

Fuel for School: Nutrition and Food Preparation Policies of the Infant-Toddler and Preschool Program

Many parents have different ideas about nutrition and food preparation. Some families don't allow their children any sugar, artificial additives or preservatives. Some are comfortable allowing toddlers to consume whole grapes, while others are more cautious.

We certainly do not think it appropriate to tell families what their children should eat while they're at home, however, just as we have certain guidelines for toys and medication at the Center, we believe it is necessary to establish certain nutritional and food preparation guidelines in order to provide the best care possible for all children while they are with us.

Children are encouraged to be aware of and meet their own individual needs, thus they are free to choose among food items provided from home. Teachers do not dictate if, when, or how much of each food is eaten, however, **expert health and safety recommendations and practical experience leads us to prohibit certain items at school. These include, but may not be limited to:**

Peanuts and Peanut Butter: These items are restricted from the program due to serious or life threatening allergies.

Chewing gum: In addition to being a serious choking hazard for children, gum can get stuck on hair, shoes, carpets, chairs and tables. If shared, the spread of contagious germs can occur.

Foods containing honey for children under one year of age.

Cow's milk for children under one year of age.

Fruit juices.

(Please speak with a Director if you have special needs in this area.)

Foods high in refined sugar: Foods such as candy, sodas (even Hansen's), sugared juice drinks (such as Capri-Sun), Twinkies, cupcakes, chocolate, and sugared fruit rolls or snack bars offer children little in the way of nutritional value and generally contain high levels of refined sugar. In the group child care environment, we find that highly sugared foods tend to be preferred by children, and will be favored over other, more nutritional foods. Children expend a tremendous amount of energy during the day, and need foods which can help them sustain their energy over a longer period of time. Additionally, these types of "dessert" or sweet foods can cause problems for teachers and children alike because they serve as the focus of arguments, bribes, and negotiations that often result in hurt feelings, especially among preschool age children.

Foods which are a choking hazard for children under four years of age: The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) in the text *CARING FOR OUR CHILDREN: National Health and Safety Performance Standards--Guidelines For Out of Home Child Care Programs* strongly recommends prohibiting children under four from eating certain foods due to heightened risk posed by the textures or shapes of these foods. Included in the list are:

- . foods that are round, hard, thick or sticky.
- . hot dogs and sausages, including Vienna sausages, and string cheese tubes (unless cut lengthwise)
- . whole grapes (please quarter)
- . hard candy
- . whole nuts, raisins, & seeds
- . uncooked celery, & carrots (may not be coin cut or in whole stick shape)
- . dried fruit, fruit rolls or fruit leathers

- Bavarian pretzels, rice cakes, some types of chips
- peanuts and popcorn
- marshmallows, spoonfuls of nut butters
- chunks of meat larger than can be swallowed whole

Additionally, the AAP states that foods for infants should be cut into cubes no larger than 1/4" and for toddlers no larger than 1/2". As a result of these guidelines, we ask that all grapes be quartered. **(The risk of choking can be minimized if children are taught to always sit while eating.)**

If any of the above items do appear with your child's lunch, we may set them aside, return them to the lunch container for you to take home, and make sure your child still has enough to eat here for lunch.

Silica Packets:

If a food package contains a silica packet such as roasted seaweed and freeze dried fruits, please remove the silica packet before sending it to the Center. Children may inadvertently ingest the packet while eating the foods inside the package.

A few more notes on nutrition and food preparation:

Some breakfast items can be extremely sugary. Please remember that what your child eats for breakfast contributes to setting a tone for the day. You may want to consider foods which include proteins, fresh fruit, or non-sugary carbohydrates.

Our experience is that children will eat a reasonably nourishing lunch when provided appropriate healthy choices.

Remember that prior to the age of five is a time when habits and patterns become ingrained and may follow us, for better or worse, through our lives. As age appropriate, the CEC's curriculum includes discussions regarding balanced nutrition and maintaining healthy bodies. We would like to support the development of healthy habits and strong bodies.

The preceding guidelines apply to what you send in your child's lunch. For foods that are to be shared with other children, such as birthday treats that parents bring in, items children bring in for "share lunch" days, or contributions brought by parents for children's dinners during parent meetings, additional rules apply. They are:

1. No peanuts or peanut butter (the CEC restricts these due to allergies)
2. No added sugar (or honey for children under two years of age).
3. No aspartame (NutraSweet) or other artificial sweeteners. Please read labels carefully. Items labeled "sugar-free" often contain aspartame.
4. Parents wishing to bring in treats for the room must clear items first with a lead teacher.

On the encouraging side, there are lots of foods available that are both tasty and nourishing. Here's a list of lunch suggestions from our staff.

Entrees/Protein Foods:

Sandwiches, the perennial standby, can be made interesting, especially if your child can help in some way with the preparation. Suggestions for sandwiches include tuna, egg, chicken, almond butter, cold meats, cheeses, and even imaginative combinations like avocado and cheese. Other possibilities for lunch include spaghetti, chili, soup, or stew; salads of all kinds: tuna, tofu, chicken, yogurt, cottage cheese, egg salad, crackers and cheese, or enchiladas and burritos. All of these can be stored in thermos containers or the refrigerator so they're still delicious at midday.

Side dishes/snacks:

Fruits, vegetables, breads, crackers, grains, potatoes, pasta, mixed green or pasta salads, hummus or bean dip.

If you have any questions, or need suggestions for your child's lunch, please feel free to see a Lead Teacher or Program Director.