable diseases and conditions. Active play is essential to build strong bones and muscles, burn off calories, and stay in shape physically and mentally.

References:


Child care providers can have a great deal of influence on what infants and young children learn about food, nutrition, and physical activity. By discussing and demonstrating healthy eating practices and fun ways to exercise, caregivers help children develop healthy habits early in life.

When young infants first come into childcare, parents decide how their babies will be fed. Some mothers prefer to breastfeed their infants while other mothers choose to bottle-feed. Both breast milk and infant formula provide babies with all the nutrition they need for the first 6 months. Providers can support mothers in their decisions and guide parents as their young infants transition into child care.

For infants, the experience of food is as much about nurturance and learning as it is about health. Infants need the closeness, warmth, and nurturance that parents and caregivers provide during feeding. Holding infants, looking at them and talking or singing to them while feeding, communicates to babies that they are safe, that they are loved, and that their needs will be met.

As infants grow, they need more nutrients than they can get from milk or formula alone. Most babies are ready for soft solid foods around 6 months of age. Infants must be able to hold their heads up and eat from a small spoon without pushing the food out with their tongue. Most infants start with rice cereal mixed thinly with formula or breast milk. When that is accepted, infants can try other grains one at a time followed by pureed fruits and vegetables.

Older, teething infants and young toddlers, who can grasp items with their hands, are usually ready for finger foods, such as bite-sized toast or pieces of banana. Foods that are small and round, such as hard candy and hot dog slices, or hard-to-chew foods such as raw carrots, are choking hazards and should not be served to children younger than three years of age.

Some foods, such as grapes and apples, can be cut into manageable pieces.

Toddler and preschoolers are at a perfect age to begin learning about and preparing food. Children this age need to explore the color, taste, smell, and texture of foods. Encourage them to help with the choice and preparation of food. Allow children to choose from a selection of nutritious foods and guide them in a discussion about how the foods they are eating will help their bodies grow.

Young children need a lot of fuel for energy and growth, but their stomachs are too small to hold much food at one meal. Snacks provide children the additional calories they require to meet their daily energy needs. Young children should be offered easy to eat foods, from all food groups, such as applesauce, finely chopped bites of chicken, cooked beans, yogurt, and toast. The Child and Adult Care Food Program’s website includes recommended portion sizes in “Meal Pattern Requirements” for infants, toddlers and preschoolers: www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/care/ProgramBasics/basics.htm#Meal%20Pattern%20Requirements

### Food Safety for Young Children

- Avoid hard, round or hard-to-chew foods
- Cut firm food into very small pieces
- Always supervise children while eating
- Have children stay seated while eating
- Learn what to do if a child is choking
Young children are learning about different foods and their likes and dislikes. Caregivers can be reassured that picky eating and “food jags” (wanting only one food) are common at this age. Continuing to make only healthy food available, and gently offering refused foods every few days, will help children learn to like a wide variety of foods.

**Great Fun!**

In addition to good nutrition, infants and young children need physical activity to thrive. The Environment Rating Scales suggest children participate in 60 minutes of physical activity a day. In addition, North Carolina Child Care Rules (.0509(d), .0511(d) and .1718(2)) require children in care to spend time outdoors each day. A great way to do both is to involve children in active play both indoors and out. Child care providers can help young children enjoy moving by guiding them through different kinds of play.

Active babies build strong muscles to use for crawling and exploring their world. Caregivers can arrange the environment to make exercise fun and easy. Consider that non-mobile infants love to look at lights and colorful objects. Hang short colorful ribbons over the changing table and move them periodically. Infants look up and down or side to side to see the ribbons, helping to develop their neck muscles.

For mobile infants, try setting up a small obstacle course either inside or outside. A hula hoop to crawl through, a pillow to crawl over, beach balls to move or go around, boxes to crawl through, and mobiles to swat are all fun ways to help babies to develop their muscles.

