



Eco-Healthy Child Care®



Eco-Healthy Child Care® helps early childhood learning environments to be as healthy, safe and green as possible by reducing children's exposure to toxic chemicals.

Improving Nutrition and Promoting Physical Activity

Health Concerns

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the rate of children becoming overweight has increased rapidly over the past twenty years. Pre-school aged children (2-5 yrs old) weigh more than the same age group did 30 years ago. Almost 1 in 4 preschoolers are either overweight or at risk for becoming overweight. Obesity now affects 17% of all children and adolescents in the United States - triple the rate from just one generation ago. So, do your part to ensure children are active and eating right!

Choose organic or sustainable foods when you can. Organic certification means that no growth hormones, antibiotics, synthetic pesticides or genetically modified ingredients were used to grow or process the food.

Switch to nonfat dairy products and limit meats in children's diets. Saturated fat found in animal products is a major contributor to heart disease later in life. Avoiding animal fats reduces exposure to toxins that accumulate in fat, like dioxins and PCBs. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends non-fat or low-fat (skim or 1%) dairy for children after age two. Healthy fats include nuts, seeds, olives, avocados, flaxseed and wheat germ.

Serve more "whole food." Cook "from scratch" whenever possible. Read labels and choose foods with ingredients you recognize. Choosing foods with fewer ingredients will help you avoid added salt, sugar, fats, dyes and other artificial additives.

Avoid foods with high fructose corn syrup. In addition to its empty calories, this additive, found in many processed and packaged foods, may also contain mercury, a neurotoxin.

Replace fruit juice with water and a piece of whole fruit. Fruit juice provides calories with little nutrition and contributes to cavities. Whole fruit is nutrient-rich and a great source of fiber. Water is free and healthy. The money you don't spend on juice can help offset the cost of local and organic produce.

Buy from local sources. Locally grown fruits and vegetables are likely to have higher nutrient levels because they can get to market quickly (produce loses nutrients every day after harvest). Find a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) in your area to get local fresh fruits and vegetables at a reasonable price. If restricted to buying food in bulk from a "big box" store, ask for whole grain, low fat, low sugar and organic choices. If fresh is out of season, then frozen local produce is a good choice.

Grow your own! Whether in a windowsill planter or a full-blown garden, growing herbs or vegetables is a simple way to save money, avoid pesticides, and help kids learn where their food comes from. Nothing tastes better than veggies and fruit picked fresh from your garden!

Avoid canned products. Most cans are lined with BPA, a toxic chemical that can leach into food and be a health risk for children. Choose fresh, frozen or dried options for beans, pasta, fruits and veggies. If you have to use canned, inquire whether the lining is BPA-free.

Never microwave or cook with plastic even if it is labeled “microwave safe.” When plastic is heated, it can leach toxic chemicals like BPA and phthalates into food.

Buy safer cookware. When scratched, old or overheated, Teflon and other non-stick coating can leach toxic chemicals into food. Cast iron may be more expensive, but it is safer and more durable. Also consider stainless steel pitchers, ceramics with non-lead coatings, and thick Pyrex bowls and plates.

Limit intake of fish species with higher mercury levels. See *Mercury fact sheet*.

Support breastfeeding. Welcome mothers who wish to continue breastfeeding by providing a com-

fortable, private space for mothers who wish to breastfeed during the day and by training staff in the proper feeding of breast-fed infants. Research shows that breastfeeding can help to prevent obesity, protect against infections, reduce the risk of SIDS, and prevent other chronic diseases.

Keep children active. Children should have 15 minutes of “unstructured” physical activity for every hour they are in child care. Free play is essential for social, emotional, and cognitive developmental milestones and managing stress. Preschoolers should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time (except when sleeping).

- Go on a walk. Go biking. Make up a dance. Play on the playground. Kick or throw a ball. Play tag. Practice tumbling. Run around the yard!
- Ensure children are using appropriate safety equipment such as: helmets and closed-toe, sturdy shoes.
- Be sure to closely monitor children with asthma or exercise-induced asthma.

Nutrition and Physical Activity Resources

- American Academy of Pediatricians & American Heart Association. 2006. Dietary recommendations for children and adolescents: A guide for practitioners. *Pediatrics* 117(2). Available at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/117/2/544>
- National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/physicalactivity/index.htm
- Let’s Move Child Care www.healthykidshealthyfuture.org/
- Environmental Working Group. Shopper’s Guide to Pesticides: the Dirty Dozen. Available at www.foodnews.org/methodology.php.
- Farm to Preschool www.fns.usda.gov/end/F2S/farm_to_childcare.htm

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Eco-Healthy Child Care® (EHCC) is a science-based, award-winning national program that seeks to improve the environmental health of children by partnering with child care professionals to eliminate or reduce environmental health hazards found in child care facilities.

Eco-Healthy Child Care®

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