

Nibbles for Health

Nutrition Newsletters for
Parents of Young Children

LEADER **GUIDE**



Nibbles for Health is a project developed by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The newsletters and sharing sessions are intended for parents of preschool-aged children who participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), which provides meals and snacks in childcare and adult daycare facilities. However, these nutrition education materials can be used in other settings, such as the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program, to help parents and other caregivers promote healthful eating and active living to young children.

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Nibbles for Health Newsletters (Black and White)

Posters

"READ IT before you EAT IT!"

"Move It!"

"What size is your serving?"



A Look at Nibbles for Health

Newsletters And Sharing Sessions For Empowering Parents and Caregivers

Nibbles for Health offers a newsletter approach for reaching the parents and other caregivers of young children in your program. It's created as a series of easy-to-read, practical, and empowering messages. Each one addresses parents' concerns about healthful eating and active living for the personal health of their child, family, and self. Descriptions and how-tos for three short sharing sessions are included, too. Simply presented, the focused messages are in a format that's easy for you to use.

For Parents and Caregivers of Young Children...

Forty-one newsletters, and the three brief sharing sessions, can be used with parents of young children in many settings. These include day-care programs, such as those that participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) from USDA. *Nibbles for Health* may also be shared with staff, and some families, in other programs, such as WIC and Food Stamps, that provide nutrition services to preschool-aged children.

Why reach parents of young children? The early childhood years are a key time in a child's development. Young children are growing physically. They're also forming attitudes, beliefs, preferences, and habits about eating and physical activity. What parents say and do now can have a lifelong impact on their child's health.

Nibbles for Health guides the whole family, not just the young child, on healthful eating and active living. Its parenting tips also help parents take care of themselves. When parents commit to their own health, their children benefit, too.

Newsletters and Sharing Sessions: Beyond Facts...

The newsletters and sharing sessions do more than provide facts about healthy eating and active living. Their meaningful messages address challenges that parents face when feeding young children and families. Their practical approach offers "can do" ways to empower and motivate them, too.

Goals:

Nibbles for Health newsletters and sharing sessions help parents:

- Create a healthful eating environment:
 - Use the Food Guide Pyramid and Nutrition Facts label to provide a variety of healthful foods for the family.
 - Offer more fruits, vegetables, and grain products in meals and snacks.
 - Provide lower-fat foods more often.
- Move more and sit less.
- Prepare food in a safe, nutritious way.
- Support the whole family in their efforts to eat smart and be more physically active.

Messages for parents are...

Simple, quick, and practical—Each newsletter is filled with easy-to-use parenting advice, solutions for child feeding, and ideas for active lifestyles that fit busy, often hectic, family life.

Informative—Besides dealing with everyday child-feeding concerns, the newsletters alert parents to potential health problems. They also offer ways to reduce the likelihood of developing heart disease, overweight, obesity, diabetes, and other health problems later in life.

Personal—*Nibbles for Health* talks to parents in a positive, warm, and personal way. The newsletters are full of “you-and-me” messages that show how their own self-care helps promote their child’s health.

Individualized—The newsletters recognize that children and their families are unique and special. Parents can adapt specific ideas and strategies to fit their own situation.

Supportive—*Nibbles for Health* reassures parents and acknowledges that they already do many things right.

Skill building—The newsletters build skills in feeding children, and the sharing sessions provide practice with tools to help both the child and the family eat smart and be more physically active.

Developmentally appropriate—Newsletter topics connect child nutrition with other developmental issues that parents face: building self-esteem, dealing with growing independence, parenting siblings, playing safely, and monitoring growth.

Empowering—Parents don’t always realize how powerful they are in helping their children learn habits for lifelong health. The newsletters focus on parental responsibility and “can-do” strategies to help them.

For a quick view of the issues, outcomes, and empowerment messages addressed in the newsletters and sharing sessions, refer to “Overview of the Educational Content” on page 31.



The Value of Nutrition and Physical Activity For Young Children

The newsletters in Nibbles for Health provide brief additional information that builds on the following concepts.

Respecting individual differences...

Each child is unique and special. Growing and developing at a different rate, trying different foods, playing in different ways, growing up with siblings or not, growing up in different families—all affect a child’s character and development. Children thrive when parents nurture and respect their child’s individual differences, enjoying all that’s special about each child. Even children in the same family are different, and they each need individual time with caring adults.

Several newsletters address food and nutrition issues that apply to some, but not all, children including vegetarian diets, food allergies, lactose intolerance, weight problems, and the need for nutrient supplements.

Encouraging a child to make healthful food choices...

