MISSION
The mission of the National Food Service Management Institute is to provide information and services that promote the continuous improvement of child nutrition programs.

VISION
The vision of the National Food Service Management Institute is to be the leader in providing education, research, and resources to promote excellence in child nutrition programs.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service through an agreement with the National Food Service Management Institute at The University of Mississippi. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.

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**Eating Habits of Preschoolers**

Preschoolers have very specific ideas about foods and how and when they want to eat. Families and preschool staffs should recognize and respect the food behaviors of each child. Young children should be guided by adults to explore new foods in an environment that promotes social development.

- Preschool children generally prefer mildly flavored foods. Spicy or strong flavored foods are an acquired taste.
- Simple foods that are low or moderate in sugars and fats teach healthful food choices.
- Overcooked vegetables are frequently disliked.
- Most young children like raw vegetables.
- Fruits are liked either raw or cooked.
- Meats and chicken are favorite foods.
- As children get older, they develop definite preferences for familiar foods, making exposure to a variety of foods and flavors at the preschool age important.
- Many preschoolers’ diets are low in vitamins A and C, and iron.
- Offering a variety of foods ensures children get the nutrients they need.

**Nutrition Education Curriculum Goals**

Nutrition education lessons help children to:
- Enjoy a variety of healthful foods
- Learn about new foods in a fun and exciting way
- Understand their feelings of hunger and fullness
- Learn ways to group and describe foods
- Learn to refuse food politely
Getting Families Involved in the Nutrition Education Program

The preschool or child care center staff should work in partnership with the children's families to achieve the nutrition objectives of the program. The effort made to involve families helps ensure that children practice at home what they learn at the child care center or preschool. Good eating habits learned in the preschool and child care center must carry over to the home if they are to last! Here are some suggestions for involving parents.

1. Send menus home with the children.
2. Have families serve on a menu planning committee with teachers and food service staff. A different group of families could serve each month.
3. Encourage families to observe the lessons whenever possible and to share meals and snacks, and accompany children on field trips to where food is grown, purchased, or prepared.
4. Have nutrition information available at family meetings.
5. Sponsor international family pot-luck dinners to introduce various cultural and ethnic foods.
6. Follow through on the What Families Can Do suggestions listed in More Than Mud Pies. Send copies of the Family Guides home with the children.

What about the cost?

Nutrition education should be adequately reflected in the budget. The materials needed for nutrition education activities should be a part of the preschool and child care center program budget (cost per child per year). Some of the lessons will involve preparing foods that meet U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) meal or snack requirements and can be covered by the current reimbursement rate. For those activities that do not meet these requirements, program funds will need to be used.

In order to economize, centers and preschools can collect and recycle materials that will be useful in food preparation activities. Garage sales, family kitchens, restaurant close-out sales, and thrift stores are all good sources of utensils and other materials.

Using the Curriculum

The More Than Mud Pies nutrition education curriculum is designed to provide both staff and children with enjoyable activities that encourage positive ideas about nutrition and foods. Before beginning the activities and recipes, the children should develop confidence with the skills needed to prepare and enjoy foods.

The five preliminary lessons activities, Mealtime Routines for Health and Manners, The Food Groups, Measuring Manipulation, Kitchen Safety, and How to Follow a Picture Recipe, introduce these skills. The
preliminary skills can be taught daily or on a once-a-week schedule. As soon as the children have some experience with these skills, begin the seasonal activities. The curriculum materials include 54 lessons. Each lesson is built around the season. The teacher should note that most activities in the lessons are adaptable to any time of the year. The activities introduce the ideas of food sources, nutrients, and the five senses.

**Lesson Outline**

- **Opportunities for Learning** — specific objectives to be achieved by children performing the activity
- **Things to Do Before the Lesson** — advance preparation requirements for staff
- **Activities with Things You'll Do** — steps to follow to complete the activity
- **Things You'll Need** — list of all supplies and materials needed to complete the activity
- **What Families Can Do** — suggestions that involve families

Additional information may include
- Discussion suggestions for teachers with children.
- Books to read and songs to sing may be listed.

The recipes used in *More Than Mud Pies* were selected to reflect the principles of good nutrition — variety, balance, and moderation. Lessons create an awareness of the importance of food choices to growth and health.
State and Local Requirements on Food Preparation in Child Care Centers and Preschools

All local fire and health departments’ rules or regulations concerning the placement of appliances or food safety requirements, which might prevent children from participating in all the steps of the lesson, should be followed.

Be sure to check with all sponsoring agencies for restrictions on allowing children to participate in food activities when the food will be consumed by the children. Some state agencies may have regulations about crediting foods prepared by children as part of the reimbursable meal or snack.

