

GROWING HEALTHY

A Guide for Head Start Health Managers and Families about Healthy Active Living for Young Children



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Health

STAFF NOTES

START TODAY—HELP YOUR YOUNG CHILDREN STAY AT A HEALTHY WEIGHT FOR LIFE

Why Is This Important?

- Many people are not aware that developing a healthy weight for life **begins** when children are infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.
- The way young children eat, move and sleep affects their weight now and in the future.

Talking Points for Parents of Infants

- It might seem hard to believe but there are things you can do today, while your child is still a baby, to help her grow healthy now and into the future when she is a toddler, a teen, and even an adult.

Talking Points for Parents of Toddlers

- When you set healthy habits early in your toddler's life, you give your child a gift that lasts a lifetime by helping him grow at a healthy weight.
- Healthy habits like eating meals together as a family whenever you can, making active play a part of each day and having a regular bedtime routine are great ways to start.

Talking Points for Parents of Preschoolers

- When you help your preschooler develop healthy habits, you give your child a gift that lasts a lifetime by helping her grow at a healthy weight.
- Healthy habits like eating meals together as a family whenever you can, making active play a part of each day and having a regular bedtime routine are great ways to start.

For All Parents

- While you are working hard to do what's best for your child, don't forget to take care of yourself, too. It's not easy to find time and energy to eat well and stay active, but your baby watches what you eat and do.

**THERE ARE THINGS YOU CAN DO
RIGHT NOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD
STAY A HEALTHY WEIGHT FOR LIFE**



START TODAY!

STAFF NOTES

FEEDING BABIES IN A HEALTHY WAY

Why Is This Important?

- Babies who are breastfed for at least 6 months are more likely to have a healthy weight as they grow up.
- Mothers often report that breastfeeding is harder than they thought; moms may be more likely to stop breastfeeding if they feel unsupported and have nowhere to turn for help.
- Parents, for many reasons, may choose not to breastfeed. These parents have questions and need support to feed their infants in a healthy and safe way, too.
- When babies are fussy, it doesn't always mean they are hungry. Using a bottle or breastfeeding to soothe infants can contribute to overfeeding.
- Babies should be ready to start eating simple solids around 6 months. Babies who start eating solid foods too early are more likely to have weight problems as children and adults.

Talking Points About Breastfeeding

- If breastfeeding is harder than you thought it would be you are not alone!
- Lots of people say that breastfeeding just comes “naturally” but for many moms, it doesn't.
- Going back to work and wanting to get back into a normal family routine can make it hard to stick with breastfeeding. Using a breast pump can help ensure your baby still gets the best nutrition.
- If you need support or help at any time while you are breastfeeding, talk to us or call 1-800-994-9662 (the National Breastfeeding Hotline) for free breastfeeding support.

Talking Points About Bottle Feeding

- Don't use pillows or other objects to hold a bottle for your baby. This makes it hard for her to spit out the bottle when she's done—it can cause her to keep eating after she's full.
- Make sure you take the bottle away if your baby falls asleep. If you let the baby keep the bottle in her mouth when he's sleeping, formula can stay in her mouth and can damage his teeth or cause her to choke.
- Stick with ONLY breast milk or formula for feeding your baby until she is 6 months old. Unless your doctor tells you something different, adding cereal to baby's bottle adds extra calories to her diet that she doesn't need.

Talking Points About Starting Solids

- If your baby is around 6 months old, it's time to start simple solids like rice cereal.
- After cereal, move on to vegetables and meats first. That way your baby will learn to like those flavors before he gets used to the sweet flavors of fruit.
- Start with small serving sizes—just 1–2 small spoonfuls at a time. Don't make your baby eat if he's not hungry. If he leans back or turns away, he is full. Let your baby have at least 2–3 days to get used to a new food before introducing something else.

FEEDING YOUR BABY IN A HEALTHY WAY



STAFF NOTES

EVEN BABIES NEED ACTIVE PLAY

Why Is This Important?

- Many parents are surprised to learn that babies need to move and be active as part of healthy growth and development.
- Parents often want ideas about how to be active with infants in developmentally appropriate ways.

