

Network News

e-Newsletter of the VA Infant & Toddler Specialist Network

VIRGINIA

INFANT & TODDLER SPECIALIST NETWORK

“Achieving Excellence in Early Care”

March-April-May 2015

Issue #13



Healthy Eating and Nutrition for Infants and Toddlers

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More and more children today are struggling with being overweight and obese. Did you know that the obesity epidemic is now affecting babies and toddlers too? The Institute of

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Medicine finds that almost 10% of babies have high weights for their length, and that over 20% of toddlers are already overweight or obese.

The long term consequences of weight gain, especially early weight gain in young children, include diabetes, asthma, cancer, depression, and other health concerns. Studies are finding that obesity gains its hold in the earliest years.

Caregivers of infants and toddlers play an important role helping young children learn healthy eating habits by providing healthy meals and snacks and sharing nutrition information with parents. For the little ones, it's not just what food they eat, but also how they learn to think about food and eating. These experiences can establish patterns that can last a lifetime.

Caregivers can provide eating/feeding environments that are warm and supportive, and teach children not just what to eat but how to choose and enjoy foods. Caregivers can teach infants and toddlers to recognize their own hunger/fullness cues, and to stop eating when they are full. Even the "pickiest" toddler can be encouraged to taste and enjoy a variety of nutritious foods. With good care, the habits for a lifetime of healthy eating can be established, protecting children from obesity with a great start!

Here are some practical ways that caregivers can promote healthy eating and nutrition in early care settings, and support children's healthy weight and overall well-being.

[Support moms who want to breastfeed.](#)

Breastfeeding has been shown to prevent obesity in children, and support children's overall healthy development. Child care programs that provide a private, comfortable spot for mothers to nurse their babies increase the chances that a mother will breastfeed exclusively for six months, as recommended by pediatricians. To learn more about breastfeeding friendly childcare programs, [click here](#).

[Be responsive to children's hunger/fullness cues.](#)

Babies know when they are full, but rely on adults to recognize their signals to communicate that feeling. Caregivers who respond by slowing down and watching when babies turn away from a bottle or spoon, or give other signals of "all done," are helping young children learn to understand their own body's signs of being full. Avoid trying to "make" babies and toddlers finish a bottle or food serving. This teaches them to ignore their own body. As children get older, encourage toddlers to use language to talk about whether they are hungry or full. For example, it helps a toddler when an adult shares information like, "I hear your tummy growling. Maybe you're hungry?" or "Your tummy is poking out. I bet you feel full."

[Make mealtimes pleasant.](#)

Meals are not just about food. They are an opportunity to connect with children, get to know them, and teach socially useful behaviors. Hold infants while bottle-feeding. Sit and eat with toddlers, and role model pleasant mealtime conversation. Develop routines that allow children to contribute to the mealtime experience. For example, toddlers can set and clear the table. Don't ask children to sit for more than 15-20 minutes for meals and 5-10 minutes for snacks. Having books or other quiet activities available will occupy toddlers who are ready to leave the table and still allow time for slower eaters, so meals can be pleasant for everyone.

[Teach about food and health.](#)

For toddlers, talk about the food they're eating. Which ones are vegetables? Which are fruits? Tell children basic information about how food helps us, like that milk makes bones grow strong. Toddlers can begin to learn that some foods are "special treat foods" to be enjoyed sometimes while other foods are "healthy foods" that can be eaten anytime. Meals are a natural opportunity to begin to teach children about making good choices, in a gentle way.

[Do not use food as punishment or reward.](#)

Children today need to learn that food is important for their bodies and helps them grow strong and healthy. Food should not be used to get children to "behave" or to reward children. In today's food environment, children need clear messages from caregivers about making healthy food choices.

When child care providers model, teach, and support children's nutrition experiences, children can learn positive habits for lifelong health. Many child care providers in Virginia are using the teaching strategies and tips to prevent obesity and support lifelong health found at [Let's Move: Child Care](#) and learning simple ways to implement best practices of a healthy child care environment.

Parents may appreciate this booklet on healthy eating from NAEYC, [Healthy from the Start: How Feeding Nurtures Your Young Child's Body, Heart, and Mind](#).

Institute of Medicine Reports: Early Childhood Obesity Prevention Policies. Released: June 23, 2011

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT ON: Nemours Child Care Provider's Guide

[Click here](#) for a guide about helping children eat right and stay active in a child care setting. Feeding and physical

Upcoming Professional Development Opportunities:

Register now for
Celebrating Active Babies & Tot 2015

March 28, 2015 Chesapeake

April 18, 2015 Herndon

May 2, 2015 Roanoke

May 16, 2015 Richmond



These valuable professional development institutes will focus on how movement and physical activity impact the overall health, development, and well-being of infants and toddlers.

For more information and registration visit
www.va-itsnetwork.org

Audio Conference for Early Care Providers
Developmentally Appropriate Art Activities for Toddlers and Twos

April 1, 2015

1:00-2:00 pm

**Registration will begin in early March, visit
www.va-itsnetwork.org**

WOW (Working on Wonderful)

Congratulations to the following programs that have completed Level 1 services with the VA ITSN during the current year, July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015:

Abdullah Kawthar

Northern Region

Bryant Early Learning Center

Northern Region

Ebenezer Baptist Church Academy Daycare

North Central Region

Edla Yilma

Northern Region

Ghazala Khilji

Northern Region

James & Juliette McNeil Preschool Academy

Northern Region

Leonor Medina

Northern Region

Little Acorn Patch at Kingstowne

Northern Region

Little Wonders Development Center

Western Region

Madison Learning Center

Valley Region

Minnieland, South Riding

Northern Region

Minnieland at Bridlewood

North Central Region

Minnieland Early Learning Center at Lorton

Northern Region

Seven Oaks Academy, Manassas

North Central Region

Yolanda Acho

Northern Region

Working on Wonderful WOW

We are striving to achieve excellence in
early care for infants and toddlers!

DID YOU KNOW . . .

. . . that spending time outdoors matters to
infants and toddlers?

[Click here to watch a video](#) that explains the
benefits of outside time for children as well as
various ways they can experience the outdoors.

The VA Infant & Toddler Specialist Network is a program of Child Development Resources, and is supported by the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) Grant #93.575, with funds made available to Virginia from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Points of view or opinions contained within this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of VDSS or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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