



What Should I Look for in Child Care?

How does child care contribute to childhood obesity?

Only recently has the contribution of child care to the obesity epidemic been recognized. Child care facilities provide meals, snacks and play time to many children, sometimes for a large portion of the day. Habits formed in childhood can last a lifetime.

Studies show that meals provided in child care facilities often have too much fat and rarely include the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables. Foods such as cookies, French fries, fried meat, hot dogs and high-fat condiments are served often.

How should I evaluate different child care programs?

Follow these three steps:

- ❖ **Know your state regulations.** Federal nutrition regulations exist only for child care services receiving federal money (e.g., Head Start Programs, etc). However, each state has health, safety and nutrition standards for child care providers licensed in their state. [The National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education](#) is one place to look for regulations organized by state. By understanding what your state requires, you can determine if the child care facilities you are using (or considering using) are meeting nutrition and physical activity guidelines.

- ❖ **Ask about the nutrient content of the foods the center will serve your child.**

State regulations represent the minimal required for licensing purposes and, depending on the state, may not be rigorous. Ideally, meals and snacks should meet the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), which state that children should:

- Consume **whole-grain** products often; at least half the grains should be whole grains.
- Consume 2 cups per day of fat-free or low-fat **milk** or equivalent milk products for children 2 to 8 years old. Children 9 years old and older should consume 3 cups per day of fat-free or low-fat milk or equivalent milk products.
- Keep total **fat** intake between 30%-35% of calories for children 2 to 3 years old; children and adolescents 4 to 18 years old should keep total fat intake between 25%-35%, with most of the fat coming from sources of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids, such as fish, nuts and vegetable oils.
- Consume sufficient amounts of **fruits** and **vegetables**.



❖ Ask how much physical activity your child will get each day. Physical activity is important to develop coordination and strengthen small and large muscles as your child grows. The amount and type of activity your child needs each day depends on is or her age.

It is also important for your child to have the opportunity to play indoors and outdoors every day in structured and unstructured ways. “Screen time,” such as television, computers and electronic games, should be limited to fewer than 2 hours each day.

Table 1: Recommendations for Physical Activity by Age

Age	Structured	Unstructured	Total/Day	Days/ Week
Toddlers	30 minutes	60 minutes to several hours	Several hours	Most days
Preschool	60 minutes	60 minutes to several hours	Several hours	Most days
5 to 12 years old	No recommendation	Several hours	Several hours	Each day
Adolescents	No recommendation	60 minutes to 2 hours	Minimum 60 minutes, 2 hours recommended	Daily

Source: *National Association of Sports and Physical Education*