One year-olds are developing skills such as balancing, jumping, kicking, and throwing. Help toddlers develop arm muscles by learning to throw. Show a toddler how to crumple a piece of paper using both hands. Then offer them wrapping paper or newspaper to crumple. Throw your crumpled paper and ask the child if they can do the same. After enjoying crumpling and throwing all the paper, have the toddler help pick up the pieces and toss them in the wastebasket. There may be a strong throwing arm in the making!

Two and three year-olds love to be chased, to kick and throw balls, and to climb stairs. They will enjoy games such as bowling with beanbags, chasing after bubbles, and dancing with colorful scarves. Riding and push-pull toys are also popular with children this age.

Four and five year-olds enjoy moving and often do not like being physically inactive. They love to dance to music, sing songs, run, and engage each other and their teacher in play. Ask them to show how many ways they can cross the playground and then watch them jump, skip, leapfrog, tiptoe and sideways walk across the space! Running races, playing tag, hide and seek, and other running games are lots of fun for preschoolers. If children enjoy participating in physical activities while they are young, they are more likely to continue to enjoy physical activity in adulthood. So no matter what, keep them moving!

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**Serving Sizes through the Ages!**

MyPyramid recommends the number of servings from each food category. But a serving size varies depending on the child’s age. This example shows a serving size of applesauce for different ages.

- **Ages 1-2** - 1/4 cup (the size of a large egg)
- **Ages 3-5** - 1/2 cup (the size of a light bulb)
- **Ages 6-12** - 3/4 cup (6 oz. juice cup)

For information on serving sizes, nutrition and recipes, visit [www.fns.usda.gov/mn/Resources/childcarerecipes_INFOCRDS.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/mn/Resources/childcarerecipes_INFOCRDS.pdf)
Food Allergies

Food is the leading cause of severe allergic reactions in children. Milk, eggs, peanuts, wheat, soy, and tree nuts cause most food allergic reactions. Allergic reactions to food range from mild to life-threatening (anaphylactic shock).

Signs of food reactions:
1. Skin: itching, flushing, rash, swelling, pale or blue color
2. Gut: nausea, vomiting, cramps or diarrhea
3. Mouth: Tightening of throat, swelling of lips or tongue, hoarseness, or cough
4. Lungs: Chest tightness, shortness of breath, wheezing, or breathing difficulty
5. Nose: congestion, runny nose, sneezing
6. Eyes: itchy or teary
7. Circulation: Fast and light pulse, fainting

Prevention of food allergies: Do not serve the foods that trigger allergic reactions. Develop a health care plan for each child with a food allergy. A sample plan can be found at http://www.foodallergy.org/actionplan.pdf.

Caring for Our Children recommendations are found in Standard 4.010.
- Attach child's picture to the special health care plan.
- Post children and food allergy in classroom and food prep area.
- Have emergency medications on site.
- Provide instructions for administering the medication.
- Provide training on food allergies.
- Establish a food allergy policy. Include how staff and parents will be notified about a food allergy. Consider not allowing any known food allergy triggers in the facility. Do not allow children to trade or share foods, food utensils, or food containers.
- Carry the written health care plan and emergency medications on all field trips.

Treatment should be immediately available for emergencies.

References:

NAP SACC

Did you know that 1 out of every 3 preschoolers in NC is overweight? Being too heavy as a child can lead to asthma, other health problems and teasing from children.

NAP SACC* (Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care) gives child care providers the opportunity to assess the food they serve for meals, snacks and events like birthdays and holidays. It helps providers find ways to serve healthier foods to children. NAP SACC also encourages providers to promote active play and exercise for children and staff!

The NAP SACC project:
- Allows centers to “self-assess” their surroundings and guides them in making choices that will improve their program’s nutrition and increase children’s active play.
- Provides a Child Care Health Consultant to help the center make these improvements.
- Provides state approved training on nutrition and physical activity. Center staff members participating in the training receive contact hour credits.

National Smart Start Conference
March 6-10, 2006
Koury Convention Center, Greensboro, NC
www.ncsmartstart.org/conference/index.htm

Scoop on Poop Update
5 out of 8 specimens have been positive for viral infections. Remember to double bag soiled diapers for the Scoop on Poop study. Contact a CC CHC or nurse to collect the specimen. Questions? Contact Joan: 919-843-7151, walshj@email.unc.edu.

