



NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Health and Wellness



Healthy Active Living

About 12% of Head Start children have excess weight or obesity. Health Managers can support and enhance the healthy active living initiatives that Head Start programs provide to children and their families. It's also important for Head Start staff to be able to tailor these initiatives for the unique health concerns of the children and families in their programs. Many of the health specific Head Start Program Performance Standards are designed to encourage healthy active living habits such as regular physical activity and healthy nutrition.

Related Head Start Program Performance Standards

- [1302.31\(e\)\(2\) & \(4\)](#)
- [1302.44](#)
- [1302.46\(b\)\(1\)\(ii\)](#)

Things to consider:

Physical activity: Partner with program staff and parents to find safe ways to add active play during their child's day. Help families find ways to play at home that don't involve screen time.

Nutrition Assessment: Ensure your assessments are accurate by providing training to staff and families about appropriate serving sizes.

Nutrition Education: Does your nutrition education incorporate basic healthy active living strategies? Do you model healthy habits by serving healthy foods and drinks and creating movement breaks during trainings?

Family style meals: Provide training for teachers about the importance of family style meals, appropriate serving sizes, and skills to effectively encourage children to try new foods. Encourage families to practice these skills at home.



Preschoolers who are overweight or obese are 5 times more likely as normal weight children to be overweight or obese as adults.

- CDC Vital Signs

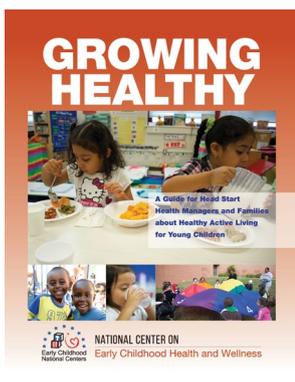
SUPPORTING STAFF

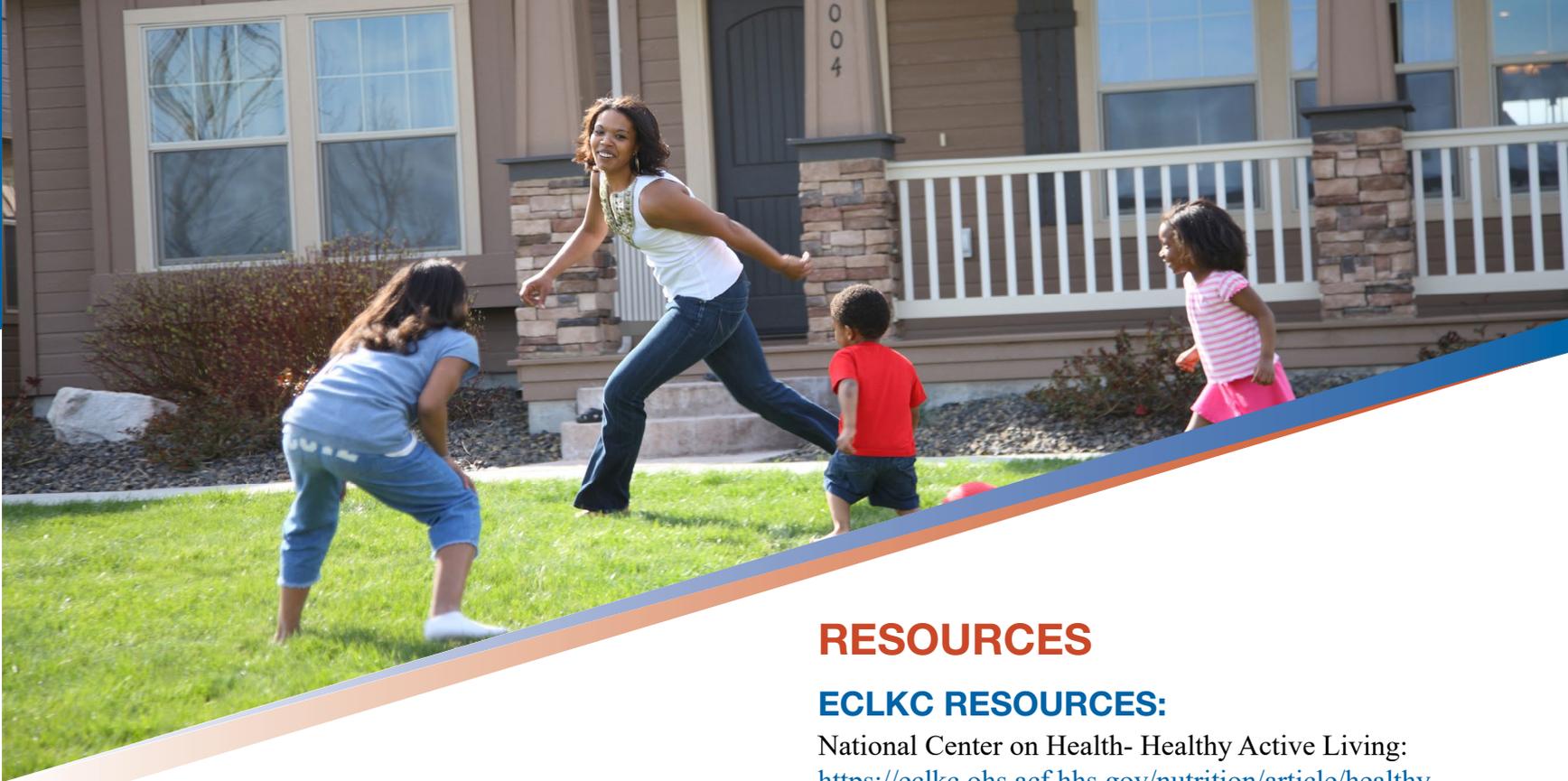
There is abundant data and research discussing the physical and psychological risks for children with excess weight or obesity. However, the data can be overwhelming to families as well as staff. Instead, focus on simple strategies to encourage families to build healthy habits into their child's lives as early as possible. Encourage all Head Start staff to use the 5,2,1,0 framework when talking with families. These simple strategies have been shown to make the biggest health impact. Help families choose small, incremental health goals they can easily build into bigger ones. It is easy for families to feel overwhelmed but gradually building on small successes can create long term effects.