Teaching Preschoolers the Importance of Good Nutrition

Nutrition education activities in the preschool and child care settings can help shape the eating habits of young children. The concept of eating a variety of foods from each of the five food groups can be taught to preschoolers.

The child who has learned about making wise food choices can apply that knowledge in elementary school where children may choose their own foods at breakfast and lunch. Since children spend an extended part of their day in child care, food preparation and nutrition education activities support learning healthful eating behaviors taught at home.

Food preparation is a fascinating, hands-on tool for learning about healthful eating, and it is fun! Cooking provides children with a sense of personal achievement as they meet their own food needs. Children can only pretend to drive a car or be a fireman, but they really can cook and produce real food that other people will eat.

Special Notes for the More Than Mud Pies Lessons

All lessons assume the following steps are taken.

1. All foods are washed.
2. All work surfaces are cleaned and sanitized before and after each food-related activity.
3. Children and teachers always wash hands before and after each food-related activity.
4. Napkins, plates, cups, and other needed tasting equipment is provided whenever food is eaten.
5. Water is always a good beverage to serve anytime food is tasted.
6. Remember that peanut butter and nuts are common allergens for young children. They may have an allergic reaction to coming in contact with it as well as eating it.
Suggestions for Presenting Nutrition Education and Food Preparation Activities

1. Prepare for each lesson at least one week in advance.
   A well thought out cooking experience allows the teacher to devote full attention to the children, instead of wondering if all the necessary supplies are available.

2. Make the lesson a special occasion.
   Wear a special costume (colorful apron, floppy hat) for weekly lessons. Have washable aprons made for the children (pillowcases with holes cut for neck and arms).

3. Children should be supervised at all times when around potentially dangerous equipment such as knives or appliances.
   Use volunteers, such as foster grandparents and parents, to supervise children with peeling, grating, slicing, and measuring.

4. Make certain that all children are involved.
   Divide into small groups at separate tables with all materials and ingredients at each table.

5. Provide enough praise and reinforcement to make the experience rewarding to children.
   Cooking experiences should not focus on the end results. The process is more important.

6. Let children experience things for themselves as much as possible.
   Let them use their senses. Everyone should have a chance to smell, feel, and taste.

7. Help children observe and talk about color, texture, size, and shape.
   Talk about what happens when ingredients are combined and the effects of different temperatures on food.

8. Cleanup should be an ongoing activity.
   Have sinks with running water and soap nearby so children can wash hands while they prepare food.

9. Follow through on projects so everyone has a chance to taste what has been made.
Nutrition Education Is an Essential Part of the Child Care Center and Preschool Program

In addition to learning about foods and healthful eating, nutrition education activities provide opportunities for the overall objectives of the preschool or child care center program to be accomplished. In addition to promoting wise food choices, nutrition education offers valuable learning experiences to young children who are learning skills they will use throughout life. Nutrition education provides exciting, stimulating activities that allow children to practice pre-reading, math, science, motor, and language skills. Communication and cooperation skills are learned as children work together during cooking and mealtime experiences.

Common Objectives of Nutrition Education Activities

Nutrition Awareness
By learning which foods are important for growth, strength, and energy, children may make better food choices. Children can learn to eat many different kinds of foods to keep their bodies healthy.

Emotional and Social Development
Food comforts and nourishes. It is an expression of love. Helping prepare food makes children feel that they are important. Tasting food shows children that people have different likes and dislikes. Some people like the taste of a certain food and others do not. Courtesy and sharing are encouraged.

Vocabulary Enrichment
By working with food, children can learn new words and concepts such as stir, blend, slice, grind, freeze, and melt. Children really learn the concept of stirring or slicing when they do the task during a cooking activity.

Sequencing/Pre-Reading Skills
Because activities and recipes need to be completed in a specific order, children learn the idea of sequences. Picture recipes introduce the concept of order and pre-reading skills.
Scientific Concepts
Cooking is a science experiment you can eat. Children learn the different sources of foods and how animals and plants grow. Each child has the right to know that carrots grow in the ground and do not originate in the produce section of the local supermarket. Children see foods change color and texture when heated.

Quantity Concepts/Pre-Math Skills
Simple ideas about quantity are learned in cooking activities. Mathematical concepts are learned in a fun and practical way.

Motor Skills
Food preparation gives children a chance to practice eye-hand coordination in activities such as paring, measuring, and mixing. Eye-hand coordination is important in learning to read and write.

Safety Awareness
Both parents and center staff work together to help children learn a healthy respect for appliances and utensils.

Food Safety Awareness
Children can develop good health (hygienic) practices from their association with good food handling practices. Children learn to wash hands after using a tissue, after going to the bathroom, and before handling food.