



TOOLKIT

Child Care

MISSOURI FOUNDATION FOR HEALTH

Healthy Schools Healthy Communities

LET'S BUILD A HEALTHIER FUTURE

*In 2013, Missouri Foundation for Health established the **Healthy Schools Healthy Communities (HSHC)** initiative to address childhood obesity in select areas. HSHC brought together schools, community organizations, businesses, parents, and other residents to identify and advocate for changes that increase access to healthy food and physical activity where our kids live, learn, and play. This toolkit was originally developed as part of the initiative and has been adapted for statewide use.*

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Nutrition

The first 1,000 days of a child's life are crucial for brain development. Healthy eating helps lay the foundation for proper growth and development in young children.

Breastfeeding

Breastmilk is a perfect first food for infants. It provides needed nutrients for brain growth and early child development. Breastfeeding can reduce chronic illness and stress in young children while increasing the bond between mother and child.

Child care programs are a perfect environment to support families that choose to breastfeed. Consider creating a **private breastfeeding-friendly area** for parents with:

- Electrical outlets for breast pumps
- Comfortable rocking chair or sofa
- Small table for pump or bottle supplies
- Adjustable lighting
- Changing table and supplies
- A refrigerator or freezer space to store expressed breast milk. Remember to label each container with child's first and last name and the date it was expressed before storing.



These rooms can also be used for parents who wish to bond with their infants while feeding them in a child care setting. Consider offering the room to fathers as a way to bond with their babies, supporting the importance of being with an infant in quiet, one-on-one time.

In Missouri, the Department of Health and Senior Services offers a [Breastfeeding Friendly Worksite recognition](#). This is a great way to support breastfeeding in a child care setting while marketing the program as family friendly.

Additional breastfeeding resources:

[Caregiver's Guide to the Breastfed Baby](#)

[How to Handle and Store Expressed Milk](#)

[How to Meet the Needs of Breastfed Babies in Child Care](#)

[Introducing a Bottle to a Breastfed Baby](#)

Increasing Daily Water Consumption

All living things need water to survive. Without water, our bodies do not work properly. Water makes up over half of a child’s body weight and is essential for good health. It is the best way to hydrate. The amount of water a child needs daily depends on body size, activity level, age, and overall health. Water is essential for helping a body work well. Offer water to children throughout the day. Keep water visible both inside and outside. To make water available, consider using:

- Reusable, individually labeled water bottles,
- Individually labeled sippy cups, or
- Pitchers of water or a thermos of water with disposable cups that children can self-serve when they are thirsty.



Set up a **hydration station**. Secure a cooler with water to a table so children can access water throughout the day as they are thirsty using their own water bottles or cups. Take the water outside with the cooler secured to a cart for water availability during active play.

Resources to increase access to water in your child care program:

[Water and Juice Tip Sheet](#)

[Why Water and Milk are the Best Choices](#)

[Increasing Access to Drinking Water and Other Healthier Beverages](#)

[Grow Healthy Kids: Just Add Water](#)

Reducing Sugary Beverages

Sugary beverages are a large contributor to children’s consumption of “empty calories.” Many times we offer children sugary beverages in child care without realizing it. Even real fruit juices are so concentrated that the juice is almost 100% sugar. Always check the nutrition facts label and the ingredient list carefully for that amount of sugar. Eating the whole fruit instead contains fiber and less sugar, helping children enjoy the taste of the fruit instead of the taste of the sugar.

Children one year and older should not drink more than 4-6 ounces of juice per day. Since most toddlers and preschoolers drink more than six ounces of juice every day at home, it is best practice for you not to serve any juice at all. Children under 12 months should never be served juice.

Replacing juice with water is cost-saving too! Substitute water for juice three times a week and see the savings!

Nurture Healthy Eaters

Creating healthy eating habits at an early age can help reduce obesity and other chronic health issues later in life. Learning the importance of eating all the colors of the rainbow and making healthy food choices as a child can have lifelong positive effects. What does this look like in a child care?

- Include fresh fruits and vegetables at meals and for snacks.
- Introduce new foods as parts of lessons on senses, experiencing cultures through food or gardening.
- Get excited about new foods and celebrate different tastes.
- Role model to encourage them in tasting and trying new experiences. Not all children will like all foods. It is not about loving every food but about being open to trying healthy foods.
- Offer a variety of new foods and consider asking families for ideas on healthy food options. You are helping them learn new habits with their children.
- Encourage children to taste at least two bites of a new food, giving themselves a chance to experience the new tastes and textures, before deciding on how they like it.



Increase healthy food choices by growing a garden! Create an indoor hydroponic garden on a wall or in a window. Build a raised bed or backyard garden as a project with families and the community. Children are much more likely to eat what they have grown. Have fun with the foods you grow. Create pictures with the fruits and vegetables you grow and then “Eat Your Art.”

Resources to nurture healthy eaters:

[Growing with MO Toolkit](#)

[Team Nutrition Resource Library](#)

[Grow It, Try It, Like It! Nutrition Education Kit](#)

[Grow It, Try it, Like It! Fun with Fruits and Vegetables](#)

Healthy Celebrations

Celebrations can be fun and healthy without all the sugary sweets. Focus on fun activities and special games rather than the food. Creating healthy habits that relate celebrations to action and experience, rather than sweet foods, is a valuable habit to learn when young.

