



Healthy Kids, Healthy Michigan

Childcare Checklist – A Family's Guide to Healthy Eating and Physical Activity

Young children need healthy food and lots of physical activity to get them on track for a lifetime of health. When choosing a childcare provider (or working with your existing provider), it is a good idea to talk about what the provider is doing to promote children's health in order to give children the best possible start.

Why ask about water?

Children need water to restore fluids to their bodies everyday. Water is calorie-free, sugar-free and salt-free. Water is the best choice for children especially between meals and snacks.

Why ask about milk?

Milk is important for healthy bones, teeth and muscles. Children over the age of two do not need the additional milk fat provided in whole or 2% milk. Lower fat milk (1%, ½% and skim milk) has more nutrients ounce for ounce than whole or 2% milk.

Why ask about infant feeding?

Parents' decisions about infant feeding, especially the mother's breastfeeding (nursing) efforts, should be supported. Breastfeeding offers proven health benefits, including a decreased risk of obesity in children. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months. Age appropriate "solid" foods can begin to be offered at about 6 months of age.

Why ask about juice?

100% fruit juice can be a part of a healthy diet when limited to one age-appropriate serving per day. Drinking too much juice can lead to overweight or obesity and can also cause tooth decay and diarrhea.

Why ask about meals and snacks?

Healthy meals and snacks consist of fruits, vegetables, whole grains (such as whole-wheat bread and pasta, oatmeal, whole cornmeal, brown rice), low-fat dairy or lean protein (such as beef, chicken, turkey, fish, cooked beans/peas, eggs, fat-free or low-fat yogurt and cheeses). Preschoolers and toddlers have small stomachs and high energy requirements. Meals and snacks should be planned so that children eat every two to three hours.

Why ask about healthy celebrations?

Traditionally, treats are provided for celebrations such as birthdays, Halloween, Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, etc. These are often food items that may be unhealthy (e.g. candies, cakes, cookies, and other high-fat, salty or sugary snacks). Consider bringing in non-food items (like stickers or pencils) or healthy treats (like fruit kabobs or veggies and low-fat dip).

Why is it important for children to be physically active?

Children need physical activity to help them grow up healthy. Regular physical activity helps to achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Physical activity and movement are also important parts of development, learning and growth of young children. Children learn through play and when playing outdoors, they also learn about the environment, science, and nature.

Why is it important to limit screen time?

Screen time is the viewing of TV/video, computer, electronic games, hand-held devices or other visual devices. In the first years of life, children's brains and bodies are going through important growth and development. It is critical for infants and young children to have positive interactions with people. Sitting in front of a screen takes away from social interactions with parents/guardians and caregivers/teachers. The more time a child spends in front of a screen, the less the less time he or she is being active, and the more likely to snack when he or she is not hungry.

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Infant Feeding

- Infants (babies less than 12 months of age) are fed only human milk or formula, never cow’s milk.
- Infants are fed when hungry and are allowed to stop feeding when they show signs of fullness.
- Caregivers and teachers always hold infants for bottle-feeding of human milk or formula.
- Mothers are encouraged to breastfeed on-site, if possible, and breastfeeding families are welcomed.
- Infants are not fed solid foods in a bottle or infant feeder unless the feeding is written in the infant’s care plan by the child’s primary care provider.
- Infants are offered solid food no sooner than four months of age, and preferably around six months of age, as agreed upon with their families.

Toddler and Preschool Beverages

- 100% fruit juice is limited to one ½ cup (4 oz.) serving per day for children over 1 year of age.
- Children are not served concentrated sweetened drinks (e.g. soft drinks, or fruit punch).
- From the age of two, children are served lower fat milk (1%, ½% and skim milk) unless whole milk is written in the child’s care plan by the child’s primary care provider.
- Clean, sanitary drinking water is readily available, self serve throughout the day and children are encouraged to drink it.
- Child care staff role model by drinking water in front of the children throughout the day.

Toddler and Preschool Meals and Snacks

- Menus provide age-appropriate servings of whole grains, vegetables, fruits, chicken, fish, and beans, and avoid salty and fried foods.
- Menus are posted.
- Weekly menus include both new and familiar foods.
- Weekly menus include foods from different cultures.
- Accommodations are made for children with dietary restrictions such as food allergies and religious beliefs.
- Children are not served concentrated sweetened foods like candy.
- Snacks are offered between each meal when appropriate.
- Children are served age-appropriate portions that meet national requirements for children in early care and education.
- Toddlers and older infants are encouraged to feed themselves. Caregivers sit with them and supervise their use of child-sized cups, spoons, forks, and fingers.
- The child care staff eat with the children and eat the same meals and snacks as the children.
- Children are allowed to say “no” to a snack or meal.
- When a child eats less than half of a meal or snack, the child care staff helps the child determine if he/she is full before removing the plate.
- When a child requests seconds, the staff help determine if the child is still hungry before serving additional food.

Notes:

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Birthday, Holiday and General Celebrations

- Mostly healthy food or non-food treats are offered for holidays or celebrations.
- Support for healthy food and beverage choices displayed in classrooms and common areas.
- Items other than food (like more play time, stickers, or stamps) are used as reward for positive behavior.

Opportunities for Physical Activity

- Infants have supervised tummy time daily. Tummy time begins as a three-five minute period and is gradually increased (NOTE: Tummy time is only for when the infant is awake).
- Infants have outdoor activity and/or carriage/stroller rides daily, weather permitting.
- Children are offered at least one hour per day of active play time (active play is child-led free play that includes activities that respect and encourage children’s individual abilities and interests).
- Children are seated no more than 30 minutes at a time, unless eating or sleeping.

Encouragement of Physical Activity

- Caregivers and teachers wear clothing and shoes that allow for easy movement
- Caregivers and teachers encourage families to dress children for active play.
- Children are led in two or more active games and/or movement activities daily by a caregiver or teacher.
- Caregivers arrange indoor and outdoor areas to encourage active and safe play for all children.
- Children are encouraged to run where space is ample and safe outdoors.
- Caregivers and teachers include movement and physical action in children’s indoor play and learning activities.
- Children are encouraged to drink clean and sanitary water throughout their activities.
- Caregivers and teachers take part in training to learn the importance of physical activity and how to promote children’s physical activity.
- There is a written plan in place for promoting children’s physical activity.

Limiting Screen Time (TV, DVD, Computer)

- Children under two years of age do not watch TV, DVDs or use computers.
- The caregiver limits time for children two years and older in front of a screen (less than 1 hour per day of TV and computer use).
- Children do not watch TV or DVDs during meal or snack times.
- Children’s use of computers at early care and education is limited to periods of 15 minutes or less (except for school-age children for whom computer-time may be extended for homework or school projects).
- Computer use is limited to educational programs, with safeguards and adult supervision.

Notes:

This checklist was adapted from the *Family Checklists for Nutrition and Physical Activity in Early Care and Education*, a publication of the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education.