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Provide Healthy Food and Activity Choices Every Day

As a child care provider, you help create a healthier generation by taking steps to prevent obesity and encouraging healthy habits that last a lifetime. Whether you work in a large child care center or provide child care in your home, you help children learn about healthy food choices and being physically active.

Studies show that about one in five children are overweight or obese by the time they reach their 6th birthday¹ and over half of obese children become overweight at or before age 2.² Diseases and health issues that were once mainly seen in adults are now becoming more common in children and adolescents with excess body fat.³

There are ways to help children in your care develop healthy habits. The meals and snacks you serve should provide nutrients children need to be healthy, without too much sodium, solid fats, and added sugars. You can lower the risk of foodborne illness by making sure that the food is safe to eat, and the areas where food is prepared and served are clean. You provide opportunities for active play that include more movement and less time in front of a television or computer screen. The USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), which serves millions of children across the United States,⁴ provides a great opportunity to give children the best start when it comes to healthy eating and physical activity.

Good nutrition and physical activity work together to promote healthy growth and development. While you may not have all the answers, helping young children learn to make good food and activity choices is one of the greatest lifelong gifts you can give them. The good news is that the tips in this handbook give you specific ways to support children and their families in the four important areas of providing healthy food, following food safety practices, encouraging active play, and limiting screen time.

The tip sheets in this handbook cover fruits, vegetables, dry beans and peas, meat and meat alternates, whole grains, milk, sodium, fats and oils, added sugars, water, food safety, providing opportunities for active play, encouraging active play, written policies and practices that promote active play, and the importance of limiting screen time. The tip sheets include recommendations to improve the meals you serve in your child care program and, along with other online resources, can help you choose the best foods and activities for the children in your care.

Note: Throughout this handbook, the term *child care* includes early care and education and day care. The term *active play* means physical activity, which includes all types of physical movement.

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