Talking Points About Active Play with Infants

- Being active helps babies learn and reach important milestones like sitting up and crawling.
- Give your baby plenty of chances to stretch. A play-mat with toys suspended above him will give him the opportunity to kick and reach.
- Bouncers, strollers, and baby carriers are great for letting you get things done, but time in them doesn't count as active time for your baby. Make sure he gets time to roll, crawl, sit up, and stand every day.
- Give your young baby plenty of supervised "tummy time"! This helps his muscles get stronger and gets him ready to sit up and crawl.
- Did you know? A 3- to 4-month-old baby will push down if you hold him in a standing position. Make this a fun bonding time for you and your baby, and help him stand and sit over and over again until he's tired.
- Play some music and dance with baby in your arms.
- Try teaching him peekaboo and patty-cake—games like this will help him develop motor skills.

EVEN BABIES NEED ACTIVE PLAY



STAFF NOTES

FEEDING TODDLERS IN A HEALTHY WAY

Why Is This Important?

- Many parents know what foods are healthy but they may have difficulty feeding children in a healthy way due to food insecurity, lack of confidence with meal prep or questions about portion sizes and snacks.
- Picky eating frustrates and discourages so many parents!
- Many parents find it hard to set limits on sugary beverages, including juice. Some parents view juice as a way to provide their toddler with the recommended servings of fruit/vegetables. Even 100% fruit juice has sugar that can damage teeth.

Talking Points About Healthy Eating

- Serving sizes for toddlers are very small. A serving size of veggies is only 1–2 tablespoons, about the size of a quarter.
- Lots of parents say their child is picky, especially when it comes to new foods or eating fruits and vegetables. You are not alone!
- Did you know that a young child might need to try a new food 10–15 times over several months before she'll eat it?
- If possible, give your toddler a couple healthy choices at mealtimes but let her decide when and how much to eat.

Talking Points About Healthy Beverages

- Water and low-fat milk are the best beverage choices for your toddler. Toddlers never need soda pop or sports drinks.
- Toddlers need about 3 servings (1/2 cup for this age) of milk each day.
- Skip the juice and stick with water. Sometimes young children fill up on juice and then don't want to eat healthier foods.
- Try letting your child pick out a favorite, special cup for water only.
- If you choose to give other drinks, limit it to 4–6 ounces a day of 100% juice or low-fat, low-sugar, flavored milk.

FEEDING YOUR TODDLER IN A HEALTHY WAY



STAFF NOTES

KEEPING TODDLERS ACTIVE

Why Is This Important?

- Parents often believe toddlers are “active enough” already.
- Active play is important not only for reaching developmental milestones, motor skills and coordination, but also for maintaining or developing healthy weight.
- Even if children have to play indoors, they need ways to play safely but actively.
- Screen time can be a touchy subject; some parents view screen time as educational, others use TV time to keep children safe and occupied so parents can get other things done.
- The connection between sleep and growing healthy may be unknown to many parents.

Talking Points About Active Play

- Because most toddlers are so naturally active, it can be easy to overlook that toddlers need daily physical activity, planned and supervised by adults.
- Even if your child can’t go outside to play (due to weather, safety concerns, etc.) she still needs physical activity—a chance to move and use her energy—every day! Dance to music, play Hide-and-Seek, or play Follow-the-Leader to get your toddler moving indoors.

Talking Points About Television

- Try cutting back on television time by turning off the TV during mealtimes, play time, bath time and bedtime.

Talking Points About Sleep

- Sleep is very important for your toddler. He needs lots of sleep—about 10–12 hours a day, including naps, to grow up healthy. Children who don’t get enough sleep are more likely to have weight problems.

KEEPING TODDLERS ACTIVE



STAFF NOTES

SMART CHOICES FOR FEEDING PRESCHOOLERS

Why Is This Important?

- Energetic preschoolers need 1–2 healthy snacks a day to fuel their growth.
- As young children get older, sticking to milk or water may be more difficult. Friends and family may believe that soda pop and juice boxes/pouches are okay for preschoolers, and these sugary beverages may be hard to avoid outside of school.

Talking Points About Healthy Eating

- Your preschooler is still learning what he likes and doesn't like—and his tastes can (and will!) change very quickly. Something your child refuses to eat this week could be his favorite next week so don't give up.
- Let your child choose between 2 healthy options. He's more likely to eat something if he chooses it himself.
- Even if your family has a hectic schedule, try to limit fast food to one meal per week.

Talking Points About Snacks

- If kids are hungry, snack time can be a great time to try a new fruit or veggie.
- Be creative at snack time—use fruits and veggies to make up a story. Broccoli can be a tree, celery can be a boat.

Talking Points About Healthy Drinks

- Milk and water are still the healthiest choices for your preschooler.
- Eat fruits instead of drinking juice. Offer cut up bananas, strawberries, grapes or other fun finger food for snacks.
- If you decide to allow some juice or punch at a party, mix in some water so it's less sugary.

