



Mealtime Memo for Child Care

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Nutrition Education: Why, When, Where, and How

Nutrition education provides basic information about foods and the benefits of making healthful food choices. This information can raise awareness of good food choices for children, parents, and child care providers, and can encourage children to try new, healthy foods. The food children eat now will directly influence their future.

Food is a source of energy. Choosing healthy foods provides

the energy to grow and play, and provides the building blocks of a strong, healthy body that aids in the growth and development of young

children. Good nutrition habits can potentially increase academic success and decrease health care cost in the future. Since there is such a close link

between diet and health, nutrition education has become essential in child care programs.



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Nutrition Education: Why, When, Where, and How



Why

It is important to teach children about healthy foods and their health benefits. When children learn these lessons at a young age, they are more likely to make healthier food choices throughout their adult life. As stated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, healthy eating reduces risk for obesity, dental caries, and several diseases that can lead to death such as diabetes, heart disease and stroke. Nutrition education is necessary in order to equip children with the knowledge to make educated food choices.

When

Anytime can be a great time to incorporate nutrition education, such as mealtime, story time, and play time. A child care provider can use every opportunity to teach children about making nutritious food choices.

Where

Nutrition education can occur at any location. Take advantage of learning opportunities in the play area with pretend foods, during meals, or at story time. Learning about nutrition can take place inside the classroom as well as outside of the classroom with field trips to a farm or children's museum. Invite children to experience new foods through taste testing and preparing simple snacks. The more children are exposed to healthy foods, the more likely they are to try them.

How

Nutrition education can be done traditionally through teacher directed activities or during child directed activities such as free play or unstructured play time.

The best way to implement nutrition education is to be creative. There are many resources that have fun games, lesson plans, and activities to teach nutrition education, in addition there are many ways to implement nutrition education such as:

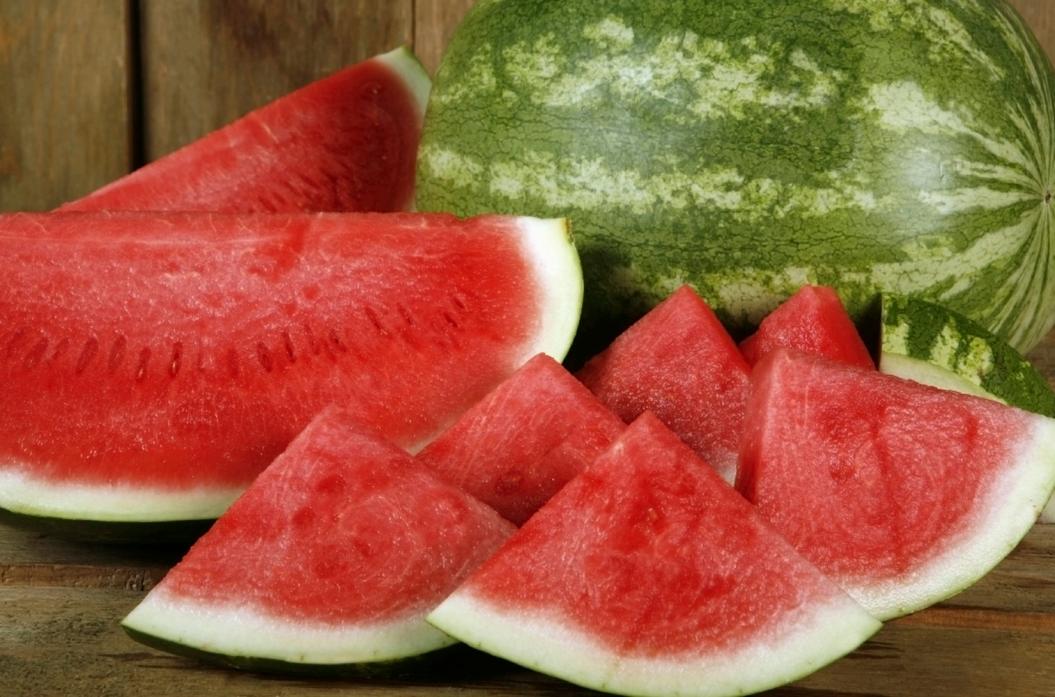
- Games: Food group games and nutrition word games
- Stories: Reading books about fruits and vegetables to children
- Music and movement: sing “nutrition centered” songs or dance to music with nutrition based lyrics

Some essential resources include:

CARE Connection: Nutrition Education – <http://www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=207>

USDA: Team Nutrition – <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/team-nutrition>

Nutrition Education – <http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/professional-and-career-resources/nutrition-education>



Fruit of the Month Watermelon

Did you know watermelon was first harvested about 5,000 years ago in Egypt? It is the most consumed melon in the United States and is made up mostly of water. In fact 92% of the melon is water. There are five types that can be purchased: seeded, seedless, mini, yellow, and orange. Watermelon is an excellent source of vitamin A and C. In addition, it provides vitamin B6 and potassium. Select watermelons that are symmetrical and heavy for size, with a yellow spot where it sat to ripen in the sun.

Nutrition Tip

In the past, carbohydrates have received criticism, but carbohydrates are the body's main source of fuel. Carbohydrates are more than starchy or processed foods. Carbohydrates include starches, fruits, and dairy products. There are two types: simple and complex carbohydrates. Simple carbohydrates, also known as simple sugars, are usually found in processed foods and candy. Complex carbohydrates are found in bread, crackers, pasta, and rice. Healthier options are unrefined complex carbohydrates such as whole grains. These options have more vitamins, minerals and fiber than the refined or processed selections. Eating the right carbohydrates supports the wellbeing of children and a healthy lifestyle.

Nutrition Fact

Vitamin D is an important nutrient not found in many foods. It is obtained mostly from exposure to the sun. Many people are deficient, or do not get enough vitamin D in their daily diet. Vitamin D plays a role in growth and development, decreases inflammation, and improves immune functions meaning the body's defense system against illness and diseases. It assists calcium absorption which makes it very important for growing children. A deficiency can lead to thin, brittle bones. It can also lead to serious issues such as rickets in children (which means the bones are not readily mineralized) and osteomalacia or bone softening in adults. Generally, sufficient vitamin D levels can be reached through 5-30 minutes of sun exposure at least twice a week. It is important to allow children ample outside playtime to maintain appropriate amounts of vitamin D. If sun exposure is more than 15 minutes, sunscreen might be necessary to prevent future skin damage and aging.



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