



“Where is Your Menu?”: Healthy Eating in Early Childhood Settings

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One of the most frequently asked questions by parents visiting a childcare centre is, “Where is your menu?” With children spending more time in childcare settings, early childhood educators (ECEs) have many opportunities to

introduce children to different aspects of healthy eating (Maimon, 2008). The Child Care Facilities Act, Regulations and Guidelines of PEI (1998) tells centres to “ensure that all meals and snacks...meet the nutritional requirements of children [according to] Canada’s Food Guide.” Centres must also post menus for parents.

According to Canada’s Food Guide, it is important to serve children healthy food because it helps them grow, makes their bodies strong, aids in brain development, and gives them energy to play and to help their bodies heal. Also, children develop food-related attitudes during the pre-school years that extend into adulthood (Fuller, Keller, Olson, & Plymale, 2005).

ECEs have the opportunity to introduce food to children with their peers in a non-threatening atmosphere. This information is then carried back to the home. Knowing that their child ate well-balanced Snacks and lunch during the day helps parents feel confident their child is receiving necessary

nutrients.

There is more to healthy eating than serving. It is important to consider role modeling, offering a variety of foods, getting the children involved, making food fun, providing color and choice, and remembering the physical component. When children create their own subs, put spaghetti sauce on or not, or build a taco with lots of lettuce, children see that food is fun. When eating, children learn language and socializing skills, math (counting), science (nutrients), and social studies (foods around the world).

With growing research on healthy eating and its importance on child development, centers need to re-

evaluate their menus. ECEs, supervisors, and administrators have a crucial role to play in meeting and educating the nutritional needs of children. There



are a variety of resources to help them provide this information, such as Eating Between the Lines (ebtl.org). The lessons children learn during these early years are essential to their continued health and success as they grow to become an integrated part of society.

Fuller, C., Keller, L., Olson, J., & Plymale, A. (2005). Helping preschoolers become healthy eaters. *Journal of Pediatric Health Care: Official Publication of National Association of Pediatric Nurse Associates & Practitioners*, 19(3), 178-182.

Maimon, M. (2008). Michelangelo and the prevention of childhood obesity. *Exchange: The Early Childhood Leaders' Magazine since 1978*, (181), 76-78.