

NETA Quarterly News

Nutrition, Physical Activity & Gardening for
Early Childhood Providers



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Preschool Physical Activity Guidelines

Many young kids are not meeting the recommendations for diet and physical activity. In 2008 the obesity rate in the U.S. for low-income, 2-5 year olds was 15%; in Alameda County 17% of the same age low-income kids were obese.

Kids are eating too much and are not as physically active as they should be. Physical activity and eating healthy foods in moderate amounts are good ways to lower childhood obesity. Kids that develop healthy habits early in life tend to keep these habits as adults. In childcare centers kids can learn to eat healthy and be active. Teachers have the chance to be good role models. Show a positive attitude toward eating healthy foods and being active. It's not just what you say, it's what you do.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

Physical activity helps kids be healthy, control weight, and believe in themselves. The National Association for Sports and Physical Activity has

developed guidelines to improve preschool kids' motor and physical activity skills:

1. Kids need at least 60 minutes a day of structured physical activity.
2. Kids should have several hours of free play.
3. Kids should not be inactive for more than 60 minutes at a time, except when sleeping.
4. Get kids to develop their motor skills. Remember each child develops at his/her own rate.
5. Make your indoor and outdoor areas safe for kids.

Kids need to stay active and eat more fruits and vegetables. Get kids to taste new foods and eat a variety of fruits and vegetables. Serve fruits and vegetables with every meal or snack. See NETA's *Tips for Busy Professionals* and Quarterly Newsletters for ideas. NETA monthly *Tips for Busy Professionals* provide tips to get kids to try more fruits, with simple ways to involve children in cooking activities. Contact Nutrition Education Training Academy (NETA) at <http://neta.ucdavis.edu> or phone (510) 567-6812 for more information.

References

MyPyramid for Preschoolers. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). <http://www.mypyramid.gov/preschoolers/>

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Photo: Network for a Healthy California

Garden-Based Nutrition Education for Young Kids

The *Dietary Guidelines* suggest that Americans eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains daily. Kids 2-5 years old should eat 1-1½ cups of fruits and 1-1½ cups of vegetables each day. Many preschool kids do not eat these amounts. Educators and health professionals both found that, quite often, kids change their views about fruits and vegetables when they grow their own food. Kids' attitudes and preferences for fruits and vegetables improve, which is important in developing healthy eating habits.

Garden-based nutrition is a great opportunity for kids to understand how fruits and vegetables grow, and connects the food to the kitchen. Kids have the chance to learn about fruits and vegetables through hands-on experiences. The California Department of Education reports that children

involved in garden-based nutrition education improve their intellectual, social, and physical skills.

To include nutrition education in the garden:

- Teach kids that plants, like people, need food and water to grow and stay healthy.
- Create an edible garden of a size and shape that is your preference and easy to manage.
- Grow a variety of vegetables and fruits in your school and even in your home gardens.
- Include new fruits and vegetables in the garden for kids to taste them.
- Prepare a snack after harvest. Kids usually taste what they grow.
- Eat different parts of the plant and teach kids about vegetables that are



roots, stems, leaves. See NETA's *Nutrition Matters!* curriculum.

- Practice good food safety. Washing hands is one of the most important ways to keep kids from getting sick.
- Wash all food from the garden before eating it. Be sure kids wash their hands before handling food.
- Do taste tests or snacks with the vegetables they grow.

Garden-based nutrition education is a very good way to help preschoolers develop skills and healthy eating habits that can last a lifetime. UC Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners have a lot of information about how to grow home and school garden. Helpful resources include Garden Notes for Amateurs Gardeners, Alameda County Master Gardener Publications, and Teacher Train of Trainer Handout.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) Gardening with Kids

Teaching kids gardening can be a powerful nutrition lesson. Mr. Charles Slocum, Early Childhood Education (ECE) teacher at Martin Luther King Child Development Center (MLK CDC) has a nutrition garden and teaches children where food comes from and how to grow it properly.

Charles was motivated in having a garden to improve kid's eating habits and offering kids the opportunity to participate in the learning experience, after seeing "... too much junk food and not enough vegetables." The preschoolers are involved in all aspects of growing vegetables; parents are essential in maintaining the

garden. Children take home produce (especially tomatoes, lettuce, chiles, corn, squash, and beans). Neighbors also harvest produce from the garden. MLK CDC is located at 960 – 10th Street, Oakland 94607.

For more successful school gardens, ask Nutrition Education Training Academy (NETA) staff for a copy of *School Gardens Assessment, 2009-10*, the Alameda School Garden Directory or contact <http://neta.ucdavis.edu> or (510) 567-6812.

