

INTRODUCTION



In an age of fast food, prepackaged processed meals, and rising obesity rates, it is vital that we expose children to whole foods and teach them the value of good nutrition. By providing meaningful opportunities for them to experience healthful foods in a variety of ways, we foster an appreciation for nutritious food. As children are familiarized with new foods in a respectful environment, they begin to develop healthy attitudes about food that will stay with them through their lives.

This curriculum is designed to:

- 🍎 Teach children healthy habits.
- 🍎 Introduce children to wholesome, healthful foods.
- 🍎 Familiarize them with the origins of foods and feature fresh seasonal foods.
- 🍎 Provide an accepting environment for trying new foods.
- 🍎 Provide teachers with a framework for implementing a nutrition curriculum.
- 🍎 Incorporate math, science, and literacy concepts.
- 🍎 Create fun cooking opportunities where children participate and can make choices.

- 🍎 Allow children the chance to explore foods by using all their senses.

The curriculum in *Food for Thought* is structured around five units:

- 🍎 Fabulous Fall Fruits and Vegetables
- 🍎 Wonderful Winter Fruits and Vegetables
- 🍎 Go-go Grains
- 🍎 Power Up with Proteins
- 🍎 Summary of Spring Snacking

Each unit has six to seven weekly lessons featuring a food or recipe of the week. The curriculum starts with simple, familiar foods and advances to more complex recipes that build upon each other. It is intended to start in the fall with two weeks of teaching “healthy habits” (hand washing, setting the table, table etiquette, and cleaning up after mealtime) and continue for 32 more weeks. You may repeat lessons during the summer months. Although the activities are planned with three- to five-year-olds in mind, they can be adapted successfully for other age groups.

Each lesson includes background information and a nutrition activity that is intended to be part of a meal.

In addition, other menu ideas can extend the curriculum further and teach mathematics, science, and literacy concepts. Questions are provided for teachers to use during activities to enhance children's learning.

For success in carrying out the lessons, it is important to:

-  Read the entire lesson before beginning an activity.
-  Plan and be prepared.
-  Involve children as much as possible in the process and cleanup.
-  Allow for choices and preferences.
-  Extend the activities and concepts to other areas in the classroom.
-  Use individualized recipes and provide children with their own ingredients as appropriate.

Safety and hygiene practices for leading the activities are as follows:

-  Make sure children wash hands before starting the nutrition activities.
-  After having the children help wash vegetables or fruits in tubs of water, place the fresh produce in a colander and rinse thoroughly under running water.

-  Conduct activities in small groups that are

manageable and can be well supervised.

-  Make sure to have enough utensils and kitchen equipment on hand in case tools fall on the floor or go in a child's mouth.
-  Provide towels for wiping up spills.
-  When it is possible, let children make individual portions so they eat the foods they have prepared.
-  Allow for tasting (when appropriate) at the end of the project.
-  When children will be cutting round foods, adults should cut the food in half first and place the cut side down. Children will find it easier to handle. For larger foods (potatoes, pumpkins, melons), cut them in half and then into strips or manageable sizes.
-  Electrical appliances should be unplugged when not in use. Place them on a table against the wall or counter so children do not trip over the cords.
-  Know which children have food allergies and plan accordingly.

If we, as caregivers and educators, model a healthy relationship with food, impart to children an appreciation for nutritious food, and inspire within them a love for cooking, we have done our part to positively affect the health of the children in our care.

