

Ensuring Young Children Grow Up at a Healthy Weight:

*Policy Opportunities to Prevent Obesity**



Good nutrition and physical activity in children's earliest years are important tools for building lifelong physical, cognitive, and mental health outcomes that influence how well children achieve their potential. Without access to healthy food and plenty of opportunities for physical activity, children's risk of being overweight or obese increases, and unhealthy weight can lead to serious, long-term physical and emotional health problems. Experts agree that preventing childhood obesity requires action in a child's earliest years—from birth to age two. Investing early in preventing childhood obesity yields benefits for all of us down the line by fostering a healthier population overall and greatly reducing obesity-related health care costs over time.

1 Support breastfeeding in hospitals and in child care centers and group child care homes.

Breastfeeding may help promote a healthy weight in young children.

- ▶ Hospitals can encourage new mothers to breastfeed by adopting the “Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding” (recommended by the World Health Organization), discontinuing the practice of giving free bags of infant formula to new mothers, and allowing anyone who provides lactation consultation in a hospital to be reimbursed.
- ▶ Child care centers and group child care homes play an important role in supporting breastfeeding mothers by providing mothers a clean, private place to breastfeed and train staff on proper storage and handling of breast milk, and displaying breastfeeding promotion information.

2 Serve only healthy beverages in all child care settings.

Sugary drink consumption can contribute to unhealthy weight in young children.

- ▶ All child care settings can help children avoid extra calories by:
 - serving no beverages other than breast milk or infant formula to children ages 0-11 months; and
 - serving no beverages other than breast milk, unflavored full-fat milk, water, and no more than 4 ounces a day of 100% fruit juice to children 12 months to 2 years

3 Help child care centers and group child care homes follow good nutrition guidelines.

Adherence to federal nutrition guidelines and standards positively influences children's diets by promoting healthy eating.

- ▶ Federal guidelines call for serving:
 - more whole grains and low-sugar cereals
 - fewer high-sugar desserts, fried foods, and high-sodium foods
 - no sugary drinks

4 Increase physical activity time for infants and toddlers in all child care settings.

Physical activity is critical to infants' and toddlers' ability to maintain healthy weight.

- ▶ Child care centers, group child care homes, and family child care homes can help children get the activity they need by:
 - placing infants in a prone (on their tummies) position 2-3 times a day, for 3-5 minutes each time. The time should be increased as the infant shows enjoyment of the activity
 - allowing toddlers 60-90 minutes during an 8-hour day for moderate to vigorous physical activity, including running

5 Protect infants and toddlers in all child care settings from “screen time”.

Talking, playing, singing and interacting with people promotes brain development and encourages physical activity.

- ▶ Child care centers, group child care homes, and family child care homes can encourage healthy infant and toddler development by:
 - never placing them in front of televisions, computers, or tablets to occupy them
 - never allowing infants and toddlers to passively watch a television, computer, mobile phone, or other screen that older children in the same room are watching

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