May 2015

Mealtime Memo for Child Care

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Sodium: What Is It?

Today, almost everyone, including children and adults, consumes high amounts of sodium. Unfortunately, many people are unaware of the sources of sodium, thus increasing the challenges of limiting sodium in the diet. However, knowing the key sources of sodium and methods for limiting them can help you reduce the sodium in your child care menus.

What is sodium, and how does it affect the body? Sodium is an essential mineral that balances fluids, relaxes muscles, and transmits nerve impulses throughout the body. Therefore, the body needs sodium to function properly, but it only needs trace or small amounts. Eating foods with too much sodium can put individuals at risk for cardiovascular diseases, such as high blood pressure and heart disease.

Sodium is naturally found in some foods, such as dairy products and meat products. In other foods, it is added during the processing of food to increase the shelf-life and to add texture and flavor.

One of the largest sources of sodium is processed foods. Shockingly, over 40% of the high-in-sodium foods consumed by Americans come from just ten types of processed foods: breads, cold cuts, pizza, poultry, soups, sandwiches, cheese, pasta dishes, meat dishes, and snacks (e.g. chips). For example, a two-ounce

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Sodium: What Is It?

serving of deli or pre-packaged luncheon meat could have a whopping 1,050 mg of sodium, accounting for well over half of the daily recommended limit, which is less than 1,500 mg for 2- to 3-year-olds and 1,900 mg for 4- to 5-year-olds.

When planning menus and shopping for foods, keep these simple tips in mind to help reduce the sodium:

- Prepare meals from scratch instead of buying pre-packaged or processed foods.
- Use salt-free herbs and spices (to add flavor) instead of salt.
- Use fresh or frozen vegetables over canned vegetables.
- Choose canned vegetables with no added salt. Otherwise, rinse canned vegetables to reduce the amount of salt.
- Limit or eliminate sodas, sports drinks, and other sugary beverages that are high in sodium.
- Read nutrition labels, and choose foods with low sodium or no salt added.
- Know the sodium terms and their meanings. Sodium-free means less than 5 mg of sodium per serving; very low sodium means 35 mg or less of sodium per serving; and low-sodium means 140 mg or less of sodium per serving.

Knowing how to recognize high sources of sodium and replacing those with more nutritious foods can help lower the sodium in meals. For more information on reducing sodium in child care menus, check out the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Sodium and Food Sources* web page at http://www.cdc.gov/salt/food.htm and the ChooseMyPlate.gov's *Daily Food Plan for Preschoolers: Salt* web page at http://www.choosemyplate.gov/preschoolers/daily-food-plans/about-salt.html.

Fruit of the Month: Pineapple

The pineapple is a tasty fruit with a balance of tart and sweet flavors. It was originally discovered in 1493 in the Caribbean Islands. The enzyme, bromelain, is one of the many health-promoting compounds in a pineapple because of the potential anti-inflammatory and digestive benefits. Pineapples have a high vitamin C content, which aids the body in immune support. Additionally, pineapples are fat-free, saturated fat-free, cholesterol-free, and very low in sodium.

Recipe of the Month
Banana Smoothie

Are you looking for an easy and refreshing beverage to make for the children? Check out the Banana Smoothie recipe in the *Snacks That Count: Recipes for Nutritious Snacks* resource by the Texas Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Division.

Ingredients:
4 small, whole bananas
4 cups of orange juice, chilled
½ teaspoon vanilla extract

Directions:
1. Place all ingredients in a blender.
2. Blend until smooth.
3. Serve!

Yield: 8 servings

For this recipe and additional recipes, visit http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/hsmrs/Texas /SnacksThatCount.pdf to download *Snacks That Count: Recipes for Nutritious Snacks*.

Nutrition Fact

Do you know the importance of vitamin A? It provides many health benefits, such as strengthening the immune system and supporting proper functions of most body organs. Vitamin A is found in many of the food groups. Some examples of vegetables rich in vitamin A include asparagus, carrots, kale, pumpkin, peppers, peas, and spinach. Fruits, such as mangos, peaches, plums, watermelon, oranges, and cantaloupe contain a high content of vitamin A. Protein foods high in vitamin A include fish, eggs, and liver. Milk and cheese are also sources of vitamin A. As you plan menus, include foods filled with vitamin A and other essential nutrients.

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