



Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

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It's About That Time: Enhancing Nutrition Education Programs to Promote Healthy Eating Habits

Nutrition education is one of the most beneficial and rewarding ways

to introduce new foods and promote healthy eating habits to young children.

When children are engaged in hands-on, nutrition-related activities, they are more likely to apply the information learned in real-life situations, such as choosing fresh fruits and vegetables over foods high in sugar. In addition, nutrition education

provides opportunities for young children to learn why it is important

to choose nutritious foods. Knowing the “why factor” promotes optimum growth and development, and it aids in establishing lifelong, healthy eating habits. In celebration of the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s *Week of the Young Child* (WOYC), take

this month to enhance your nutrition education program to better help the children in your care.



Nutrition Education Activities and Curricula

Nutrition education programs are easily enhanced by adding activities to your current curriculum. One option is to use arts and crafts to introduce nutrition, such as creating a weekly food collage that focuses on a specific food, using images and words from magazines or newspapers. Another option is use literacy to teach children about nutrition, such as reading nutrition-related books to the children and adding books about food and healthy eating to the reading section of your classroom. Lastly, use music to teach children about nutrition through

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Nutrition Education Activities and Curricula

singing, chanting, rhyming, and listening to nutrition-related music. These simple changes can help the children in your care develop lifelong healthy eating habits.

As you begin to enhance your nutrition education program, you may need additional resources. There are several nutrition education resources and curricula designed specifically for early childhood programs. For example, the National Food Service Management Institute's (NFSMI) *More Than Mud Pies* found at <http://www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=247>. This nutrition education curriculum provides both staff and children with enjoyable activities that encourage positive ideas about nutrition and food. The 54 lessons are built around the seasons of the year. Children will engage in age-appropriate activities to learn about growth, nutrition, and food preparation. In addition, the *Farm to Preschool* website has a compiled list of nutrition education curricula on physical activity, gardening, farming, and various other topics. Visit the *Farm to Preschool* website at <http://www.farmtopreschool.org/curricula.html> for more information on each curriculum.



Week of the Young Child

Sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the *Week of the Young Child* is April 12-18, 2015. During this time, child care providers and others in the early childhood education profession celebrate young children and the importance of education. In addition, this week serves as a great time to raise awareness and to plan how best to continue meeting the needs of children and families nationwide. As you make plans to celebrate the WOYC, incorporate health and nutrition activities into your daily celebrations. Some examples for each day of the WOYC are below.

- April 12: Fruit and Vegetable Day – Children and staff dress in the color of their favorite fruit or vegetable.
- April 13: Gardening Day – Children and staff plant seeds in a cup, bucket, or garden, and watch it grow over time.
- April 14: Active Day – Children and staff dress up in fitness clothing and participate in fun physical activities throughout the day.
- April 15: Farmer Day – Children and staff visit a farm, or a farmer visits the child care facility to talk to the children about farming, animals, and food.
- April 16: Chef Day – A local chef visits the child care facility to talk to the children about healthy food and provides child-friendly food demonstrations.

These are just some simple tips for incorporating nutrition activities into the WOYC. For additional tools for planning for the WOYC from NAEYC, visit <http://www.naeyc.org/woyc/eventplanning> to check out the NAEYC's *Event Planning Handbook*.

Fruit of the Month: Strawberry



Strawberries were originally grown in North and South America but are now harvested on all continents, except Africa and Australia. In the United States, California and Florida are the leading sources for strawberries. This flavorful fruit is filled with nutrients and antioxidants, including vitamin C and folate. Whether selecting strawberries for the nutritional benefits or as a sweet treat, choose firm, bright, and red strawberries with fresh, green caps that are intact. Be sure to refrain from washing them until you are ready to serve to the children in your care.



Recipe of the Month

Chicken Nuggets

Chicken nuggets are an all-time favorite food for many young children. While often purchased pre-made for convenience cooking, chicken nuggets can be prepared from scratch. One recipe to use is the “Chicken Nuggets” recipe from the *USDA Recipes for Child Care* resource below. It is sure to be a yummy dish for the children in your care.

Ingredients:

- 4 oz – Enriched dry bread crumbs
- 1 ½ tsp – Salt
- ½ tsp – Ground black or white pepper
- 3 lb, 7 oz – Raw boneless, skinless chicken
- 3 oz – Low-fat yogurt

Equipment:

- Pan release spray
- 2 – 13”x18”x1” half-sheet pans
- Conventional oven

Directions:

1. In a small bowl, combine salt, pepper, and bread crumbs. Set aside for step 3.
2. In another bowl, coat chicken with yogurt.
3. Using the mixture from step one, roll chicken pieces in bread crumbs to coat.
4. Spray pan with pan release spray. Then, place 25 pieces of chicken in a single layer on each pan.
5. Bake in conventional oven on 500 °F for 13-17 minutes. Heat to 165 °F or higher for 15 seconds and hold for hot service at 140 °F or warmer.

Yield: 25 servings

For CACFP crediting information and other ways to prepare this recipe, visit http://www.nfsmi.org/USDA_recipes/cc_recipes/D-09B.pdf to download the “Chicken Nuggets” recipe.

Nutrition Fact

Do you know why physical activity is often included when discussing nutrition? Research has proven that physical activity helps maintain a healthy weight. Along with burning calories to control weight, physical activity helps regulate appetite, boosts metabolism, aids sleep, and is associated with a decreased risk for several diseases, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and osteoporosis.

Fortunately, physical activity does not require children to spend hours at the gym each day. Physical activity goals can be met by incorporating a variety of child-friendly activities throughout the day, including running outside, dancing, jumping rope, hula-hooping, or stretching. Exposing children to physical activity early can help them find an activity they are interested in and help them develop a habit of exercising and being active throughout their life.



Nutrition Education Tips for Success

When introducing nutrition-related activities to young children, always keep the following tips in mind:

- Children are natural explorers, and they need hands-on activities that engage their senses.
- Children need activities that are developmentally appropriate, fun, and interesting.
- Select and plan easier activities before harder activities to allow children to build on what they already know.
- Be flexible and take advantage of teachable moments because some activities will need to be changed or adapted to meet the needs of the children in your care.

For additional tips on planning nutrition education activities, check out NFSMI's *How to Plan a Nutrition Education Activity* at http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/201009_22093456.pdf.

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