Nutrition and Learning

As child care providers, you can influence the lives of young children in your care. Most likely children spend a large amount of time with you, so why not make sure that time is a continuous learning experience that will help prepare them for school and beyond.

By providing good nutrition and appropriate meals for the children, you are making a difference in their lives. When participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), you serve nutritious food that meets USDA guidelines. These foods help with brain development, nutrition, and growth in infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. You may think, "I take part in the CACFP and feed the children in my care nutritious and appropriate food, but is there more that I can be doing?"

According to Zero to Three (2018), "Children who are malnourished – not just fussy eaters but truly deprived of adequate calories and protein in their diet – throughout this period [mid-gestation and two years of age] do not adequately grow, either physically or mentally." During this time, it is important for infants and moms to have good nutrition intake. Insufficient nutrition for infants can have a devastating effect and can cause the brain to be smaller than normal, which could possibly result in impaired cognitive and motor development. Some of the effects of not receiving proper nutrition may be irreversible; however, nutrients such as iron, iodine, DHA, choline, folic acid, and zinc promotes early brain development (Nutrition and Early Brain Development, 2011).
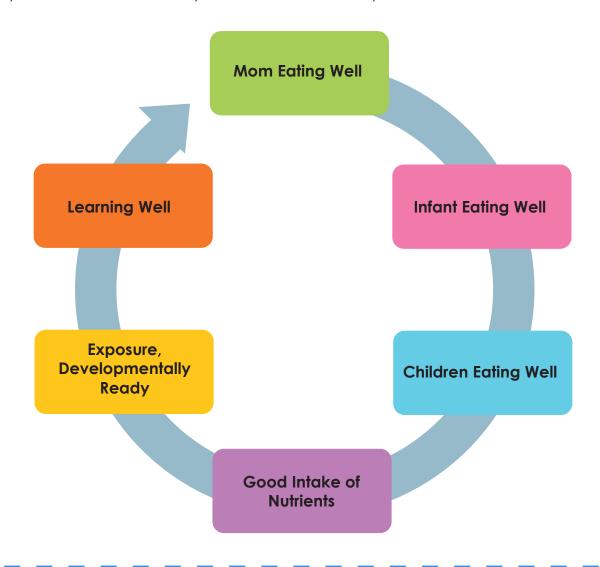
Providing good nutrition for proper growth and development along with encouraging healthy eating habits can set the stage for success as children begin to learn. A healthy diet is linked to better reading skills (Science Daily, 2016). Books are designed to accommodate different age groups. Therefore, it is never too early to give a child a book. Having books available for infants and toddlers can increase their curiosity about reading. It also provides a positive experience that infants and young children look forward to and

Institute of Child Nutrition | The University of Mississippi

can increase their desire to learn to read in the same manner that you are reading to them. According to the University of Eastern Finland (2016), "Healthy diets boost children's reading skills."

As you begin reading to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, let them see, touch, and hold the book. Reading readiness varies in children so it is important to continue to expose them to books and reading while making it fun. Learning to read will vary in age with children. The more they see and hear, the easier it will be to learn to read when they are developmentally ready. As appropriate for the child, choose a letter and teach the name of the letter and sound of the letter. When ready introduce them to phonics. Phonics is a method of teaching children to read by correlating sounds with letters or groups of letters in the alphabet. Preschool is a good time to teach children how to sound out letters, then whole words, and they may learn to read. This is a lifetime gift that they will be thankful for! They will remember it was in child care when they learned the alphabet and how to sound out the letters. Keep in mind that all children learn differently, and some children may not be successful with phonics.

References

All About Learning Press. (2018). *How to teach phonograms.* Retrieved from
https://blog.allaboutlearningpress.com/phonograms/

Livestrong.com. (2017, Jun 13,). How poor nutrition affects child development
Retrieved from https://www.livestrong.com/article/465374-how-poor-nutrition-affects-child-development/

PBS Parents. (2018). *Phonics basics.* Retrieved from
http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/reading-language/reading-tips/phonics-basics/

The Urban Child Institute. (2011). *Nutrition and early brain development.* Retrieved from
http://www.urbanchildinstitute.org/articles/updates/nutrition-and-early-brain- development

University of Eastern Finland. (2016). *Healthy diet boosts children's reading skills.* Retrieved from
https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/09/160913100502.htm

Zero to Three. (2018). *8 ways to motivate kids to read.* Retrieved from
https://blog.allaboutlearningpress.com/motivating-kids-to-read/

Zero to Three. (2018). *How does nutrition affect the developing brain?* Retrieved from
https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1372-how-does-nutrition-affect-the-developing-brain