The preschool years are a time when children learn to eat and enjoy a variety of foods. Most children need to try a food several times before they decide if they like it. In pleasant surroundings, with patient, supportive parents, young children eventually learn to enjoy most foods. It is important that young children get the same respect as adults for their food preferences. Learning to be a good eater means knowing when hunger has been satisfied. By paying attention to their bodies, children learn to eat the right amount without overeating. A child naturally knows how much to eat, unless urged to eat more. It’s up to children to choose *how much to eat from what is offered*. It’s up to adults to decide *what foods* to offer children and *when*.

Nibbles for Health provides guidance for helping children make sound food choices with tips on trying new foods, handling choosy eaters, respecting a child’s appetite, and teaching good eating habits.

Being a good role model for children...

Children develop their attitudes, beliefs, and eating habits from other people: parents, childcare providers, older siblings, and other caregivers. Children are eager to please, curious, alert, and anxious to grow up, and they often want to imitate what adults and older siblings do. Intentional or not, role modeling is a powerful tool for helping children learn about healthful eating and active living.

Nibbles for Health supports parents as they strive to be good role models in their food and lifestyle choices.

Helping a child grow and develop...

During the preschool years, young children grow at an amazing rate physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually. Healthful eating, in addition to an environment that supports their social, mental, and emotional growth, is essential in this process. Preschool children need fewer calories but the same variety of foods that older children and adults require. The Food Guide Pyramid can suggest meal and snack choices for young children. These easy strategies can help encourage children to eat enough fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain foods, as well as foods rich in iron and calcium. This is also the best time to help children choose to eat more low-fat and lean foods. Using these strategies for smart eating, parents can help their child lower the chances of heart disease, overweight, diabetes, and other chronic health problems later in life.

Smaller portions are more appropriate for preschool children than adult-sized portions, which can overwhelm smaller stomachs. A child's growth rate slows somewhat during the preschool years, and urging a child to eat too much can lead to weight-related problems.

Nibbles for Health advises parents on the amount and variety of foods that young children and families need for energy, growth, and good health.

Exploring a child's world of food...

Hands-on experiences with food help children explore and enjoy a variety of foods. Helping in the kitchen or garden promotes independence, helps build self-esteem, develops motor and mental skills, and offers a chance for parents and children to spend time together.

Nibbles for Health offers fun and safe ways for parents and children to cook and garden together.

Enjoying the chance for active play...

Active play is the work of childhood. At least 60 minutes of physical activity on most days helps children in many ways. Vigorous exercise helps develop motor skills, increases strength and endurance, relieves stress, and promotes learning, self-assurance, and good health. Physical activity also helps children develop habits that decrease the chances of becoming overweight. Parents and other caregivers need to include physical activity, including safe play, as a regular part of their family life. Playing together also nurtures family relationships.



Communication Tools for Staff and Parents

Parent Newsletters

Nibbles for Health educates parents about healthful eating and lifestyle issues focused on feeding young children and families. In this guide, you'll find:

- 41 newsletters ready for duplication
- Key messages: summary statements from each newsletter*
*See the summary on page 32.

Sharing Sessions

The short interactive sharing sessions can be used with small groups of parents or in one-on-one discussions. In this guide, you'll find:

- Three outlines and handouts for sharing sessions, ready and easy to present
- Key messages: summary statements from each sharing session*
*See the summary on page 42.

Posters

Three colorful posters to be used with the sharing sessions are included. They are designed to help encourage parents and other caregivers make smart family food choices and find ways to create a setting for healthful eating and active living:

- **READ IT before you EAT IT!** shows caregivers how to use the Nutrition Facts label on food containers.
- **Move It!** encourages people to move more and sit less.
- **What size is your serving?** helps adults know whether they are eating enough or too much.



How To Use the Newsletters

The *Nibbles for Health* newsletters are presented in a ready-to-copy format to be used to match your center or program needs.

- *Distribute the Nibbles for Health newsletters on a routine basis as an ongoing source of parent education.*
 - ✓ **Copy and provide** the newsletters as a weekly or bi-monthly source of information. Put copies of the newsletters in a pick-up box in the area where parents pick up their children.
 - ✓ **Use different colored paper** every time you make black and white copies.
 - ✓ **Display one of the posters and provide related newsletters** for parents to take home and read.
 - ✓ **Encourage parents to read** the newsletters and keep them handy. They might display them on their refrigerator as quick reminders, or collect them as a set to be used as a reference.
- *Additional Uses:*
 - ✓ **Include *Nibbles for Health* topics in parent newsletters**, sponsored by your center or program.
 - ✓ **Share the newsletters with parents who express concerns** about how to deal with feeding and behavior problems.
 - ✓ **Put your organization's name on the newsletters**, and use them as part of your promotional efforts. A space at the bottom has been provided for this purpose. Parents often want to see examples of the extra benefits you provide as an indication of high quality childcare standards.
 - ✓ **Print them on the backs of menus** for meals and snacks served to young children, as part of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).
 - ✓ **Distribute copies at events** at your childcare center or at community health fairs and similar events.
 - ✓ **Attach the newsletters to press releases** on child feeding, and send them to local newspapers.
 - ✓ **Make copies available in group meetings or counseling sessions** with parents and caregivers.



