

Why promote healthy eating in early childhood education services?

Eating healthy food in early childhood has an effect on children's growth, behaviour and health. Evidence shows that:

- breastfeeding provides optimum nutrition for infants
- breastfeeding assists infants' physical and emotional development
- introducing complementary foods too early can increase the risk of children developing food allergies, eczema, asthma, iron deficiency, respiratory disease and diarrhoea
- infants and toddlers who are deficient in iron can have permanent and potentially irreversible impaired growth and intellectual and motor performance, including basic learning skills
- obese children are more likely to become obese adults, especially if their parents are obese.

All nutrients required for activity, growth and development are provided by the foods and drinks consumed. Since babies, toddlers and young children can only eat what they are given, the responsibility lies with all carers, including those at the ECE service, to ensure that what children are given meets their nutritional needs.

Many children spend all day at the centre, so it is important that the food provided is nutritionally adequate. Early childhood is also a time when lifelong eating habits are being formed. Early childhood education services can play an important role in creating a culture of healthy eating and in helping children to develop the healthy food behaviours that will support them to grow into healthy adults.



Information from <http://www.fuelled4life.org.nz>