



Eight Tips for Encouraging Healthy Eating Habits (and how your MCCA Center is supporting them!!)

1. Pay attention to portions sizes and eat smaller meals more often throughout the day

Preschool children have very small stomachs and need to eat very small portions but more often. Older children need to continually recharge their bodies with small, but nutrient dense foods. Our centers provide opportunities for 5 mini meals throughout the day approximately 3 hours apart- Breakfast, Morning snack, Lunch, Afternoon snack, and for those children who stay very late in the afternoon we provide fruit at the end of the day.

2. Replace white grains with whole grains

Our centers are working with our food suppliers to replace as many of our products such as crackers, bread, pizza dough, pretzels, pasta, bagels, etc. with multi or whole grains. We are using more recipes including whole grain flours and are introducing children to a wide variety of healthy grains.

3. Choose foods lower in sugar and sodium

Our centers serve only low sugar breakfast cereals such as Cheerios, Rice Crispies, Raisin Bran, and Wheaties. Centers continue to work with our food suppliers to replace our food products with lower sugar and sodium alternatives to favorite snack foods such as pretzels, granola bars, cereal bars, and snack crackers. Centers, as often as possible, provide fresh fruits that are healthy sweet alternatives, and when serving canned fruits we only serve fruits packed in fruit juice or light syrup and the syrup is drained off.

4. Limit fruit juice to 4-6 ounces per day

Our centers serve only 100% fruit juice and serve them in the appropriate serving amount for the child's age. Children, after drinking the recommended serving size, are then offered water if they are still thirsty.

5. Eat with your child

Meals times should be a social event where the emphasis is on conversations, building relationships, and focused on the task at hand – eating a meal. Children who eat meals with other distractions such as reading, watching TV or playing a game often will eat many more calories than needed. Our centers serve our meals “family style” meaning the children are seated at the table with caring adults and are learning about the foods they are eating, learning to self serve and self monitor serving sizes, trying foods new to them, and learning social skills.

6. Serve low fat (1%) or non-fat milk

According to the USDA low fat (1%) milk and non-fat milk provide just as much calcium as whole milk without the fat or extra calories. Our centers serve only 1% or non-fat milk. Milk is always served with breakfast and is always available with lunch.

7. Be a good role model for healthy eating

Our staff always sit with the children at lunch and often will eat the snack with them. When staff bring their lunch or snacks to the center to eat with the children they are required to be thoughtful about the foods they eat and follow the food program same guidelines as the children. They are encouraged to talk with the children about their good food choices, and are not permitted to eat fast food, drink sodas, etc. in front of the children.

8. Plan fun food activities

Children become more comfortable with foods, especially new foods, if they are involved in the preparation or the meals. Our staff use this knowledge to plan activities that help the children experience foods in a variety of ways. Cooking projects, growing vegetable gardens, field trips to pick-your-own farms, restaurants, grocery stores, or other places they can gain a wider knowledge and comfort with foods. With the wonderful diversity represented in all of our centers staff also turn to the families to introduce them and the children to new foods.

