

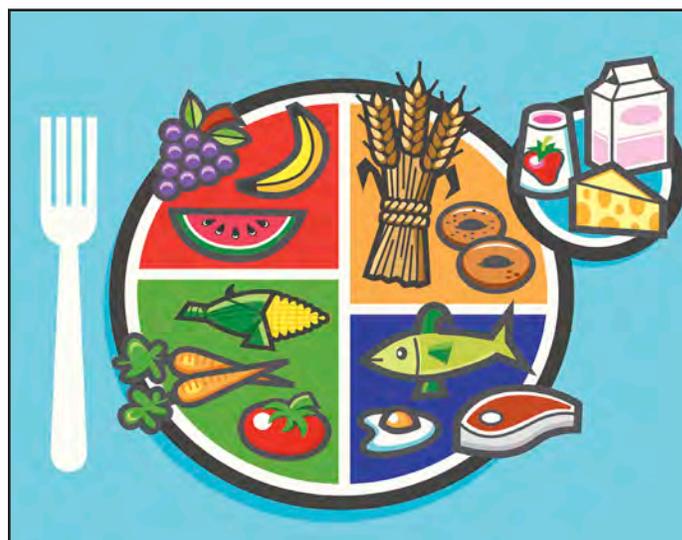


Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

Appropriate Eating for Young Children

When referring to appropriate eating for young children, providers want to serve nutritious food to children in their care, many of whom are attending child care for most of the day. Providers may serve children their main meal(s) plus a snack, food which provides vitamins and nutrients that help their bodies grow and mature. Providers are responsible for offering appropriate meals that meet CACFP guidelines and includes all of the food groups (milk, fruits, vegetables, grains and meat/meat alternates). The variety of foods will provide the nutrients that support growth and development. All food offered to young children should be appropriate, nutritious, inviting as well as appetizing.



Young Children Helping as Part of the Process

Children should participate in preparing for the meal and cleaning up afterwards. Participation may include growing the food, as well as washing, cleaning, and helping to prepare the food. For example, a child can help to mix a salad together or pour the salad dressing. Children will often eat what they have helped prepare. Model and let them practice these mealtime skills:

- washing fruit and vegetables
- setting the table
- removing dirty dishes from the table
- discarding leftover food



Allow Children to Help

Different developmental stages allow for children to help with various tasks. At age 2 children are learning to use large muscles in their arms. They can wipe the table or carry unbreakable items. At age 3 children are learning to use their hands. They can pour liquids and rinse fruits and vegetables. By age 4 - 5 children are learning to use smaller muscles in their fingers. They can scrub, measure, beat, or mash soft cooked fruits or vegetables with a fork.

Mealtime and Menus

As a provider, compare the meal items to the CACFP meal pattern. Then, have your menus checked by another professional to make sure all components are there. Once these components are in place, it is important for providers to establish a routine mealtime so children will know what is expected of them. This includes maintaining the same mealtime daily. Some days children may eat less than they usually do, or there may be days when they may eat more than they usually do.

To encourage good intake at mealtime, the food should be colorful and appetizing. Young children should want to eat the food when they see it. Make sure they have washed their hands and are sitting at the table ready to eat.



Introduction of New Foods

Introduce a new food with a familiar food. It may take repeated exposure at meals before a child accepts something new. Eating a new food is a skill that children often learn gradually, but continue to offer new foods to children. When they see other children eating the new food, they are more likely to try it.

Food Preparation

Food should be safe for children to eat. Make sure it is cooked to the recommended temperatures and is soft enough for the child to chew. Always cut into small pieces to avoid large chunks that could be a choking hazard. Make vegetables one-half inch ($\frac{1}{2}$ ") at most, and cut round pieces into short strips. Make every bite count.

Foods to Avoid

Food that is small and dry may be difficult for the child to chew. It could be considered a choking hazard. This could include popcorn, peanuts, and sunflower seeds. Foods that are sticky such as chewable snacks, cheese, large pieces of fruits or vegetables, hotdogs, or any circular foods may lodge in a child's throat. Also, be mindful of food with bones that could get caught in a child's throat (e.g., fish).

Any food can become a choking hazard. It is important to make sure children are sitting down, relaxed, and giving attention to eating the food in front of them.

Things to Remember when Serving Young Children

- Post your menus for parents to see.
- Establish a schedule for meals and snacks that are consumed by young children in your care.
- Use colorful fruits and vegetables to catch the children's attention.
- Make every bite nutritious.
- Make sure that food served is not a choking hazard.
- Know foods that could be considered a choking hazard.
- Never allow children to play, run, or move around when it is mealtime.

Always

- Have menus with safe food for the young children you serve.
- Sit with the children at the table to monitor them.
- Have all children sit correctly at the table; don't allow them to jump around or play.
- Have children eat slowly.
- Tell them they cannot have any food in their mouth while talking.
- Never allow children to eat when playing a game. Children should eat at mealtime or snack time only.

References

USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (2016). Supplement D: Create a positive meal environment. *Nutrition and wellness tips for young children*. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/nutrition-wellness-tips-young-children>

USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (2013). Supplement A: Practice choking prevention. *Nutrition and wellness tips for young children*. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/nutrition-wellness-tips-young-children>

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