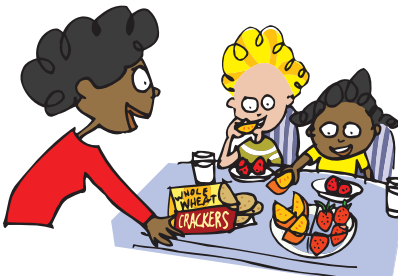
Build a Healthy Plate With Less Added Sugars

Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children: Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program

Sugars are found naturally in fruits, milk, yogurt, and cheese. However, the majority of sugars in typical American diets are "added sugars." You can help children stay healthier as they grow by providing them with foods and beverages with fewer added sugars. It is important to remember that:



- **The extra calories in added sugars can make children feel full before they've had a chance to get the nutrients they need from other foods.**
- **The extra calories from added sugars also make it harder for children to grow at a healthy weight.**
- **Added sugars are often called "empty calories" because they add calories to the diet without offering any nutrients.**
- **Sugar also increases the risk for dental cavities.**

What can I do to limit foods and beverages with added sugars?

Be aware of sources of added sugars. Sodas, fruit drinks, cakes, pies, cookies, dairy desserts, and candy are the major sources of added sugars for children and adolescents 2 to 18 years old. For younger children, sugar-sweetened beverages and cold cereals are the top sources. Offer foods that have no added sugars. Here are some substitutions of foods to choose for **children 2 years and older:**

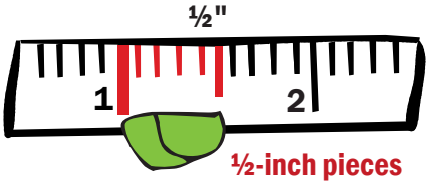
Instead Of:	Choose:
Flavored milk	Unflavored fat-free or low-fat milk (1% fat or less)
Sweetened yogurt	Fat-free or low-fat plain yogurt topped with fruit
Ice cream or frozen yogurt	Frozen fruits that don't contain added sugars, or frozen 100% fruit bars
Sweetened breakfast cereals	Cereals with little or no added sugar, whole-grain cereals, or oatmeal with fruit
Cookies	*Whole-grain* crackers, graham crackers, or plain animal crackers
Canned fruit in syrup, or sweetened applesauce	Fruit canned in water or 100% fruit juice; *unsweetened* applesauce
Doughnuts, pies, or cakes for desserts	Fruits (fresh, frozen, or canned in water or 100% juice), fruit salads, or baked fruits (like baked apples or pears)
Jam or jelly	100% fruit spread
Soda, fruit-flavored drinks, fruit cocktails, or fruit punch	Water, skim or low-fat milk, or 100% juice (no more than one ½ cup or ¾ cup serving of 100% juice a day)

Code Words for Added Sugars

- **Added sugars** are sugars added to foods during processing, preparation, or at the table.
- **Look at the ingredient list on the back of a package.** Do you see high fructose corn syrup, white sugar, brown sugar, honey, molasses, corn syrup, corn syrup solids, raw sugar, malt syrup, maple syrup, pancake syrup, or ingredients ending in "-ose" (such as maltose or fructose)? All of these are added sugars.
- **Choose foods that do not list added sugars** among the first three ingredients in the ingredient list.

For children younger than 4 years old:

- **Cut raw fruit in small pieces no larger than one-half inch (½") to prevent choking.**
- **Slice grapes and other round foods in half.**
- **Hard fruit chunks, chewy fruit snacks, and certain types of candy pose choking hazards.**
- **See Appendix A on page 77 for more information on choking hazards.**



How can I serve fewer foods with added sugars?

Children are born preferring sweet flavors. When children regularly taste sugar and sweet flavors, they learn to prefer these sweet flavors more and more. Adding less or no sugar and choosing foods and beverages lower in "added sugars" can help children learn to like foods that are not as sweet. Here are some tips:

- **Serve fresh fruit more often** instead of fruit-based desserts, such as fruit pies, cobblers, and crisps.
- **Offer raisins** instead of chewy fruit snacks, candy, or sweets.

There is usually very little fruit in chewy fruit snacks or "fruit-flavored" beverages (often called fruit drinks or fruit punch).

