



Eco-Healthy Child Care



Eco-Healthy Child Care is a national program created by the Oregon Environmental Council to ensure that child care settings are as healthy, safe and green as possible by reducing children's exposure to toxic chemicals.

Easy Ways to Improve Nutrition

Choose organic or sustainable foods when you can. Organic certification means that no growth hormones, antibiotics, synthetic pesticides or genetically modified ingredients were used to grow or process the food.

Switch to nonfat dairy products and limit meats in children's diets. Saturated fat found in animal products is a major contributor to heart disease later in life. Avoiding animal fats reduces exposure to toxics that accumulate in fat, like dioxins and PCBs. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends non-fat or low fat dairy for children after age two.² Healthy fats include nuts, seeds, olives, avocados, flaxseed and wheat germ. Fruits and veggies are also less expensive than dairy and meats.

Serve more "real food." Read labels and make or choose foods with ingredients you recognize. Choosing foods with fewer ingredients will help you avoid added salt, sugar, fats, dyes and other artificial additives.

Avoid high fructose corn syrup. This additive is found in many processed and packaged foods, sodas and energy drinks. Avoiding corn syrup will reduce exposure to pesticides and genetically modified ingredients, and also reduce "empty" (non-nutritious) calories.

Replace any fruit juice (even 100%) with water and a piece of whole fruit. Fruit juice provides calories with little nutrition and contributes to cavities. Whole fruit is nutrient-rich and a great source of fiber. Water is free and healthy. The money you don't spend on juice can help offset the cost of local and organic produce.

Buy from local sources. Locally grown fruits and vegetables are likely to have higher nutrient levels³ because they can get to market quickly (produce loses nutrients every day after harvest). If fresh is out of season, then frozen local produce is a good bet.

Grow your own! Whether a windowsill planter or a full-blown garden, growing herbs or vegetables is a simple way to save money, avoid pesticides, and help kids learn where their food comes from. Nothing tastes better than veggies and fruit picked fresh from your garden! Many cities have community gardens, a plot shared by neighbors to grow and pick food.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Avoid canned products. Most cans are lined with BPA, a toxic chemical that can leach into food and be a health risk for children. Choose fresh, frozen or dried options for beans, pasta, fruits and veggies. If you use canned, ask the manufacturer whether the lining is BPA-free.

Never microwave or cook with plastic even if it is labeled “microwave safe.” When plastic is heated, it can leach toxic chemicals like BPA and phthalates into food.

Buy cookware without non-stick coating. When scratched, old or overheated, Teflon and other non-stick coating can leach toxic chemicals into food. Cast iron may be more expensive, but it is safer and more durable in the long run. Avoid dishware made from plastics labeled #3, #6 & #7. Also consider stainless steel pitchers, ceramics with non-lead coatings, and thick Pyrex bowls and plates.



Nutrition Resources

Notes:

1. Environmental Working Group. Shopper's Guide to Pesticides: the Dirty Dozen. Available at www.foodnews.org/methodology.php.
2. American Academy of Pediatricians & American Heart Association. 2006. Dietary recommendations for children and adolescents: A guide for practitioners. *Pediatrics* 117(2). Available at www.pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/117/2/544.
3. Review of recent studies comparing phytochemical levels in organic versus conventional foods. In Still No Free Lunch: Nutrient levels in US food supply eroded by pursuit of high yields. The Organic Center. Helweil, Brian. 2007. Available at www.organic.insightd.net/reportfiles/Yield_Nutrient_Density_Final.pdf.

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