

Have a Healthy, Active, and Safe Summer

With every summer comes an increase in outdoor activity and new daily routines for children. This increased activity also affects their nutritional needs. This issue of the Small Bites quarterly newsletter provides tips Head Start and Early Head Start staff can share with families to promote healthy eating and safe physical activity all summer long.

Keep Children Healthy

Support families to make healthy food choices. This means including a variety of fruits and vegetables; lean, nutrient-rich sources of protein, such as fish, nuts and seeds, beans, poultry; and low-fat dairy and whole grains throughout the day.

- **Take a virtual grocery store tour.** This [video series](#) promotes good nutrition and healthy eating habits. Many videos include tips for families to consider while grocery shopping! Bring along MyPlate's [Grocery Store Bingo](#) to provide a fun and educational shopping experience.
- **Eat healthy meals to be a healthy family.** Families who commit to eating meals together are the most successful in creating healthy eating environments for children. Research shows children who sit down for family meals — even just once a day — eat more fruits, vegetables, and dairy products and are less likely to become overweight. While eating, conversations can strengthen family relationships. Start a conversation with, “What was the best part of your day?” or “What fun activities should we do outside this summer?”
- **Stay hydrated.** Remind families to provide children with plenty of water to drink throughout the day. Sugar-sweetened beverages and sports drinks should not replace water. [Water is not recommended for infants](#), especially those younger than 6 months old. Infants may be offered more breast milk or formula during the hot summer months.

Keep Children Active

Share these tips with families for staying physically active.

- **Stay active.** Work with families to come up with fun activities for the summer. They can try swimming, hiking, a family bike ride, a picnic, a trip to the park, or walking at the local zoo. If it's hot, families can consider water play, indoor activities, and early morning or evening walks. The Office of Head Start's [The Great Outdoors](#) blog is a great resource for more information on the [benefits of spending time outside](#).
- **Stay safe.** Share safety tips with families. Stress the importance of using sunscreen and bug spray, wearing a helmet when riding anything with wheels,

watching for traffic, and supervising small children at all times, especially during water play. Find more tips and resources in [Summer Safety Tips for Early Care and Education Programs](#).

- **Get into gardening.** Growing a garden can be a rewarding experience for children and families. It helps them learn where their food comes from and how it is grown. Gardening can be fun and easy. Ideas include joining a community garden, growing herbs indoors, and growing flowers and plants in pots. Families can also visit their local gardening center for tips and tricks.

- [Gardening to Enhance Early Childhood and Help Children Grow](#) provides resources on gardening for caregivers and teachers.

- [KidsGardening.org](#) offers many great ideas for families to get their children involved in gardening this summer, including the [Seed Viewer](#) and [Container Gardening for Kids](#) sample activities.

Access Nutritious Meals and Snacks

Help families access free and low-cost nutritious meals this summer.

- **Access nutritious food services.**

- The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides tailored nutrition assistance and breastfeeding support to new moms, infants, and children for their first five years of life. [The WIC Cash Value Voucher](#) allows WIC participants to purchase fruits and vegetables at grocery stores and farmers markets.

- The Feeding America network of food banks secures and distributes meals through food pantries and meal programs throughout the United States. Contact your [local food bank](#) to find [food and food assistance programs](#).

- To help those most in need receive healthy, fresh foods, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers boxes of prepacked, mixed fresh produce through the [Emergency Food Assistance Program](#), in addition to the single varieties that are available to order.

- [The Summer Food Service Program](#) reimburses program operators who serve free healthy meals and snacks to children in low-income areas.

- Because of COVID-19, the USDA has created new options to ensure children can receive summer meals, including an option for families and caregivers to pick up meals and take them home. Check with your state agency to see which options are available and use the [Meal Site Finder](#) tool to find meals in your program area.

- **Explore your local farmers market!** Farmers markets can be a fun, kid-friendly way to see and buy local, fresh produce. Many markets are affordable and may accept [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) other nutritional assistance program benefits that allow families access to healthy, fresh foods at a discounted price. Information on local farmers markets is available on the USDA's [National Farmers Market Directory](#).

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We Want to Hear from You

The Small Bites newsletter is produced quarterly by the National Center on Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety. Submit questions or suggestions for future newsletter topics to health@ecetta.info.