

NUTRITIOUS SNACKS  
in  
EARLY CHILDHOOD  
PROGRAMS

# Goals and Objectives

- To Develop program policies for snacks by:
  - Assuring that fruits or vegetables are part of the snack menu at least three times/week.
  - Understanding and recognizing the hunger cues that each age group of children may exhibit
  - Enlisting the support of staff and parents by educating them on the importance of good early childhood nutrition.
  - Providing ideas for a variety of nutritious and tasty snacks appropriate for the developmental stage for children, birth to five, in early childhood settings

# Dietary Trends Among Children

- More than 60% of young people eat too much fat and less than 20% eat the recommended 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day
- Children younger than 12 comprise 18% of the US population, but consume 28% of all juice and juice drinks
- The majority of children 2-9 exceed the dietary guidelines for fat and saturated fat

# Dietary Trends - II

- The majority of children do not meet the dietary guidelines for vegetables
- The percentage of children's calories from soft drinks has doubled over the last 20 years

# Snacks As Part of a Healthy Diet

- Snacks can provide up to 20 % of a child's nutritional needs for the day
- Smaller stomachs mean more frequent eating and smaller meals
- Try new foods as snacks

# Selecting Healthy Snacks

- Use the food guide to select snack foods to assure that they have a high nutritional value.
- Strive to include three fruits and vegetables/day by serving them as snacks as well as at mealtime.
- Use the same emotional and physical environment for snacks as used for mealtimes.

# Nutritional Needs of Growing Children: Infants

- By one year most infants have increased:
  - Body length by 55%;
  - Head circumference by 40%; and
  - Body weight has tripled.
  - The brain also experiences rapid growth.
  - Nutritional deficiencies have a greater effect during this time period of a child's life.



# Infant Communication Cues

- Wants to eat
  - Mouthing
  - Rooting
  - Hands to mouth
  - Sucking
  - Clenched fingers or tight fist over chest
  - Suck/Pause
- Wants a break:
  - Spitting up
  - Choking
  - Arching back
- Is full:
  - Pushing away
  - Falling asleep
  - Relaxed body
- Wants to be with you:
  - Smiling
  - Looking at face
  - Reaching out

# Foods for Infants



- Breastmilk
- Iron fortified infant formula
- Gradually introduce solids
- Foods are given when the child indicates hunger, not necessarily at set times, therefore snacks are not truly an issue with infants

# Foods for Infants

- Solid foods should be introduced only after the child is 4-6 months of age because, if introduced earlier they:
  - Interfere with the intake of milk that is needed to to promote growth during the earliest months, and
  - Infants' digestive, immune, oral and neruomuscular systems are not developmentally ready to handle solid foods before 4-6 months

# Nutritional Needs of Growing Children: Toddlers



- Toddlers' growth rate slows, caloric needs decrease
  - Brain growth continues at a rapid rate
  - Limited teeth for chewing and biting
- Much smaller stomachs than adults and need to eat more frequent, small meals

# Toddler Communication Cues

- Hungry

- Requests snack foods
- Irritable or cranky or forgetful
- Agrees to sit at the table (not for too long)
- May eat new or unfamiliar foods willingly

- Satisfied

- Begins to play with food or utensils
- Throws food or gets up from the table
- Loses focus on eating, is more interested in surroundings
- May refuse new or unfamiliar foods
- Gets sleepy

# Foods for Toddlers

- Mix a variety of familiar foods with newer foods that the toddler may not have tried before.
- Be aware of choking hazards
- Use vegetables and fruits for snacks; limit the juices served
- Offer whole wheat and other nutritious crackers
- Offer the toddler water during the day

# Considerations when Feeding Toddlers

- Toddlers may eat more at one time than another
- Toddlers may like a food one day and not the next
- Toddlers begin to have erratic eating patterns

# More Considerations when Feeding Toddlers



- They:
  - Eat table foods
  - Want to explore
  - Need boundaries at mealtimes
  - Need adults to interact with them
  - Need to maintain ability to self regulate

# Nutritional Needs of Growing Children: Preschoolers

- Preschoolers can be very active and may tend to want to play through meals and snacks if left to their own devices
- They may be curious about new foods but still a bit reluctant to try them “in their mouths”!
- Providers should model tasting new foods when they snack with the children

# Preschool Communication Cues

- Hungry
  - May use words
  - Irritable/Cranky
  - May ask for liquids
  - Willingly
    - sets table
    - washes hands
    - comes to table
    - sits down
  - Talks about foods
- Satisfied
  - Slows down eating
  - Will carry on a conversation
  - Gets up & down from table/easily distractable
  - Indicates a desire to eat more familiar foods
  - Picks at plate of food
  - Slouches in chair

# Foods for Preschoolers

- Preschoolers can easily begin serving themselves and are often willing and eager to try new things.
- This is the age to begin adding a wide variety of snacks to their menus.
- Try mixing a variety of fruits and vegetables and encourage them to help prepare the snack.

# Considerations in Feeding Preschoolers

- Preschoolers:
  - Exert independence with gusto!
  - Benefit greatly from adult role models
  - Are easily influenced by environmental factors
  - Learning ability is impaired by low iron status
  - Have growth spurts that impact appetite & needs

# General Feeding Guidelines for Young Children

- Provide a variety of foods
- Children may need to try a new food up to 20 times before they decide they like it!
- Forcing children to eat new foods creates an unhealthy eating environment

# Nutritious Snack Policies

- Why have a policy?
- What should be included in the policy?
- Who should promote the policy?
- Who should have input into the policy?

# Policies that Encourage Healthy Snacks

- Policies should include the following elements:
  - Serving a variety of appealing foods
  - Sitting down and eating with the children
  - Creating an enjoyable eating environment
  - Helping the children serve themselves
  - Helping the children self regulate
  - Letting them help prepare and serve

# Policy: The Feeding Environment

- Adults:
  - Determine where children eat
  - Regulate when children eat
  - Serve a variety of foods
  - Help children feel safe and comfortable
- Children:
  - Develop motor skills
    - Fine and gross
    - Spatial arrangement
    - Hand-eye coordination
  - Boost self esteem
    - Let them help prepare and serve
  - Improve nutrient intake

# Policy: Adults Snack With Children

- Safety
  - Prevents disasters
  - Promotes: “Yours, Mine, Ours”
- Role modeling
  - Etiquette
  - Eating new foods
  - Child size portions
- Foster skill development
  - Communication
  - Socialization
- Share in participation
  - Ensures interaction
  - Improves relationships

# Policy: Children decide how much/what to eat



- Self Regulation
  - Babies do it!
  - Eat when HUNGRY (every 2 – 3 ½ hrs)
  - Stop when FULL

# Children decide how much/what to eat



- Minimizes meal time stress
- Contributes to healthy eating habits
  - Obesity and eating disorders are on the rise

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