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 cup (228g)

Amount Per Serving

Calories 250	Calories from Fat 110
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 12g	18%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 470mg	20%
Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 6g	
Protein 5g	

Vitamin A 4% • Vitamin C 2%
Calcium 20% • Iron 4%

- **Purchase whole-grain breads and cereals with few or no added sugars.** Low-sugar cereals should have no more than 6 grams of sugar per serving, according to the Nutrition Facts label. Top cereal or oatmeal with fruit to sweeten the taste.
- **Offer fresh foods and less-processed foods.**
- **Choose not to offer sweets as rewards.** By offering food as a reward for good behavior, children learn to think that some foods are "better" than other foods. Reward the children in your care with kind words and comforting hugs, or give them nonfood items, like stickers, to make them feel special.

How can I encourage kids to eat a balanced variety of foods without added sugar?

Some kids may need time to adjust to a less sweet flavor. Introduce less-sweetened versions of the same foods that were previously sweetened. Here are some ways to help kids eat less added sugars:

- **Make food fun!** Serve a festive drink with no more than ½ cup to ¾ cup serving of fruit juice, once per day, and add an orange, lemon, or lime wedge as a garnish. During the rest of the day, offer most fruit whole or cut up, to get more fiber.

- **Cook together.** Children learn about foods when they help prepare them. Instead of sweetened yogurt, have kids make their own "fruit and yogurt parfait" by topping nonfat plain yogurt with whole-grain cereal and fresh or frozen berries, banana slices, fruit canned in 100% juice, or their favorite fruit.

Juice or Fruit Drinks?

Why Fruit Juice?

Juice is a way to enjoy fruit. Keeping 100% juice on hand is good for your whole family!

Here's what juice provides:

- **Vitamin C** to help heal cuts and bruises, fight infection, and use iron from food.
- **Vitamin A** in some juices for healthy eyes and skin.
- **Carbohydrates** for energy. Sugar from fruit is the carbohydrate in 100% juice.

Juice is mostly water. Like you, your child needs enough fluid to stay healthy.

How Much Juice?

Offer your child enough, but not too much:

Ages 2 to 5: when serving 100% juice, offer no more than ½ to ¾ cup depending on age, gender, and activity level.

Go Easy...

Because juice is convenient, it is easy to drink too much of it. Here is why drinking too much juice can be a problem:

- Juice has calories. Too much may give your child more calories than he or she needs. That may contribute to overweight. Go easy for yourself, too!
- If juice replaces milk or calcium-fortified soy beverages, your child may not get enough bone building calcium.
- Sipping juice a lot promotes cavities. Sometimes diarrhea is a problem too.

Try to offer lowfat or fat-free milk or water as an alternative beverage.

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Support the Message

- **Send the message home.** Share the *Nibbles for Health* take-home newsletter for parents on juice. *http://www.teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/Nibbles/Nibbles_Newsletter_19.pdf*

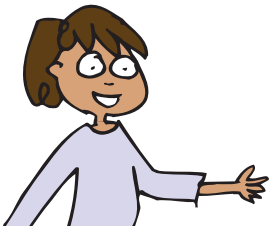
- **Eat a variety of foods with less added sugars, and kids will too.** They learn from watching you. See *Choose MyPlate* for more ideas. *http://www.choosemyplate.gov/preschoolers/daily-food-plans/about-empty-calories.html*

Activities

How can I put this information into practice?

- **Compare ingredient lists for food products you serve on the child care menu.** Sometimes foods and beverages contain "hidden sugars," or added sugars that you may not know about.

- **Look for added sugars on ingredient lists** (see *Code Words for Added Sugars* on page 48). Which products have added sugars as the first three ingredients in the list?



Take a look at your current weekly or cycle menu.

- **Circle items that contain added sugars on the menu.**

- **Circle the menu items to which you typically add additional sugar** (for example: pancake syrup to waffles, or brown sugar to oatmeal).

- **Find menu items low in added sugars. What are some foods that can be served instead of the circled menu items next month?** Review this tip sheet and the *Added Sugars Substitution Chart* on page 47 for some ideas.

- **Write down two to three ways that you can serve items without added sugars in next month's menu.** Think about food choices that are lower in added sugars, what to look for when food shopping, or different ways to prepare foods without adding additional sugar.

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