Nutrition Needs Grab and Go Lesson

Serve the Right Amount and Kind of Fat in Child Care Menus

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 encourages meals with less fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol than are typically eaten by Americans today.

Fat Is Important
Fats and oils are part of a healthful diet for young children, but the type of fat and the total amount of fat eaten makes a difference. Fats provide a concentrated source of energy for children to grow and play. Some fats and oils contain components essential for infants and children to grow and develop properly. Fats and oils in foods carry the fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K. Fats also carry flavors in foods and have unique flavors of their own that make foods taste good. Children enjoy eating foods that taste good.

Too Much of a Good Thing
Eating a lot of fat (greater than 35% of total calories) generally increases saturated fat and excess calories in the diet. The Dietary Guidelines recommends children 2 to 3 years of age eat about 30 to 35% of their daily calories from fat and 25 to 35% of calories come from fat for children and adolescents 4 to 18 years of age.

We need some saturated fats for good health, but eating too much saturated fat has been linked to heart disease. Avoid too many sources of saturated fat in child care meals to help children’s diets have less than 10% of total calories from saturated fats as recommended in the Dietary Guidelines.
How can you tell if a fat is saturated? Here is a tip to use: the harder a fat is at room temperature, the more saturated it is. Animal fats, hydrogenated shortening and margarines, and butter are examples of fats high in saturated fatty acids. According to the Dietary Guidelines, most fats should come from sources of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids, such as fish, nuts, and vegetable oils.

**Trans Fats**
Keep in mind that oils can become saturated when they are made into shortening and margarine, as well as some salad dressings and other foods. These foods are hydrogenated to make them more solid and may be a source of trans fats. The Dietary Guidelines recommends keeping trans fatty acid consumption as low as possible. This is because it is not clearly understood how safe eating a large amount of these altered fats may be, especially for young children.

**Cholesterol**
The Dietary Guidelines recommends a diet with less than 300 mg of cholesterol each day. Cholesterol is another type of fat that is important to healthy development and good health, but the body can make cholesterol. It is well known today that too much cholesterol is a risk factor for heart disease. Eating a relatively small amount each day is one way to help reduce this risk factor. Weight management and physical activity are also important lifestyle factors, especially for adults, that can be practiced early in life.
The child care menu, and plenty of physical activity during the child care day, are very important in starting a healthy lifestyle for children. Serving meals with the right amount of fat and low in saturated fat and cholesterol is a great place to start.

**Tips on How to Serve the Right Amount and Kind of Fat in Child Care Menus**

**Meat**
- Choose meat items labeled as lean or extra lean.
- Trim all visible fat from meat before cooking.
- Use very little added fat with meats.
- Bake meats instead of frying.
- Roast on a rack to drain fat.
- Broil ground beef patties on a rack.
- Cook ground beef thoroughly and drain in a colander before adding to recipes such as spaghetti or chili.
- Avoid serving high-fat meats, such as bologna, wieners, and luncheon meats.

**Take It a Step Further**
Read *Nutrition Facts* labels to select lower fat meat items.

**Poultry**
- Remove skin from chicken or turkey before cooking.
- Include un-breaded, baked, or broiled poultry choices on menus.
- Chill broth from chicken, turkey, or meat and remove the solid fat from the top before adding to soups or other dishes, such as cooking rice or pasta.
Fish
- Use water-packed tuna and salmon instead of fish packed in oil.
- Include un-breaded, baked, or broiled fish choices on menus.
- Remember, fish provide the type of oil we need more often. Serve fish regularly.

Important Food Safety Tips for Fish and Shellfish
- Never serve undercooked or raw fish or shellfish to infants and young children.
- Remember, shellfish is a common food allergy and should not be fed to children who are affected.
- Check with your local state agency or local health department for recommendation on how often to serve fish to avoid unsafe mercury exposure. The Environmental Protection Agency and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have published recommendations for pregnant women and children to safely enjoy fish and shellfish without over exposure to mercury (www.epa.gov).

Meat Alternates—Dried Beans and Peas
- Legumes are naturally low in fat.
- It is not necessary to add fat to legumes and peas. If adding fat to meet taste preferences of children (not the adult caregivers) use very little added fat when preparing recipes with dried beans and peas.
- Serve dried beans and peas regularly. Balance higher fat meat choices with these lowfat meat alternates.

Take It a Step Further—Dried Beans and Peas
Serve beans and peas without added fat. Allow children to learn to enjoy the natural flavors of these delicious, low-cost, nutritious foods.
Meat Alternates—Nuts, Seeds, and Nut and Seed Butters
• Nuts provide the type of oil we need more often. Nut butters may be easier for children to eat. Be careful to reduce choking risk when serving nut and seed butters. For example, mix peanut butter with applesauce to make it easier to swallow. Also, remember that some children are highly allergic to nuts and peanuts.

Meat Alternates—Yogurt and Cheese
• Use lowfat plain yogurt or pureed cottage cheese in place of regular sour cream.
• Use lowfat plain yogurt instead of whipped cream or whipped topping.
• Choose milk products made from lower fat milk. Lowfat yogurt, lowfat cottage cheese, and part-skim mozzarella cheese are examples.

Fluid Milk
• Give children ages 1 to 2 years of age whole milk to drink. After age 2, offer lower fat milk.

Grains and Breads
• Use whole-grain breads and serve with a little jelly or jam instead of margarine or butter.
• Avoid serving pasta or rice with heavy sauces made with fat, such as a cream sauce.
• Serve pasta with a vegetable broth or marinara sauce made without any fat.
• Limit the use of higher-fat bread products, such as doughnuts, sweet rolls, and pastry crusts.
• Choose lower fat, whole-grain crackers.
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Vegetables
• Dress salads lightly or serve plain.
• Offer baked potatoes and sweet potatoes more often than French fries.
• Bake fries and eliminate fried potatoes all together. Use a very light coating of olive oil for a crisp baked product.
• Serve salads from vegetables and fruits without a dressing, dip, or other condiments that contains fat.

Take It a Step Further—Vegetables
Encourage children to enjoy the natural flavors of fresh and cooked vegetables by not introducing dips and other condiments in child care.

Fats and Oils
• Choose corn, canola, safflower, olive, or soybean oil for cooking. Some children may be allergic to corn or soybean; check to be sure.
• Buy cooking oil in small containers that can be used in a few weeks. This keeps the oil fresh.
• Use lowfat mayonnaise and salad dressings or switch to other seasoning for salads and fruits, such as a little sprinkle of orange or lime juice.
• Limit the use of any fat that is solid at room temperature to reduce the saturated fat.
• Avoid using bacon, bacon grease, fatback, or lard for seasoning.
Pre-Packaged Foods

- When given two methods of cooking on a food package label use the method that adds the least fat; for example, oven-bake rather than pan-fry.

The recipes in the *USDA Recipes for Child Care* have been revised to provide a lower fat content. To download the recipes and to find other menu planning and preparation resources for healthful child care meals visit www.nfsmi.org.