

IMPROVING NUTRITION & PROMOTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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.



HEALTH CONCERNS

Child care professionals are in a key position to provide children with opportunities to learn about and practice healthy eating, and to encourage regular physical activity. **Healthy eating and being physically active can help children achieve and maintain a healthy body weight, consume important nutrients, and reduce the risk of developing health conditions.** Empty calories from added sugars and solid fats contribute to 40% of daily calories for children—affecting the overall quality of their diets.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that **child care facilities implement policies and practices to create an environment that supports students in making healthy eating and physical activity choices.**

Serve a variety of fresh or frozen vegetables--choosing organic 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. Aim to provide a variety of vegetables, including those that are dark green, red and orange; beans and peas; starchy and others, each week.

LIMIT SATURATED AND TRANS FATS

Limit saturated fats — fats that mainly come from animal sources of food, such as red meat, poultry and full-fat dairy products. **Replace saturated fats with vegetable and nut oils.** Healthier fats are also naturally present in olives, nuts, avocados and seafood. **Limit trans fats by avoiding foods that contain partially hydrogenated oil.**

Encourage children to eat and drink fat-free or low-fat dairy products, such as milk, yogurt, or cheese.

SERVE MORE "WHOLE" FOODS

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.

LIMIT ADDED SUGARS

Examples of added sugars include brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, or honey.

Encourage children to **eat a variety of fresh or frozen fruit (organic whenever possible) and drink water — rather than fruit juice.** Whole fruit is nutrient-rich and a great source of fiber. Water is free and healthy. Make sure you test your water for contaminants like lead and carry out mitigation activities if necessary. See [EHCC's Lead Fact-Sheet](#).



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--organic if available--** at a reasonable price. By purchasing locally grown foods you are also helping the climate--less transportation equals less carbon dioxide emitted.

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!

Make sure to first test your soil's lead concentration before growing food in it. You may need to bring in clean soil if you have high lead levels and/or use raised, lined, and sealed garden beds.



AVOID CANNED PRODUCTS

Most cans are lined with **BPA or its sister compounds (BPS or BPF), 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. See [EHCC's Plastics fact sheet](#) for more info.

NEVER MICROWAVE PLASTIC

Never microwave 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, non-stick coating can leach toxic chemicals into food. **Cast iron is safer and more durable. Also consider stainless steel pitchers, ceramics with non-leaded coatings, and thick Pyrex bowls and plates.**

LIMIT MERCURY LEVELS FROM FISH

Limit intake of fish species with higher mercury levels.
See [EHCC's Mercury fact sheet](#).

SUPPORT BREASTFEEDING.

Welcome mothers who are breastfeeding by providing a comfortable, private space for those who wish to breastfeed during the day, and ensure staff are trained 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 mile-stones 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.

IMPROVING NUTRITION & PROMOTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY RESOURCES

Healthy Kids Healthy Future, Resources for Nurturing Healthy Eaters

<https://healthykidshealthyfuture.org/5-healthy-goals/nurture-healthy-eaters/resources/>

Environmental Working Group, Shopper's Guide to Pesticides: the Dirty Dozen

<https://www.ewg.org/foodnews/>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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