

What Works in Early Care & Education

healthy eating • physical activity • healthy weight



We all want young children to develop healthy habits, and we know that these habits begin at home and in the early childhood setting. When children see their caregivers as healthy role models and take an active role in caring for their bodies, make appropriate food choices, and participate in physical activity they feel a sense of pride and accomplishment in their independence and develop a sound foundation for healthy growth in all other areas of development.







Where to Start:

1. Integrate nutrition and physical activity instruction into the daily activities and lesson plans; link curriculum activities to the program - food service, teacher/provider, and family involvement.
2. Ensure that all program meals meet USDA/CACFP guidelines and are appealing to children.
3. Provide education for children, parents/caregivers and teachers/providers on healthy eating and physical activity concepts.
4. Implement a wellness policy that incorporates nutrition and physical activity strategies.
5. Utilize resources for child health services including health information, screening, and referrals.
6. Utilize existing resources:
 - ❖ Wisconsin Early Care and Education Active Early Resource Kit
<http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/P0/P00280.pdf>
 - ❖ Wisconsin Early Care and Education Healthy Bites Resource Kit
http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/physicalactivity/Sites/Community/Childcare/HealthyBites_Sept8.pdf
 - ❖ Ten Steps to Breastfeeding Friendly Childcare Centers
http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/physicalactivity/pdf_files/BreastfeedingFriendlyChildCareCenters.pdf
7. Make connections with community wellness activities to strengthen buy-in from parents/caregivers and teachers/providers. Examples include:
 - ❖ Form partnerships with community groups, businesses or healthcare organizations to develop early care and education programs or initiatives. Tie into existing promotions, media campaigns and special events (i.e. Obesity Prevention Month, Week of the Young Child, etc.).
 - ❖ Connect with summer programs and other initiatives in the community that support wellness for year-round activity.
 - ❖ Join or form a local coalition to address nutrition & physical activity in a coordinated manner.

Suggested Intervention/Program Strategies:

The following page lists several proven or best-practice strategies for promoting good health in early childhood. While not comprehensive, the strategies can serve as a guide to encourage the best possible environment for the health and well being of the young children you care about.

Focus Areas for Early Childhood Health:*

-  Increase fruit & vegetable consumption
-  Decrease sweetened beverage consumption
-  Decrease food portion size (portion control)
-  Increase physical activity
-  Decrease TV and other "screen" time
-  Increase Breastfeeding

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Evidence-Based Focus Areas

for more information: Wisconsin Department of Health Services • Division of Public Health
Wisconsin Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Program • PO Box 2659 • Madison WI 53701-2659
<http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/physicalactivity/index.htm> • 608.267.3694

Physical Activity Strategies

Physical Activity Time & Play Space

1. Provide a total of at least 90 minutes of physical activity per day for toddlers and 120 minutes per day for preschoolers. That total should include:
 - ❖ Structured physical activity (teacher-led) provided to all children at least twice a day for a total of at least 60 minutes (30 minutes for children ages 1 to 2)
 - ❖ Active (free) play time provided to all children for at least 30 minutes each day for toddlers and at least 60 minutes each day for preschoolers
2. Adequate space is available for both indoor and outdoor physical activity
3. Children are not sedentary for more than 30 minutes at a time except when sleeping
4. During active (free) play time, adults often or always join children and make positive statements about the activity
5. Safety checks on equipment occur once per week
6. Adults and children are encouraged to wear clothing and footwear that permits easy and safe movement

Indoor Activity

1. Portable play equipment that stimulates a variety of gross motor skills (pedal toys, balls, tumbling mats) is available for all children to use at the same time
2. When weather is not suitable to go outdoors, indoor play space is available for activities

Outdoor Activity

1. Outdoor active play is provided for all children 2 or more times per day
2. Outdoor play areas have a shaded space that is large enough for group games
3. Outdoor play space includes open, grassy areas and paths for wheeled toys (e.g. wagons, tricycles)
4. A wide variety of fixed play equipment (swings, slides, climbing equipment, overhead ladders) is available and accommodates the needs of all children

Infants

1. Physical activity for infants focuses on exploratory movement and skill development
2. Infants are placed in settings that encourage and stimulate movement experiences and active play for short periods of time several times a day

TV & Screen Time

1. Television and video use is limited to less than 60 minutes per day for preschool children
2. No screen time for children under 2 years of age

Adaptations for Special Needs

1. Enough equipment that is appropriate for gross motor activity is available for children with special needs
2. Children with special needs are provided opportunities for active play while other children are physically active



Nutrition Strategies

Fruit & Vegetable Consumption

1. Serve more fruits & vegetables with meals & snacks. (1 fruit and 2 vegetables in lunches and dinners)
2. Fruit is offered in its own juice (no syrups) all of the time
3. Fried or pre-fried potatoes (French fries, tator tots, hash browns) are offered <1 time/week or never
4. Provide an opportunity for children to garden
5. Talk informally with children about trying and enjoying healthy foods all of the time

Sugar Sweetened Beverage Consumption

1. Provide milk (*non-fat or low-fat, not sweetened or flavored*), water, or 100% juice with no sugar added
2. Water is accessible or available upon request

Portion Control

1. Follow CACFP meal pattern for proper serving sizes
2. Meals are served family style (children serve themselves with limited help) all of the time
3. Juice is limited to a total of 4-6 ounces or less per day for children
4. Lean Meat/meat alternates can be served at breakfast up to 3 times a week

Breastfeeding

1. Provide an appropriate place for mothers to breastfeed their baby
2. Implement policies that support breastfeeding

High Energy Dense Foods (Junk Foods)

1. High-calorie, low-nutrition foods (cookies, cakes, chips, candy, frozen treats, and other sweets) are served infrequently, if at all
2. Parents/caregivers are provided guidelines for healthy options that can be brought in for holidays, birthdays, and other celebrations
3. Snacks consist of age-appropriate servings of 2 or more of the following most of the time: vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy or low-fat protein

General Nutrition and Physical Activity

Nutrition and Physical Activity Education

1. Nutrition and physical activity education is offered to:
 - ❖ Teachers/Providers: 2 times per year or more, including ideas for lesson plans and activities
 - ❖ Children: 1 time or more per week
 - ❖ Parents/Caregivers: 2 times per year or more (workshops, activities, take-home materials)

Other Nutrition and Physical Activity Strategies

1. Active play time and food are not used as a punishment or reward
2. A written wellness policy is implemented
3. Teachers/providers show visible support for physical activity and/or nutrition by having posters, pictures, or books displayed in every room
4. Foods with Nutrition Facts labels should have zero trans fat

Role-Modeling

1. Adults sit at the table with children and consume the same food and drinks
2. Adults encourage, but do not force, children to eat