SMART CHOICES FOR FEEDING YOUR PRESCHOOLER



STAFF NOTES

PRESCHOOLERS AND ACTIVE PLAY

Why Is This Important?

- Active play is important for preschoolers as they develop motor skills and coordination but also for maintaining or reaching a healthy weight.
- Many families live in places where they do not feel safe letting children play outdoors. For healthy growth and development, preschoolers still need active play, even if it's indoors. Parents may need creative ideas for safe and active indoor play.
- Parents today are faced with many screen time options—in addition to TV, think about computers, smart phones, video games and tablets! Some parents may need to be reminded that “screen time” includes using these devices, and should be limited.

Talking Points About Active Play

- Get the whole family involved. Go for bike rides, play catch, or go to the park and climb on the jungle gym. Your child learns to be active from you!
- Preschoolers need plenty of unstructured play time (games without rules or directions) like running, jumping, dancing and kicking balls to burn off that extra preschooler energy.
- Can't go outside to play today? Do you need some new ideas for active play inside the house? Try freeze dance, build an indoor fort with tables and blankets or make an obstacle course with pillows and sofa cushions.

Talking Points About Screen Time

- Try to limit preschoolers' screen time to 2 hours a day or less. Make time each day to turn off all screens (e.g., TV, computer, smart phone, tablet).
- If the only way you can get a break to do the dishes or talk on the phone is to let your child watch TV, set a timer for 30 minutes. Get as much done as you can in those 30 minutes and then turn off the TV.
- If you let your child watch TV, make sure you are familiar with the show and comfortable with the content. Some cartoons may be too “grown up” for preschoolers.

PRESCHOOLERS AND ACTIVE PLAY



STAFF NOTES

GROWING HEALTHY

There are lots of ways to grow healthy but you don't have to do them all at once.

5 Fruits and Vegetables a Day

- Go for the rainbow. Each month, pick a color from the rainbow and try to eat a new fruit or veggie of that color (green, purple, orange, yellow, red). It's a great way for little ones to learn colors while you're all eating healthy.
- Whenever possible, let your child help get fruits and veggies ready to serve. Maybe he can wash an apple or she can mix the salad. Your little chefs may be more likely to try foods that they help to prepare.
- Ever feel like fresh fruits and veggies are just too expensive? Try using frozen ones for a few meals every week.

2 Hours or Less of Screen Time a Day

- A great way to cut down on screen time is to make a “no television (or computer) while eating” rule.
- If your children are watching TV, watch with them. Use commercial breaks for an activity break—hula hoop, dance, or come up with a crazy new way to do jumping jacks.
- If you need a break and want to let your child watch TV, set a timer for 30 minutes. You can get a lot done and you'll know how long they watched.
- Television in your child's bedroom might seem like a convenience but watching TV close to bedtime can affect your child's ability to sleep.

1 Hour of Active Play or Physical Activity a Day

- An hour of active play might seem like a lot but you don't have to do it all at one time. Try being active for 10–15 minutes several times each day.
- What were your favorite active games when you were a child? They might seem old school to you but they'll be new to your child. Try one today.
- Rain or bad weather has you stuck in the house? Don't let it keep you and your child from being active together. Try one of these fun activities:
 - Have an indoor parade.
 - Set up a scavenger hunt inside.
 - Start your own indoor Olympics—who can jump on one foot the longest or do the most sit ups?

0 Sugary Drinks a Day

- Serve milk with meals and offer water at snack time.
- Let your child pick their favorite “big kid” cup to use for water.
- Think plain water is too boring? Try adding a fruit slice (like orange) for natural flavor.
- Avoid buying juice—if it's not in the house, no one can drink it.
- If you're still trying to cut sugary drinks down to zero, keep up the great work! Young children should never have soda pop or sports drinks but if you choose to give juice, please remember:
 - Make sure the label says 100% fruit juice.
 - Limit the amount to 1 small cup a day (4–6 ounces).

GROWING HEALTHY

There are lots of ways to grow healthy but you don't have to do them all at once.



IDEAS FOR LIVING A HEALTHY ACTIVE LIFE

- 5** Eat at least **5** fruits and vegetables a day.
- 2** Keep screen time (like TV, video games, computer) down to **2** hours or less per day.
- 1** Get **1** hour or more of physical activity every day.
- 0** Drink **0** sugar-sweetened drinks. Replace soda pop, sports drinks and even 100% fruit juice with milk or water.



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