- **Remember to localize or personalize the messages.** Most newsletters have places where local or personalized information can be inserted.
 - ✓ **Write in local information** before you duplicate four of the newsletters:
 - No. 10 “Family Food Shopping: Spend Less, Get More”—add phone numbers for your community food assistance offices.
 - No. 5 “Childcare: What Will My Child Eat?”—things to know about your childcare center.
 - No. 34 “Grow a Family Garden”—add your County Extension Office phone number.
 - No. 40 “Getting Nutrition Advice for Your Family”—sources for nutrition advice in your community
 - ✓ **Encourage parents to jot down their personal ideas** on how to eat smart and be more physically active. Urge them to add the ideas of their children and other family members.
 - ✓ **Encourage parents to analyze what they’re doing already and to commit to small steps** they might take to make improvements.
- **Make a plan to promote the empowerment messages of the 41 newsletters.** Because each newsletter can stand alone, you can use them in any order and distribute only those that match your program goals and budget.



How To Use the Sharing Sessions and Posters

The three posters along with the three outlines for sharing sessions are presented to help parents and other caregivers develop specific skills. Each outline reinforces key messages:

“Food Labels: A Tool for Making Food Choices”

“Active Living: How to Get Families Moving”

“Pyramid Servings: How Much? How Many?”

The sharing sessions focus on a single topic and take only about 20 minutes or so to present. They also take a minimum amount of your time to plan and prepare.

- *Consider the opportunities for holding a sharing session.*
 - ✓ **Set up a table or booth** at your parent nights and open houses.
 - ✓ **Set up a table in the foyer** for parents who may have time to linger and talk with you.
 - ✓ **Arrange an exhibit** at community health fairs. The personal touch will attract interest for your exhibit and your program and show that you care about parents and families, as well as children.
 - ✓ **Sponsor sharing sessions** in locations where parents gather: This could include the local library, community health center, or religious center. March, Nutrition Month, is a good time. Also ask your County Extension Agent to sponsor a sharing session.
- *Plan sharing sessions when you know you have 20 minutes or more to spend with a few parents and caregivers.*
 - ✓ **Move the posters to different places** in your center where they will attract interest and attention.
 - ✓ **Create interesting displays** around the posters.
 - “READ IT before you EAT IT” poster: Hang labels from food packages, making sure the Nutrition Facts are visible. Invite parents to bring in labels from their family foods.
 - “Move It” poster: Hang magazine pictures or photos of children and families doing fun, active things. Take photos of the families and children in your center, or ask parents to share their photos from home.
 - “What Size is Your Serving?” poster: Display the objects from the poster (milk carton, computer mouse, baseball, etc.) along with photos from magazines of a variety of foods.
 - ✓ **Use posters in community displays** to promote your program.
 - ✓ **Keep a stack of mini-posters nearby for parents to take.** The black-and-white masters for the posters are in the poster folder. Duplicate them.



Sharing Sessions

Holding Sharing Sessions

As a session leader, you don't need to be an expert or know all the answers. You can share ideas, repeat the key messages, encourage parents to make positive health choices, and listen to what they have to say. The related newsletters provide the factual information they need.

Before the sharing session...

- Plan the sharing session for when you know you have at least 20 minutes or more to spend with a few parents and caregivers. Look over the session outline and related newsletters before meeting with parents. Gather any materials noted in the outline, and duplicate specific newsletters to distribute. The outline will give you the key messages to convey.
- Plan for snacks from specific food groups. Offer a snack the parents can make with or for their young child. You might find some ideas in Newsletter No. 22, "Why Snacks?"

During the sharing session...

- Help parents and caregivers feel comfortable. Some may not be accustomed to parent meetings.
 - ✓ Greet them by name, and introduce yourself in a relaxed way. Let them introduce themselves to others.
 - ✓ Let parents and other caregivers know you're there to offer support.
 - ✓ Break the ice by inviting parents to talk about their child.
- Consider these tips to effectively guide active learning:
 - ✓ Keep your messages simple and share one message at a time.
 - ✓ Present information and engage in activities that are practical and relevant to parents of young children.
 - ✓ Be positive and supportive as parents explore the topic.
 - ✓ Listen actively to identify and address parents' concerns.
 - ✓ Be personally enthusiastic.
 - ✓ Stay flexible. Let the activity continue as long as parents are engaged.
 - ✓ Keep the learning on track, and respond to parents' needs.
 - ✓ Help them find additional and appropriate help afterwards if they need it.
- Repeat the Key Messages for Parents, from page 42, during the sharing session. These are the main ideas that parents and caregivers need to learn.