June 2016

Mealtime Memo for Child Care

For Good Nutrition – Eat Foods in Season!

Good nutrition is the cornerstone of good health. A balanced diet filled with a variety of nutritious foods helps to reduce the risk of heart disease, hypertension, and obesity. In addition, when young children develop healthy eating habits, filled with nutritious foods, they are more likely to continue these healthy habits into adulthood.

Sometimes, nutritious foods are more expensive than those not-so-nutritious foods. However, purchasing foods in season can contribute to good nutrition in three key ways: price, taste, and variety. Here is a closer look at why each factor helps promote good nutrition.

Seasonal foods are priced just right. In-season produce usually costs less than when it is out-of-season. Consider the price of cantaloupe in August versus January. In August, a dollar will buy more because the price per pound is lower than during winter in most U.S. locations. When a food dollar buys more produce, take advantage of the low prices. You can either buy just the amount you need or purchase more and store for later use. If buying extra, enjoy all the produce fresh, or freeze some for future use. Always follow safe food practices when you freeze food for future use. For example, learn about freezing cantaloupe for safety and food quality at this website, http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/freeze/melon.html.

Seasonal foods taste great. Seasonal foods are picked at the peak of flavor. A vine-ripened tomato has more flavor than a cold-storage tomato. When foods are flavorful, you have less need for seasonings, such as salt or sugar. You can use simple food preparation methods to bring out the natural goodness, such as serving fruits and vegetables also fresh during meals and snacks.

Institute of Child Nutrition | The University of Mississippi

Seasonal foods emphasize variety. Each season, there are a variety of fruits available for purchase. You can find snap peas and spinach in the springtime, green beans and peppers in the summer, and carrots and potatoes during the fall. Because each food has different amounts of nutrients, eating a variety of seasonal fruits and vegetables helps assure good nutrition. Therefore, serve meals and snacks that emphasize a variety of seasonal produce.

Additionally, seasonal foods provide an opportunity to teach children how food grows. One way to teach children about fruits and vegetables is to visit local community gardens, melon patches, or orchards. Farmers markets are another place to find fresh produce in season. Often you will find a variety of items, such as different colored carrots, beets, or potatoes. Trying new foods is also great activity to do with children.

In summary, eating foods in season will lead to good nutrition in three ways. The prices of seasonal foods are often great values, which makes serving fresh fruits and vegetables a good decision budget wise. Seasonal foods taste good because they are picked at the peak of flavor. The variety of foods that come to market throughout the growing season help vary menu choices. Include these foods often in your meals. To find out more about fruits and vegetables in season, visit http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/what-fruits-and-vegetables-are-in-season.

References

Agricultural Marketing Resource Center. (2014). *Melon Profile*. Retrieved from http://www.agmrc.org/commodities__products/vegetables/melon-profile/

Fruits and Veggies More Matters. (n.d.). Cantaloupe: Nutrition. Selection. Storage. Retrieved from http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/cantaloupe-nutrition-selection-storage

University of Georgia. National Center for Home Food Preservation. (n.d.). *Freezing melons.* http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/freeze/melon.html

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 Institute of Child Nutrition 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.

The University of Mississippi is an EEO/AA/TitleVI/Title IX/Section 504/ADA/ADEA Employer.

In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability.

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights; Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

© 2016, Institute of Child Nutrition, The University of Mississippi, School of Applied Sciences

Except as provided below, you may freely use the text and information contained in this document for non-profit or educational use with no cost to the participant for the training providing the following credit is included. These materials may not be incorporated into other websites or textbooks and may not be sold.

The photographs and images in this document may be owned by third parties and used by The University of Mississippi under a licensing agreement. The University cannot, therefore, grant permission to use these images.