



Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

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Play Time is the Best Time

As a child care provider, you help children eat well and be active! Physical activity is fun and essential for children. It allows them to release some of their natural energy while teaching them good habits early in life.

Active play allows children to be creative, as well as develop motor skills and strong muscles, and strengthen bones. Active play is important because children can

develop a healthy habit of being active benefiting them into adulthood. Children love to move, run, and dance.



Let's talk about how you, as a provider, can assure children are active while they are in your care. What better way to get children involved than for you to set the example and participate with

them in the activity. In this issue we will discuss the benefits of activity for children and for you as the provider.

Health Benefits of Being Active

Active children are usually less likely to become overweight or develop chronic diseases like Type 2 diabetes. More importantly, active children have a greater chance of becoming active adults. Families being active together can be a great opportunity for children to look forward to physical activity while having fun. Both moderate and vigorous physical activity is good. Activity causes children to breathe harder and increase their heart rate.



Planning Play Time

The teacher can lead structured play time in a manner to ensure children play safely and often, and have fun doing it. This would help to ensure that all children play with a certain purpose in mind. Including play as part of their routine is an excellent strategy for children to develop healthy exercise habits as part of their daily routine.

Think about free play also known as unstructured play. This type of play is led by the child, and they are free to choose the activity that they want to do. Most children will be active during any play time. Activity type can vary according to age group and play time can take place in the classroom or outside the classroom. For example, in your lesson plans you can have an outdoor activity as well as a rainy day activity.



How Much Time is Play Time

Guidelines from the USDA website choosemyplate.gov/preschoolers state infants (birth to 12 months) should be placed in a safe setting that will stimulate their movement experiences. The guidelines for toddlers (age 12 to 36 months) are to have 30 minutes of structured physical activity and at least 60 minutes of unstructured physical activity per day. Toddlers should not be sedentary for over 60 minutes at a time.

Preschoolers (age 3 to 5) should have at least 60 minutes of structured play and at least 60 minutes of unstructured play daily. They should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time. While in the classroom, when children are playing in different areas, ring a bell to let them know it is time to move.



Ideas for Movement Breaks

Encourage movement breaks throughout the day. Ring a bell to let children know it is time to move to a different play station. Ask the children to dance like they are swimming, imitating an animal, or blowing in the wind. Don't forget to join the children during these activity breaks. At the end of the movement break they can return to the activity they were previously doing. Remember, these activities also help to relieve some of the children's energy, especially when outside play is not possible. These are only suggestions. You can develop any plan that you would like to enhance fun during the movement breaks.



Fruit of the Month South African Baby Pineapple

The flesh of a South African baby pineapple is sweet and tart. All of the flesh is edible so you don't have to core it. The skin is fragrant. The fruit is an excellent source of vitamin C and a good source of fiber. It is fat-free and cholesterol free. You may eat it as a fruit, have it in salsa or marinade, or blend in a smoothie or drink. You can ask your local grocer if they carry it.

Nutrition Tip

Did you know your body uses sodium for proper fluid balance, nerve transmission, and muscle contraction? Although some sodium is essential, too much sodium can be unhealthy. It's important to watch the intake of foods high in sodium in children's diets. Processed foods, canned foods with added salt, snacks high in sodium, or adding salt to food after cooking are all ways extra sodium is added to the diet. Always read labels to see how much sodium is present in a food item. Remember no salt added is best; however, if the label states less than 140 mg per serving, it is considered low sodium.

Nutrition Fun Fact: Sweet Potatoes and Yams

Sweet potatoes and yams are considered to be the same vegetable by many people. They are both flowering plants, but they are not related botanically. Yams and sweet potatoes are from two different plant families. Yams are starchier and drier than sweet potatoes. The color of the yam is very similar to the sweet potato. The sweet potato can be firm or soft. Sweet potatoes' skin color can range from white to yellow, orange, or orange-red. The firm sweet potato was produced before the soft variety. When cooked, the firm sweet potato remains firm but the soft sweet potato will become very soft and moist.

In most cases it is the sweet potato that you are eating. You can find yams in some stores but make sure the name sweet potato is not included. Remember, if sweet potato is on the box, it is not a yam! Both the sweet potato and yam are fat free, cholesterol free, a good source of fiber, potassium, vitamin A, and vitamin C.



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