

# HEALTHY ACTIVE LIVING



NATIONAL CENTER ON  
Early Childhood Health and Wellness

Tips for Health Managers from the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness

## What Is Healthy Active Living?



Healthy active living includes eating healthy foods, staying physically active, and getting enough rest. Developing healthy habits starts in early childhood. Eating well and being physically active helps a child continue to grow and learn.

### Why Is It Important?

Research tells us that the way young children eat, move, and sleep can impact their weight now and in the future. Early childhood is an ideal time to start healthy habits before unhealthy patterns are set. It's never too early to start:

- Encouraging breastfeeding for at least the first 6 months of life
- Eating healthy meals and snacks
- Spending time each day moving and being active
- Developing good sleep practices and patterns

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## 10 things you should know

- 1—Physical health can impact a child's readiness to learn. If a child is hungry, tired, or physically uncomfortable, she may be less able to pay attention, manage her feelings, and remember what she learns.
- 2—Health considerations should be included in data analysis for child assessment and outcome analysis. Children who are hungry, tired, or ill might not be able to demonstrate their true skills and knowledge.
- 3—Children with consistent access to healthy food are more likely to develop appropriately and have the energy to learn.
- 4—Terms like healthy habits, healthy active living, and healthy weight can be used instead of "obese," "obesity," or "overweight," words many parents don't like to hear associated with young children.
- 5—Babies who are breastfed for at least 6 months are more likely to grow up with a healthy weight.
- 6—Many parents find it hard to set limits on sugary beverages, especially juice. Even 100% fruit juice has sugar that can damage teeth.
- 7—An hour of active play might seem like a lot, but it doesn't have to be all at one time. Parents and teachers can find ways to help children be active for 10–15 minutes several times each day.
- 8—Weather or safety can be a challenge for children to play outdoors. Parents may look to Head Start staff to provide creative ideas for safe and active indoor play.
- 9—Programs can share information with families about low-cost, seasonal fruits and vegetables, with ideas for how to prepare them in a healthy way.
- 10—Parents can strategize with each other and staff for ideas to get children to try new foods and be active at home.

- 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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## Healthy Active Living and Head Start

Young children depend on parents, caregivers, and others to provide environments that foster and shape healthy habits. Head Start centers have a responsibility to promote growth and development, make healthy foods available, and provide safe spaces for active play. Staff can help children and families by encouraging and modeling healthy eating and physical activity at the center and by providing suggestions for small, healthy steps at home.

5-2-1-0 programs are helping many communities to have healthy active lives by promoting four simple strategies for families. Many states have created materials for families, child care centers, and workplaces and they are often available in multiple languages. These resources are widely available on the Internet and free for others to replicate and use.

## Key Resources

for Head Start Managers

Early Childhood Obesity Prevention Policies from the Institute of Medicine: <http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/~media/Files/Report%20Files/2011/Early-Childhood-Obesity-Prevention-Policies/Young%20Child%20Obesity%202011%20Recommendations.pdf>

HealthyChildren.org <https://www.healthychildren.org/english/healthy-living/pages/default.aspx>

Healthy Child Care America <https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/healthy-child-care/Pages/default.aspx>

Head Start resources on nutrition <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/nutrition>

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Healthy Eating Research <http://healthyeatingresearch.org/>

National Institute for Children's Healthcare Quality <http://www.nichq.org/search?terms=childhood+obesity>



This document was prepared under Grant #90HC0005 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, by the National Center on Health.