February

National Children’s Dental Health Month
American Heart Month
Kids’ E.N.T. (Ear, Nose and Throat) Health Month
February 3 Give Kids a Smile Day
February 3 National Wear Red Day 2005 (National Awareness Campaign for Women About Heart Disease)
February 27 National Tooth Fairy Day
February 12-19 National Child Passenger Safety Week

March

National Nutrition Month
Mental Retardation Awareness Month
Poison Prevention Awareness Month
Save Your Vision Month
March 3 Read Across America Day
March 5-11 Juvenile Arthritis Awareness Week
March 6-11 National School Breakfast Week
March 13-19 Brain Awareness Week
March 19-25 National Poison Prevention Week
March 23-April 2 National Sleep Awareness Week
Children, like adults, should eat foods from each of the five food groups every day.

**MyPyramid** Plan on www.mypyramid.gov is designed to help individuals choose the foods and amounts that are right for them. Parents can find out what their personal nutritional needs are. They can also see what the recommended foods and amounts are for their children 2 years of age and older.

**The Five Food Groups**

**Grains:** Brown rice, popcorn, whole-wheat cereal flakes, bread and pasta

**Vegetables:** broccoli, greens, carrots, sweet potatoes, corn, tomatoes, tomato juice, dried beans and lentils

**Fruits:** pears, peaches, plums, berries, melons, citrus fruits, and 100% fruit juice

**Milk:** milk, cheese, and yogurt

**Meats & Beans:** lean meats, poultry, nuts, seeds, dried beans and peas

*But how much is enough?*

In general, the younger the person is, the smaller the portion of food should be. Using measuring cups when serving food gives parents confidence that they are serving just the right amount of food. The Food Group Chart below shows the recommended amounts of food needed daily for preschoolers. Two and three year olds require less food each day than children four to eight years old. Children with specific nutritional needs, food allergies and those with developmental delays should follow the advice of their health care providers.

### Food Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Groups</th>
<th>2-3 year-olds</th>
<th>4-8 year-olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grains</td>
<td>3 ounces</td>
<td>4-5 ounces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>1 cup</td>
<td>1-1/2 cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits</td>
<td>1 cup</td>
<td>1-1/2 cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>2 cups</td>
<td>2 cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meats &amp; Beans</td>
<td>2 ounces</td>
<td>3-4 ounces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 slice of bread = 1 ounce of grains

1/2 apple = 1/2 cup of fruits

1 egg = 1 ounce of meat and beans

1 cup of yogurt = 1 cup of milk

1 ear of corn = 1 cup of vegetables

**Healthy Meals and Snacks**

Make a mini-pizza supper with whole wheat English muffins topped with tomato sauce, bits of lean meat, chopped cooked vegetables, and toasted cheese. Add a glass of milk and fruit for dessert. For a healthy snack, slice apples and cheese and serve with whole grain crackers. For little ones, how about a fruit smoothie made with yogurt and blended fruit?

**Physical Activity**

Physical Activity helps build bones, muscle and joints. It increases flexibility, reduces stress, helps maintain a healthy weight, reduces the risk of chronic illness, and provides a feeling of well being. Children and adults benefit most when they get 60 minutes of physical activity every day. Parents can help their children get moving by playing with them. The more families walk, run, bike, and play active games, the less time they will spend on sedentary activities such as watching TV or playing computer games. Active play helps children and adults release excess energy and it improves their health, while offering opportunities to explore and learn.

Most activities can be adjusted to fit different ages. Fun physical activities for the whole family include:

- yard bowling with bean bags
- riding bikes, trikes, and wheeled toys
- taking nature walks or hikes
- playing tag – you’re it!
- racing with eggs on spoons – don’t drop it!
- crawling, skipping and climbing through obstacle courses
- digging and building.

Whenever possible, walk to restaurants, stores, and the library to fit exercise into everyday routines. Small improvements add up.

**Family Health Tips:**

- Walk together to nearby restaurants and stores.
- Make a fresh fruit smoothie!
- Make a snowman together and go inside for vegetable soup and whole wheat crackers!

