



Key Strategies for Healthy Out-of-School Settings

Quench their Thirst

Children are drinking more sugary drinks than ever, including soda, sports drinks, flavored milk, and juice drinks with added sugars (1, 2). [Sugary drinks](#) are also associated with weight gain and tooth decay, two of the most common chronic health problems in children today. Overweight and obese children are also more likely to develop other chronic diseases later in life, such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and stroke. With more than 60% of children's bodies comprised of water, it is important that kids are hydrating with the proper beverages ([USGS](#)). Out-of-school programs can help hydrate kids with healthy beverages by making the healthy choice the easy choice.

1. WATER IS THE BEST CHOICE

[Children naturally get thirsty](#) after playing, sleeping or eating. They can learn to develop a preference for drinking water to quench their thirst if it is made readily available at all times. Below are some best practices to make drinking water enjoyable for children:

- Have water available inside and outside at all times.
 - [What's to drink? Choose water.](#)
- Fill child-size water pitchers and let kids serve themselves using small cups.
- If water fountains are available, allow children to take water breaks or refill water bottles.
- Add fruit slices or berries to make water extra enjoyable
 - [Infused Water Recipes](#)
- Plan activities on the benefits of water.
 - [Flavor that Water](#)
 - [4 Servings of Water](#)
 - [Lesson 1](#)
 - [Lesson 2](#)

2. PROVIDE LOW-FAT MILK

What is another healthy beverage choice for young children? [Low-fat milk](#). Now is the time to get children into the habit of drinking milk so they can get bone-building calcium, vitamin D and other important nutrients that their growing bodies and minds need. Milk should be served with meals, but water should also be available at mealtime for children to choose. Below are some best practices for getting children to drink low-fat milk:

- Serve children two years and older only 1%, skim or non-fat milk (unless otherwise directed by the child's health care provider; Remember, low-fat milk (1%) and reduced fat milk (2%) are different).
 - [Build a Healthy Plate with Milk](#)
- Plan activities on the benefits of dairy.
 - [3 Servings of Low-Fat Dairy](#)
 - [Milk and Dairy](#)



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3. NO SUGARY DRINKS AND LIMIT JUICES

The consumption of [sweetened drinks](#), such as soda, juice, Kool-Aid and sports drinks, has been on the rise in past decades, while more and more children continue to gain excess weight. These drinks — even 100 percent fruit juice — contain a lot of sugar and calories. Below are some helpful practices when it comes to offering children sugary drinks and juices:

- ❑ Instead of juice, serve fresh fruit, which includes important dietary fiber and is a natural source of energy.
- ❑ Try diluting 100% fruit juice with water to train children's palates to enjoy mild sweetness.
- ❑ [Never serve](#) fruit drinks, sports drinks, sweet tea and soda.
- ❑ If families pack drinks for their kids, ask them to pack healthy beverages. A policy helps.
 - [Policy Language- Beverages](#)
- ❑ Remember to model healthy drinking yourself by avoiding drinking sugary drinks in front of children.
- ❑ Serve only 100% fruit juice and work with parents to make sure children are not drinking more than 4 – 6 ounces of juice per day; however, since many children already consume 4 – 6 ounces of juice at home, consider not serving juice at all.
 - [Juice Dos & Don'ts](#)



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Fuel their Bodies

Good [nutrition](#) is key for healthy growth and development in children and can reduce the risk of children becoming overweight or obese. Eating well also decreases the chances of having medical problems in adulthood. Currently, [1 in 3 children](#) between the ages of 2 and 19 are overweight or obese. Children who consume a lot of high-calorie foods often lack their daily needs of vitamins and minerals which are essential for proper development. Since children may eat many of their meals and snacks away from home, schools and out-of-school programs have an opportunity to meet those needs by providing children with nutritious food and to encourage the [formation of healthy eating habits](#).

