



Health Fact Sheet-Obesity in Young Children

It's no secret that childhood obesity is on the rise. According to the Center of Disease Control, the number of children who are obese has more than tripled in the last 30 years. Approximately 10% of children aged 2- 5 years is overweight. Research points to high-fat diets and lack of exercise as the reasons more and more preschoolers are on their way to obesity. Potential health problems related to weight, such as diabetes, makes nutrition a major health concern.

Child care providers play a vital role in a child's nutrition. While many programs serve meals and snacks that conform to USDA nutrition guidelines, children do not necessarily eat balanced meals at home.

Caring for Our Children, the national health and safety performance standards for child care, recommends a written nutrition plan for each program. The plan would include the amount and types of food to meet each child's metabolic, growth and energy needs as well as steps to avoid and respond to choking, food allergies and tooth decay. Families should be given a copy of the plan at enrollment so they understand the nutritional aspects of the program.

The plan should also include basic nutritional recommendations, such as the following:

1. Only 100% fruit juice is served from a cup and at specific meal and snack times, not continuously during the day when a child is thirsty.
2. Milk will be served during meal time.
3. Water will be available to children throughout the day.
4. Five fruits and/vegetables will be served to children during full-time care.

Portion control is an important factor in child care. Children need to receive the appropriate amount to food to meet their nutritional needs and curb hunger. If too little food is served, children will be hungry; if too much is served, the food will be wasted. A basic portion size for children up to age five consists of one tablespoon of a food item per year age of the child. For example a three-year old would be served three tablespoons of applesauce. Make a test plate, using the correct measurement of food as a guide for serving. Teachers and children will see what the appropriate amount of food and eventually learn to serve themselves. Child sized utensils and serving bowls on rubberized mats will keep the family style meals less prone to spills.

Educating children and their families should be incorporated into the daily curriculum. Toddlers increase vocabulary by naming and describing the foods they are eating. Teachers can introduce new fruits and vegetables, discussing the land of origin, finding the country on the globe and discussing any cultural ties. Children learn math skills when discussing serving sizes and how to divide a pizza for lunch. Dramatic play area should be stocked with boxes of low sugar cereals, plastic fruits and vegetables and cleaned juice containers.

If your child is overweight, more than 20% above the ideal weight for his age and height do not ignore the problem. Support your child by establishing good eating habits and regular exercise, for the entire family. Exercise for young children means outdoor play typical for a growing child and not a formal exercise program. Jumping rope, playing tag, riding tricycles and climbing playground equipment are all appropriate "exercises" for preschoolers.

Additional Resources:

Let's Move!

<http://www.letsmove.gov/>

Shaping NJ

<http://www.shapingnj.gov>

ChooseMyPlate.gov (Unites States Department of Agriculture)

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>