Celebrate by:

- Making a special shirt or hat for the birthday child to wear during the day.
- Let the birthday child choose a special book or song for everyone to enjoy.



- Create special activities - games, experiments, experiences - just for celebrations.
- Help families know what treats to bring giving them a list of healthy foods and non-food choices (crayons, stickers, whistles, noise makers) to celebrate special days instead of candy and sweets.
- Create art with food on special days and then eat as a treat.

If parents want to bring food to celebrate, give them a list of acceptable, healthy options to bring instead of cupcakes and candy.

Resources for making celebrations healthier:

[Eco-Healthy Child Care](#)

[Celebrations That Support Child Health](#)

[Healthy Celebrations](#)

Physical Activity

Physical activity is essential to healthy development for young children. Whether it is tummy time for infants, dancing for toddlers, or obstacle courses for preschoolers, daily physical activity builds a strong foundation of healthy habits that last a lifetime. Research shows that children who are active tend to have fewer behavioral and disciplinary problems, do better in school, and have longer attention spans in class. Planning daily physical activity is a wonderful way to help children use their energy in constructive ways.

Physical Activity for Infants

In their first year, infants need plenty of opportunities to move around, explore their surroundings, and play on the floor in a safe environment. Babies are naturally curious. When you set up an environment that encourages them to explore, infants will better develop skills like reaching, rolling, sitting up, crawling, pulling up, and walking. Provide opportunities for babies to be on the floor in a safe environment with toys close but slightly out of reach. This encourages movement and scooting as the infant works their way toward the child-safe toy.

For tummy time, lay the infant on their tummy on a blanket or play mat on the floor in a safe, open space. Lay down next to the baby to give them incentive to lift their head and look at you. This is a great time to sing, tell stories, or talk to engage the baby. You can also use books or toys to encourage the infant to reach and touch. Consider putting two or three babies on the floor mat together slightly out of reach. This encourages cooing, 'talking,' and general discovery. Tummy time should happen throughout the day for short periods, 5-10 minutes or until the infant is no longer engaged.

Tummy time helps infants develop basic core muscles and coordinate movement to lift their heads. A strong core is important for crawling, turning over, and sitting up unassisted. These skills lay a strong foundation to a child's ability to walk.

Infant activity resources:

[Infant Developmental Milestones](#)

[Activities for Babies](#)

[Play Activities for Babies](#)

Physical Activity for Toddlers and Preschoolers

As children get older, structured and unstructured physical activity helps develop and maintain strong bones while developing motor skills that build strength, flexibility, and endurance. Moderate to vigorous physical activity for preschool children, 60 to 120 minutes a day, helps maintain healthy weight and greatly decreases chances of developing chronic illnesses such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity. Regular physical activity builds confidence, is a healthy way to decrease stress and depression, improves brain development and socialization, and develops good sleep habits.



Push the tables, chairs, and other furniture to sides of the room and let the children bounce a beach ball on a parachute or bedsheet. Children of all abilities can practice raising and lowering, moving under and around. Make up games to go with your activities such as duck, duck, goose; going on a bear hunt; or musical chairs. Both structured, guided physical activity and unstructured physical activity led by the child are important daily activities.

Some child care programs may be limited on space, both outside and inside, but daily physical activity does not require a large area to have a big impact. Activities like dancing to child-appropriate music with ribbons and streamers or yoga are great for smaller spaces.

Toddler and Preschooler Physical Activity Resources:

[Sesame Street's Healthy Habits](#)

[Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures - Get Kids Moving](#)

[CDC Physical Activity for Children](#)

[Year Calendar of Daily Physical Activity Ideas](#)

Missouri MOve Smart Physical Activity Cards

You can request the cards for free from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. Each set of 24 activity cards includes activities that require minimal equipment and can be set up with little effort and provide big results with the children. You can also [download the cards](#).



GoNoodle

[GoNoodle](#) is free and provides hundreds of short movement and mindfulness videos for children ages pre-K through elementary school.

Yoga for Kids and Family fitness

Yoga is wonderful way to move and strengthen core muscles while increasing flexibility and balance. Yoga for Kids and Family fitness is an app that makes fitness easy and fun for toddlers and preschoolers. Workouts use cartoon children to show each pose with music and timed routines.



[Download from the Google Play store](#) (free)

[Download from the Apple Store](#) (\$2.99)

Missouri Physical Activity in Child Care Recognition



The Missouri **MOve Smart** Child Care recognition provides a set of physical activity standards for child care programs, center and family-based. These best practices support child care educators in evaluating their programs to create a healthier environment for the children, their families, and staff. Child care programs can earn this statewide recognition through the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. [Apply here](#).

Reducing Screen Time

Apps and media devices can be great resources to increase physical activity (in moderation). According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, babies and toddlers up to two years old should not have any screen time (other than video-chatting).

Watching a video for guidance during a physical activity is considered screen time. Once you and the children have learned the routine or the activity, do not rely on the video and let the children create their own routines choosing child-appropriate music. Activities that are active, social, and engage a child's senses through touching, exploring, and playing are much more beneficial than watching television or other media devices.

The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) is a great source of information and tools, including "[Family Media Use Plan](#)." The tools help families create a media plan that follows developmentally appropriate best practices for screen time.