**References:**


Nutrition and Play

The Color Me Healthy Way

Preschoolers in Guilford County are moving and eating healthy and having fun while doing it. How? The Color Me Healthy Way! During 2001 and 2002 the North Carolina Cooperative Extension developed the Color Me Healthy program. It provides fun, interactive lessons on physical activity and healthy eating.

Child care nurse consultants teach Color Me Healthy lessons at health fairs and to both child care providers and children. Providers are given a Color Me Healthy kit full of lessons they can do with the children. They seem to enjoy the program as much as the children! The Activity Alphabet lesson, children use their bodies to imitate animals and people whose names begin with a letter in the alphabet. Act like an Ape! Imaginary trips are a fun way for children to get moving while pretending to go to different places and events. Let's go to the zoo!

In the United States one in five children is overweight. Inactive children, when compared with active children, weigh more and have higher blood pressure. Child care providers help children maintain a healthy weight. They can provide nutritious food and encourage children to be active. A physically active lifestyle adopted early in life may continue into adulthood. Exercise helps children and adults improve their strength and endurance. It builds healthy bones and muscles. It also reduces anxiety and stress and increase self esteem.

So, as a provider, please be sure to prepare policies that give parents clear guidelines and expectations about how your child care facility functions.

Color Me Healthy is a great example of how lessons about nutrition and exercise can be fun and meaningful.

Cabarrus County CCHCs

Cabarrus County has two Child Care Health Consultants, Wanda Norman and me, Anita Sweeney. We are registered nurses at Cabarrus Health Alliance who work with 39 child care centers, 45 family child care homes, and 17 More At Four classrooms. We make weekly visits to facilities that serve a large number of children at risk, have a high number of infants and toddlers, or serve children who have a child care subsidy. We visit More At Four classrooms every other week.

Wanda and I spend most of our time visiting facilities. The visit may last fifteen minutes to two hours. We might assess a child for a communicable illness, review an immunization record, or spend time interacting with children and answering questions from providers. We schedule visits to teach classes for children on Hand washing, Germs, Nutrition, and Safety. Nothing can match the satisfaction we feel when a child runs up to us on our next visit and exclaims, "I wash my hands really good", or "I tried a new food today".

We answer phones calls from providers, parents, and others in the community.

We also provide DCD approved training for providers on topics such as Communicable Disease Control, Asthma, ITS-SIDS, and Child Abuse and Neglect. We emphasize proper hand washing in all we do. Our regulated facilities had only 2 reportable cases of communicable disease this year.

Wanda and I have a combined total of 65 years in nursing! We use our experience in pediatric, psychiatric, geriatric, maternal health, school health, and public health nursing in our roles as Child Care Health Consultants.
Pass the Peas Please!

Five Fat Peas
A counting fingerplay

Five fat peas in a pea pod pressed (hold hand in a fist)
One grew, two grew, and so did all the rest. (put thumb and fingers up one by one)
They grew and grew (raise hand in the air very slowly)
And did not stop,
Until one day
The pod went POP! (clap hands together)

The USDA recommends people eat 5 servings of vegetables and fruit each day. Peas are packed with nutrition and low in fat and calories. Introduce the idea of "5 a day" with activities using the theme of peas.

Pea Shoots in a Pot
Pea shoots are the edible seedlings of pea plants. Grow them in a pot indoors for a quick harvest.

Add potting soil to a wide pot until nearly full. Scatter seeds thickly and cover with 1 inch of soil. Water thoroughly. Shoots will sprout within 10 days. Harvest when seedlings are 3-4 inches long. Toss them in a tasty green salad or add them to a stir-fry during the last few minutes of cooking.


Peas in the Garden
This quick-growing crop can be started in the early spring and is fun for kids to eat right off the vine. Peas take about 10 days to germinate and mature in about 60 days. They prefer cooler, partially shaded locations in the garden, they should be sown closely, about 1" apart.

Snow pea pods are edible and can be grown without a trellis. Dip the snow peas in light yogurt for a yummy treat!