1. PROMOTE GOOD NUTRITION

[Out-of-school programs](#) provide great opportunities for children to not only consume nutritious foods, but also learn how to make healthy decisions on their own. Below are some simple ways that you can help kids learn and practice healthy habits that have been shown to be best practice for promoting good nutrition:

- Host a training for staff to educate them on the importance of proper nutrition.
 - [Staff Development on Nutrition Knowledge](#)
 - [Being a Healthy Role Model for Children](#)
- Post materials that encourage making healthy choices.
 - [Kid Friendly Fruits and Vegetables](#)
 - [Reach for a Healthy Beverage](#)
- Plant a Garden for the children to monitor during the warm-weather months.
 - [Build a Community Garden](#)
- Send handouts home with children to promote healthy eating at home.
 - [Getting Straight A's from Breakfast](#)
 - [Healthy Lunchbox](#)
 - [Shopping for Healthy Meals](#)

2. PROVIDE HEALTHY FOOD OPTIONS

Approximately [75% of parents](#) who have a child in an out-of-school program believe that healthy beverages, snacks, or meals should be offered while their child is at the program. Below are some simple ways that an out-of-school program can provide healthy options that have been shown to be best practice for providing nutritious foods:

- Follow national guidelines for healthy foods.
 - [MyPlate](#)
- Only allow healthy foods at celebrations or events. For example, offer granola bars or fruit instead of cake at a birthday party.
 - [Healthy Snacks](#)
 - [Healthy Parties](#)
- Seek community resources around nutrition education and assessment.
 - [Self-Assessment](#)
 - [Nutrition Education Program](#)
 - [Go Nebraska Kids](#)



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3. MAKE HEALTHY EATING THE NORM

Out-of-school programs may be leery of adding health and nutrition programming to their already long list of objectives, but eating healthy doesn't have to be a separate item on the list. It can be integrated into a variety of current activities and before long it will become the norm! Below are some best practices to help integrate healthy eating:

- ❑ Integrate interactive nutrition lessons into programming.
 - [A Yummy Curriculum](#)
 - [Food and Fun](#)
 - [Curricula Resources](#)
- ❑ Recognize the role of staff in developing healthy habits by requiring that they also eat nutritious foods while on the job.
 - [Healthy Role Models](#)

4. ENGAGE PARENTS IN PROMOTING HEALTHY EATING

The parents or guardians of a child are often the first role models in a child's life and play a key role in the fight to prevent childhood obesity. It is important to educate parents about the importance of good nutrition and physical activity. Getting children engaged in activities in out-of-school programs helps parents also establish positive habits at home. Below are some best practices to help engage parents:

- ❑ If parents choose to send food with their child, make sure they are healthy snacks.
 - [Healthy Snack Tips](#)
- ❑ Develop a weekly newsletter that shares information with parents on the key points being emphasized at their child's out-of-school program.
 - [Parent Tips!](#)
- ❑ Create a parent task force to keep them engaged with the program.
 - [Ideas for Engaging Parents](#)



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Starts with Staff

[In youth roundtables](#) conducted by Child Trends, youth mentioned relationships and personal connections between participants and staff as a common reason for joining and continuing to participate in out-of-school programs. Teachers and Program Leaders ARE role models and inspire students every day. Your demonstration of healthy habits not only benefits you, but can also positively influence the health-related choices made by others. Keep up the good work and enjoy the journey towards better health!

1. PROVIDE STAFF ON-GOING EDUCATION ON NUTRITION

Staff should be educated regularly on healthy eating through the use of effective training models that use evidence-based content. [Staff trainings](#) on nutrition should also be comprehensive, should not support a particular industry or food sector agenda, and should be delivered by qualified personnel. Below are some best practices for encouraging staff to be healthy role models:

- Staff members sit and eat with the youth during snack or mealtime.
 - [Healthy Eating Action Plan](#)
- Staff discusses the health benefits of nutritious food with youth.
- Staff is educated on how to discuss unhealthy food choices with youth.
- Staff does [not consume personal food or beverages](#) in front of youth other than items that would appear on the program's menu.
 - "Do as I do" is more effective than "do as I say"

Resource: [Team Nutrition](#) is a USDA initiative that helps foodservice personnel provide nutrition education for children and their caregivers and provide support to healthy eating and physical activity. Team Nutrition encourages parents and schools to work together to help children understand the importance of healthy eating and physical activity at home.

2. PROVIDE STAFF ON-GOING EDUCATION ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Just like maintaining knowledge of proper nutrition, staff should also be regularly educated on [physical activity](#) through the use of effective, evidence-based training models. Below are some best practices for encouraging staff to be healthy role models:

- Staff receives training on effective practices and strategies for including physical activity in programming for both children and other staff members.
 - [Move More](#)
- Staff annually receives in-service training on physical activity.
 - [First Aid/CPR](#)
 - How to include youth [at all levels](#) and of all abilities
 - Appropriate alternate strategies to address negative or undesirable behaviors
- Staff should [not withhold](#) or use physical activity as a reward or punishment.
- Staff leads and participates in activities.