Reference

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References

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- A Garden Pilot Project Enhances Fruit and Vegetable Consumption Among Children. JADA. <http://healthinfo.montana.edu/Gardenpilot.pdf>
- A Garden in Every School, California Department of Education. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/he/garden.asp>
- Alameda County Master Gardeners, University of California Cooperative Extension. <http://acmg.ucdavis.edu/>

Plant a Salad Garden



Plant a mini vegetable garden to make a salad. Vegetables give us many nutrients, such as vitamin A, vitamin C, folate, potassium, and fiber. Dark green leafy vegetables are some of the most nutritious vegetables you can grow. In planting a salad garden, you can have fun adding different plants in your garden. Adding variety can add taste and nutrition!

Suggested Salad Garden Components:

- Peppers, 2 plants
- Cherry Tomato, 1 plant
- Salad Tomato, 1 plant
- Greens (spinach, collard, mustard greens, and/or lettuces), 8 square feet
- Kale or chard, 2 plants
- Carrots, 4 square feet wide row
- Onions, 2 square feet
- Chives, 1 clump
- Parsley, 1-2 plants

For more information, contact Master Gardeners at UC Cooperative Extension at (510) 383-1708 or <http://acmg.ucdavis.edu/>.

"It's simply not enough for schools to offer healthy foods. Nutrition education must be a key part of every school's curricula. School gardens, as learning laboratories, provide many opportunities to enhance the school environment and reinforce nutrition education. Research shows that youngsters who plant and harvest their own fruits and vegetables are more likely to eat them."

—A.G. Kawamura, Secretary California Department of Food and Agriculture

Recipe

If you already have a garden growing at home or school, use vegetables from it to make a salad. Save this recipe, so you have it when the vegetables from your salad garden are ready to harvest. Use the spinach, tomatoes, and onion from your mini vegetable garden to prepare this recipe. In the meantime, you can purchase the produce and try this recipe.

SPINACH BLACK BEAN SALAD

Makes 3 servings. 1 cup per serving.

Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons vinegar
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon mustard
- 2 cups spinach
- 1 ½ cups black beans, unsalted and fat free
- 2 tomatoes, chopped
- 1 small red onion, chopped

Preparation:

1. In a large bowl, combine vinegar, oil, and mustard
2. Wash and drain spinach and chop spinach, tomatoes, and onions.
3. Add spinach, beans, tomatoes, and onions to oil and vinegar. Toss well and serve.



Nutrition information per serving:

Calories 190, Carbohydrate 28 g, Dietary Fiber 8 g, Protein 9 g, Total Fat 5 g, Saturated Fat 0 g, Trans Fat 0 g, Cholesterol 1 mg, Sodium 160 mg

Recipe adapted from:

USDA Snap-Ed Connection Recipe Finder, http://recipefinder.nal.usda.gov/index.php?mode=display&rec_id=948

Note: this recipe makes 3 adult servings, at 1 cup each. To make this for your classroom, double the recipe to make 24 taste tests at ¼ cup each.



Promoting Physical Activity in Preschoolers

Get kids to be active. Kids develop their motor skills during the early years.

Every kid's motor skill develops at his or her own pace and way. Some kids are able to meet the age-appropriate skills and respond well to a variety of activities, while others may take a little longer to accomplish the same task. Some tips include:

- Provide free space and age-appropriate toys and equipment to get kids physically active. These may include yoga mats, balls, hopscotch, hula hoops, and other items.
- Plan activities that get kids breathing deeper and faster such as hopping, skipping, jumping forward, balancing on one foot, throwing, and catching.



- Offer a variety of activities and difficulty levels so every kid can feel good about him or herself. When throwing something, change the distance from the target (close to far). When playing catch, vary the size and type of ball used (small to large, soft to firm).

- Get involved and do some of the activities, be a good role model. Children will imitate you.
- Include some of the activities NETA offers from the workshops and *Tips for Busy Early Childhood Professionals*.
- Encourage parents to do some of the activities included in the parent newsletter, *CNAM Parent News*, and *Tips for Parents of Preschool Children*.

References:

- American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement, Pediatrics 107(2), 2001. <http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/pediatrics;107/2/423.pdf>
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Photos: Network for a Healthy California



This material was produced by the California Department of Public Health's *Network for a Healthy California*, with funding from the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly the Food Stamp Program). These institutions are equal opportunity providers and employers. In California, food stamps provide assistance to low-income households, and can help buy nutritious foods for better health. For food stamp information, call 877-847-3663. For important nutrition information visit www.cachampionsforchange.net.

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