Healthy Active Living

It is important to help your child build healthy habits now to make sure they continue to grow healthy. Some simple ideas:

- **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.
- **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, cell phone, hand-held games, tablets) while eating" rule.
- **1 hour or more of 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.
- **Drink 0 sugar sweetened drinks.** Replace soda pop, sports drinks, and even 100% juice with milk or water. Think plain water is too boring? Try adding a fruit slice (like orange) for natural flavor.





ENGAGING FAMILIES

Families are integral to achieving successful healthy active living program activities. Partner with families on menu planning, nutrition education, building nutrition assessments, and family partnership agreements. Provide training for families and parent committee members about 5,2,1,0 including basic nutrition and physical activity needs for children.

Remember, when partnering with families:

- Provide actionable strategies families can gradually implement into their lives at home.
- Try to avoid words such as “obese” or “overweight” and instead use “healthy weight” or “growing healthy”.
- Respect that each parent is an expert on their child. Try, “No one knows your child better than you”.
- Provide an explanation of the “why” behind your suggestions or recommendations.
- Meet parents where they are. Small changes can create long term success.
- Most importantly, listen! Families want to understand they are not alone but also need to feel their individual struggles are important. Help families find a solution that works for them.

RESOURCES

ECLKC RESOURCES:

National Center on Health- Healthy Active Living:
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/nutrition/article/healthy-active-living>

Español (Spanish)

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/es/nutricion/articulo/una-vida-activa-y-sana>

Healthy Eating- Tips for Families:

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/healthy-eating-health-tips-families>

[Positive Eating Environment Assessment Tool and Action Plan](#)

OTHER RESOURCES:

American Academy of Pediatrics, Healthy Active Living for Families:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/growing-healthy/Pages/default.aspx>

[AAP Family Media Use Plan](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Vital Signs Progress on Childhood Obesity:

<https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/childhoodobesity/>

Español (Spanish)

<https://www.cdc.gov/spanish/signosvitalales/obesidadinfantil/index.html>



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View other topics in the Embracing Health and Wellness Series on the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center website: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/health-services-management/article/embracing-health-wellness-series>

Our Goal: To help Head Start and Early Head Start programs implement best practices and effective approaches within the areas of medical and dental care access, health awareness, healthy active living, emergency preparedness, and environmental safety to support healthy outcomes and school readiness for young children and their families.

Contact Us: The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback as well as your suggestions for topics for future resources! Please forward your comments to: health@ecetta.info or call us at 888-227-5125.

School readiness begins with health!