

Teaching the Basics

Nutrition Education

Early food experiences form the foundation of lifelong eating habits. Child care environments are the perfect place to teach, support, and foster healthy eating behaviors. Intentional and consistent nutrition education can be used to teach children how to make healthy choices as they grow older.

Nutrition education can occur either within formal lesson plans, stories, play time, or during meals (especially family style meals), and should include teaching the following:

- Basic nutritional benefits of healthy foods
- How to make healthy food choices
- Introduction of foods
- Food tasting experiences
- The taste, smell, and texture of foods
- Language related to food and eating



Healthy Play Food

Nutrition education is most effective when the messaging is consistent throughout your program. Make sure that play kitchens are stocked with fruits and vegetables in order to support your nutrition education efforts.



Talking About Food

Children's thoughts about what to eat are largely shaped by what they hear adults say about foods. Make sure what you say encourages a positive relationship with food.

PHRASES THAT SUPPORT HEALTHY EATING

Offering a New Food:

When offering a new food, describe it by highlighting the sensory qualities. Make comparisons that children may be familiar with.

Say This:

This is a kiwi; it's sweet like a strawberry.
These radishes are very crunchy!

Not This:

Eat that for me.
Eat one more bite, or I will be very mad.

Trying a New Food:

After children taste a food, ask them about how it tastes. Offering food as a reward or a treat when upset can lead to overeating and other unhealthy eating habits.

Say This:

How did that taste? What did you like?
What didn't you like? Was it too crunchy?
Thank you for trying your vegetables.

Not This

No dessert until you eat your vegetables.
Stop crying and I will give you a cookie.

Teaching Hunger and Fullness:

To help children know when they are hungry and full, ask questions about how their stomach feels. Avoid phrases that focus on external cues, such as a clean plate.

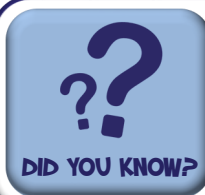
Say This:

Are you hungry, or are you full?
Is your stomach making a hungry,
growling noise?

Not This:

Take one more bite before you leave the
table.
Eat all of your peas like your sister.

Source: "Phrases that Help and Hinder," www.ChooseMyPlate.gov



Adventurous Tasting. A certain degree of "picky eating" is typical during the toddler and preschool years; however, it's important for caregivers to continue to expose children to a variety of healthy foods during this stage. **Always remember: Children can only eat what they are served.** Children are more likely to taste different foods if they are used to being offered different foods.

Cooking with Children

Many of the nutrition education activities within this curriculum suggest preparing a simple recipe with the help of children. Cooking with children adds to the foundation of healthy eating habits, and also helps children learn basic math skills, language skills, and self-confidence.

Cooking with children gives them **multiple exposures** to foods, which could **increase their familiarity** and **their willingness to taste the food**.

Tips for cooking with children using the ChildcareAlive! Curriculum:

- Allow ALL children to participate in some way in the recipe prep, adjusting tasks as necessary for different abilities (every child is a “little chef”).
- Ask children to wash hands with soap and warm water before cooking.
- Keep safety in mind – including making foods very small to avoid choking risks.



“Little Chefs”

We know that chefs make food, but there’s something else that all chefs do – they taste what they make. When children are helping you make food, remind them that they are being little chefs, and chefs always taste what they make....they don’t always like it, but they always taste it.



Taste Testing in Child Care Settings

After children help make a recipe, it is ideal if they also taste the food. Some children will be naturally hesitant to taste foods, and that's ok! The key is to make sure that all children have a positive experience.

How to Conduct a Taste Test

- **Wash Hands.** Even if children may not be tasting the food, it is still beneficial for children (and adults) to get into the habit of washing their hands before handling food.
- **Review Manners.** You may want to have a brief talk about manners before tasting foods, such as avoiding making faces or saying unpleasant things about new foods. If a child says "gross!" or "ewww!" in reference to a food, ask them to describe what they mean instead. For example: "When you said that, do you mean that this food is different than any food you've ever seen? Or it looks really squishy?"
- **Try "Sensory Exploration."** Allow time for children to explore the food using their senses. Encourage them to tell you about it: Is it small? Big? Wet? Dry? Juicy? Round? Bumpy? How does it smell? Next, you might cut into the food (if applicable) and ask children how it looks different on the inside.
- **Taste the New Food.** After exploring the food, taste it all together as a group. Offer only very small portions, and try only one new food at a time. Do not force any child to taste the food in order to keep their overall experience positive and pressure-free. Praise a child for even touching a food if that is more than the child has done before.
- **Ask: "How does it taste?"** After children taste the new food, ask them to tell you what it tastes like instead of asking "Do you like it?" Is it sweet? Sour? Crunchy? Mushy? Soft? Hard? Does it make a loud sound when you bite? Is it salty? (This will likely lead to teaching/learning some new words!) If a child decides that they like or don't like the food, encourage them to tell you why (because it's too sweet, crunchy, soft, mushy, etc.).

Sensory Exploration =

A technique used to increase a child's familiarity with a new food. **This is intentionally and actively using all senses to interact with and experience a food.** Sensory Exploration should include intentional guidance from adults to encourage children to explore a food using their senses, telling you about the shape, size, texture, and color.



Breaking the "I Don't Like It!" Habit

You've probably heard a child proclaim "I don't like it!" before they even look at a food. Saying "I don't like it" is often a habit children learn, possibly just to avoid eating something. To break this habit, ask children "How does it taste?" after they try something. This will also lead to opportunities to teach new words.

Shaping Eating Habits

Nutrition Education Activities

You will find the following in each nutrition education activity:

- Activity Guide – includes instructions for leading each activity
- Activity materials
- Suggested recipes – recipes that coincide with each activity, including possible adaptations for food allergies
- Provider Quick Tips – tips for leading certain nutrition activities
- Family Newsletter – short educational handout titled “*What We Learned Today*” containing information specific for each activity. These pages are intended to be copied and distributed for parent engagement.

What You Need to Know:

- All of the nutrition activities in this curriculum are intended for children ages 2-5 years old. All activities can be adjusted to include children of different ages and abilities.
- Each activity includes a plan which provides goals, materials, and key points. In addition, you will find suggested wording in italicized font and quotation marks. While it is not expected that you would read from this curriculum word-for-word, please note some of the specific wording that is used and try to be consistent with this language. Specific wording was chosen for these lessons in order to promote a positive view of healthy foods and trying new foods.
- Although the main focus of each activity is healthy foods, there are short bursts of movement suggested in each activity.
- The first nutrition activity focuses on MyPlate, and the remaining activities build from this one. It is highly suggested to start with the MyPlate activity (on page 19), but the rest of the activities may be done in any order.
- The tasting activities in these lessons are intended to be very small quantities (smaller than a typical snack). If you wish to serve a snack to meet Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal pattern requirements, you must adjust quantities to meet CACFP standards.
- Videos are available online for some activities. Look for the video icon on these select activities, then visit www.childcarealive.org/curriculum to view the video.

