



Both health behaviors **and** environment play a vital role in promoting a healthy weight. Where we live, learn, play and work can influence whether we end up fit and healthy or not. The meals children eat in child care provide a personal experience that can shape behavior far past their time in care. Children learn to make smart decisions, building a foundation for a lifetime of healthy snack and meal choices. Children with positive eating habits learn more, can do more, and keep a healthy weight.

Child care providers play an important role in developing these habits. Eat Smart Child Care is a program from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS). It aims to help child care providers give Missouri’s children a positive nutrition experience.

What is an Eat Smart Child Care?

It is a child care center or home that chooses to follow best practice guidelines for feeding children. Only providers participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) can be recognized as an *Eat Smart Child Care*; however all providers are encouraged to make changes to improve their meals.

What are the Missouri Eat Smart Guidelines for Child Care?

The Eat Smart Guidelines are a set of evidence based recommendations for nutrition in child care facilities. The *Guidelines* urge providers to gradually improve their meal service. Following the *Guidelines* is voluntary.

When a facility meets all the recommendations for either the intermediate or advanced level, it is recognized as an “Eat Smart Child Care.” The levels are:

- Minimum**—meets current US Department of Agriculture (USDA) meal pattern recommendations and Missouri state licensing requirements
- Intermediate**—more healthful than minimum level
- Advanced**—more healthful than intermediate level

The *Guidelines* are for any facility caring for children whether they are in-home or center-based.

Why Should Child Care Providers Adopt the Eat Smart Guidelines?

- To help children have a healthy weight and a healthy relationship with food
- To show they think about the health of the children in their care
- To attract parents who care about the food their kids eat while away from home



Some Ways Eat Smart Centers are Improving

Guidelines are given for breakfast; lunch and dinner; snack; overall meal pattern; and environmental factors that relate to meal service and food served outside of meals. Here are some ways providers are improving their nutrition program.

THE FOODS:

- More whole grains
- More fresh fruits and veggies
- Fewer processed foods
- Lower fat milk (1% or skim)
- Fewer sweet snacks and breakfast foods
- Wider variety of foods

THE ENVIRONMENT:

- Setting good examples by eating with the children
- Letting children make choices about the foods they eat
- Improving children's self-confidence with mealtime tasks: setting the table, serving themselves, cleaning up, etc.
- Teaching kids about nutrition, healthy habits and foods
- Having healthier classroom parties

What are the Benefits of Being an Eat Smart Child Care?

When a facility becomes "Eat Smart" they receive:

- A certificate and banner announcing their Eat Smart status
- Menu forms that include the Eat Smart logo
- A sample press release announcing the achievement
- A letter to parents to let them know about the changes the facility is making
- The right to use the Eat Smart logo on their website

How to Become an Eat Smart Child Care

Make all improvements needed to meet the *Guidelines*. Then submit an application to become recognized as "Eat Smart". The application and instructions for completing it can be found online (<http://health.mo.gov/eatsmartguidelines>). Providers will need to send in a month of menus with supporting paperwork, including a review of their nutrition environment. After the application is reviewed, an on-site assessment of the nutrition environment will be done before "Eat Smart" status is awarded.

Learn More About the Eat Smart Initiative

Take the Eat Smart Child Care Training. Learn how to plan nutritious menus using the Eat Smart Guidelines for Child Care and get tips for shaping healthy eating habits. Register at <http://www.health.mo.gov/living/wellness/nutrition/eatsmartguidelines/training.php>. Additional resources to help providers become "Eat Smart" are online at <http://www.health.mo.gov/eatsmartguidelines>.

