



Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

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New Year New Healthy Food Choices

2013 has passed and 2014 has begun. This is a wonderful time for everyone to begin healthier eating habits. Child care providers can be very influential in introducing healthy food items to children. Allowing children to experience new foods through their senses of touch, smell, and taste will have a positive effect on their acceptance of new food. Working together increases the success rate of everyone making healthier food choices throughout the year.

As you begin your journey, think about the type of food you serve the children in your child care program. Read the nutrition labels before you

decide to purchase foods. This could become another level of providing the best nutrition you can for the children you serve!

Start with the simple things such as:

- Drink more water daily and have water available throughout the day.
- Include fat-free (skim) and low-fat (1%) milk in daily diet for children over 2 years of age.
- Plan your cycle menus with input from



your children. Allow the children to choose new names to describe the vegetables and fruits that are on the menu. Example: King Broccoli, Fearless Broccoli, or words from the children's vocabulary.



Everyone's Included: Providers, Children, and Parents

There are several things everyone can do to promote healthy eating habits in child care. Below are just a few tips for providers, children, and parents.

Providers:

Talk to children about how food grows:

- Invite a local farmer to talk about fruits and vegetables. Ask the farmer to bring a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables for the children to touch, smell, and taste.
- Take a field trip to a local farm or community garden for children to learn the steps for planting, growing, and harvesting fruits and vegetables. Talk about how different foods grow underground, above ground, and on trees.
- During mealtimes, talk about fruits and vegetables and how they help children grow healthy and strong.
- Play the Mystery Bag Game. Place a fruit or vegetable in a bag. Ask the children to reach inside the bag, feel the fruit and describe how the fruit feels. Younger children may need to feel items outside of the bag first, when first learning about textures.
- Plant a garden on a small patch of yard, in raised beds, or in containers.

Introduce new fruits and vegetables through taste testing:

- Before trying the new food, ask the children if they think the food will taste sweet, sour, bitter, or salty. Tell what sweet, sour, bitter, and salty taste like.
- Ask if they think it will be mushy, chewy, crunchy, or crispy.
- Talk about the colors.
- Talk about the nutrients in each new fruit or vegetable and describe how they help children grow healthy and strong.
- Try the fruits and vegetables along with the children.

Children:

Allow children to explore healthy foods:

- Place “play” fruits, vegetables, and other food related items in the dramatic play area for children to enjoy during free play.
- Allow the children to prepare easy picture recipes during snack time. Choose simple picture recipes that include no more than four steps and only a few ingredients.

Talk about the nutrients in each new fruit or vegetable and describe how they help the children grow and be healthy. Let the children see how enthusiastic you feel when you talk about the fruits and vegetables.



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Vegetable of the Month Jicama (hē-kə-mə)

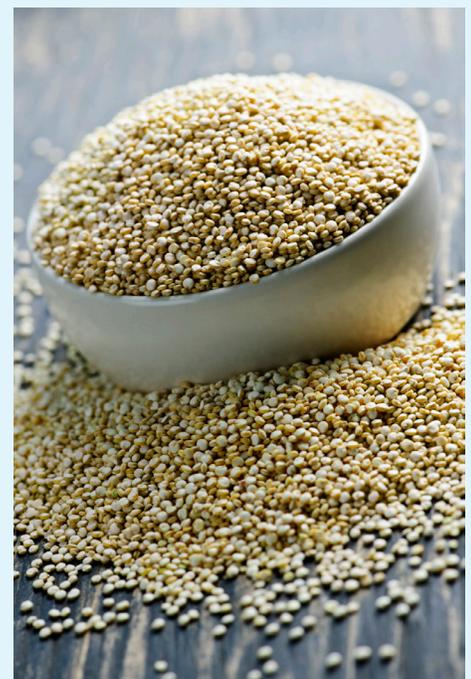
Native to Mexico, jicama is a starchy root brown-skinned tuber with white flesh. Fresh jicama is crisp and juicy. The juice of jicama can be clear or milky, and mildly flavored. Jicama has many nutritional benefits, such as being fat free, sodium free, a good source of fiber, and an excellent source of vitamin C. Try fresh jicama today with a garden salad or with low fat cheese slices.

Nutrition Tip

Did you know your body cannot store vitamin C? So it's important to have a good source each day! Vitamin C is an antioxidant. Antioxidants are substances that can help protect your cells from breaking down when exposed to the environment. Vitamin C helps heal cuts and wounds, and keeps teeth and gums healthy. Vitamin C also helps aid in iron absorption. Foods high in vitamin C include tomatoes, oranges, grapefruits, broccoli, and bell peppers of all colors.

Nutrition Fact

How do you know if a product is a whole grain? Check the ingredients list to make sure “whole” is listed before the first ingredient. There are foods that are always whole grain such as oatmeal. Grains provide energy from carbohydrates and contain protein, but whole grains make a difference because they also include B vitamins, trace minerals, antioxidants, and vitamin E. Whole grains provide fiber, which can have a positive influence on your heart health and your digestive system. Make an effort to replace refined flour products with whole grain products.



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Nutritious food and drinking more water is only part of incorporating healthy habits. Avoid having “sweet” foods too often so children will not learn to prefer them over nutritious foods. Too much sugar can lead to obesity and other health issues.

Having fruit and vegetable models on the table in the play area at school is also beneficial. Have fresh fruit in a bowl on your table at home.

Parents:

Get parent(s) on board with menu planning:

- Offer parents a menu planning workshop. Some key topics to include are meeting meal pattern requirements, developing grocery lists, using meal planning principles, and tips for evaluating planned menus.
- Send blank menus home for parents to fill in with the help of their child. The menus would be created for home and would help parents to apply the skills they have learned in the workshops.

Eating healthy foods and drinking healthy beverages, such as water, are only part of incorporating healthy habits. Avoid eating “sweet” foods too often. Too many foods high in sugar can lead to obesity, tooth decay, and other health issues.

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