Peas on Paper
Have children make the color green by mixing blue and yellow paint. Drip drops of green paint become peas on a plate …or peas rolling off the plate!

Peas in Boats
Make green playdough (see recipe). Have children shape small playdough peas and craft pea pod boats for peas to sit inside. Imagine the journey peas take to get to the table. They are buried in the ground, then sprout and grow tall. Soon peas can be harvested and eaten, helping little "sprouts" grow tall!

Kool-Aid Play Dough
- 1 c. flour
- 1 c. boiling water
- 1/2 c. salt
- 3 teaspoons Cream of Tartar
- 1-2 packages Kool-Aid Mix (lemon-lime & berry blue unsweetened)
- 1 tablespoon cooking oil

Add Kool-Aid, oil and food coloring to boiling water. Mix with remaining ingredients. Knead on a heatproof surface until smooth and cool enough for children to handle. Store in a tightly covered container.

Nutrition Facts about Peas
A 3/4 cup serving of peas has
- As much protein as an egg or a tablespoon of peanut butter
- As much vitamin C as 2 large apples
- More fiber than a slice of whole wheat bread
- Rich in Vitamin A, Folate, and Iron
- Low fat and sodium

Did you know?
- Peas were found in ancient Egyptian tombs!
- The oldest pea ever found is 3,000 years old!
- During the reign of Elizabeth the 1st peas were considered a delicacy.
- During the Roman Empire peas were considered poisonous unless dried.
- Thick fogs in London during the 19th and 20th centuries were called 'pea-soupers' because of their density and green tinge.
- The world record for eating peas is held by Janet Harris of England. In 1984 she ate 7175 peas one by one in 60 minutes using chopsticks!

Children's Books on Peas
Eat Your Peas Louise
by Pegeen Snow 1985 (P/S)

Little Pea
by Amy Krouse Rosenthal 2005 (P/S)

Pea Pod Babies
by Karen Baicker 2003 (I/T)

The Pea Blossom
by Amy Lowry Poole 2005 (P/S)

The Very Smart Pea and the Princess-to-be
by Mini Grey 2003 (P/S)

* P/S = Preschool - School-age
I/T = Infant - Toddler

References:
CDC. 5 A Day: Vegetable of the Month: Peas. www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/5ADay/month/peas.htm
Q: Many of the children in our child care program do not have a dentist. They are not receiving preventive care such as cleanings and fluoride varnish. What can we do to help these families find dental care for their children?

A: February is National Children’s Dental Month – a great time to focus on the oral health needs of young children. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends that children see a dentist when their first tooth comes in, or by their first birthday, and every six months after that. Unfortunately many children in North Carolina do not have a dentist. Families without dental insurance often find dental care too costly. Some communities do not have a dentist who provides care for young children. Parents do not always know that oral health contributes to their child’s overall well being.

Your child care program can help families by providing education. A child care health consultant (CCHC) can assist you with developing an oral health curriculum for children and families. Children and families will benefit from understanding how healthy foods develop and maintain strong teeth. Oral hygiene cleans the teeth, gums and mouth. This reduces risk for tooth decay and infections. Brushing teeth during child care helps children develop oral hygiene habits.

A CCHC can help locate resources for dental care. Local health departments and local dental hygienist programs or dental schools may be resources for your families. The CCHCs have information about North Carolina’s Children Health Insurance Programs, Health Check (Medicaid)/NC Health Choice. Any child covered by Health Check/NC Health Choice is eligible for dental care, including preventive cleaning and fluoride varnish. Regular teeth cleaning by a dental hygienist or a dentist helps keep gums, mouth and teeth healthy. Fluoride varnish can be applied to teeth every six months to protect against cavities. Parents can find more information about Health Check/NC Health Choice online at www.nchealthystart.org or by calling the NC Family Health Resource Line at 1-800-367-2229.

The children and families in your program will benefit from learning about both oral hygiene practices and local dental care resources.

Reference:

Don’t let an emergency take you by surprise! Contact a CCHC near you or Evie at evie@unc.edu for information about Emergency Preparedness and Response Trainings being offered in your area.