

Harvard Prevention Research Center Environmental Standards for Nutrition and Physical Activity in Out-of-School Time Programs

The aim of the Environmental Standards for Nutrition and Physical Activity are to help program leaders create healthier out-of-school environments for children by achieving 7 simple standards. These Environmental Standards are based on current scientific evidence about healthy eating and physical activity. These standards have been developed for part-day out-of-school time settings like sport programs and after school programs, but can easily be modified for full day programs like summer camps.

For each Environmental Standard below, we provide a brief rationale and a few suggested strategies for putting them into practice at your out-of-school time program. For more ideas on incorporating these standards into your program, check out the *Tip Sheets* in *Food & Fun 2nd Edition*!

It is important to keep parents involved and educated about healthy eating and physical activity so they can reinforce the Environmental Standards at home. Use the *Parent Handouts* and *Parent Communications* from *Food & Fun 2nd Edition* to help develop and maintain your connection with parents.

Environmental Standards for Nutrition and Physical Activity in Out-of-school Time Programs

- ★ Do not serve sugar-sweetened beverages.
- ★ Serve water every day.
- ★ Serve a fruit and/or vegetable at every meal and snack.
- ★ Do not serve foods with trans fat.
- ★ When serving grains (like bread, crackers, and cereals), serve whole grains.
- ★ Eliminate broadcast and cable TV or movies. Limit computer time to less than 1 hour each day.
- ★ Provide all children with at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity every day. Offer 20 minutes of vigorous physical activity at least 3 days per week.





**Environmental Standard #1:
Do not serve sugar-sweetened beverages.**

Rationale: The amount of sugar-sweetened beverages that children drink has significantly increased over the past 20 years. Sugar-sweetened beverages are the top source of added sugar in kids' diets. Examples of sugar-sweetened beverages are soda, sweetened iced teas, fruit punches, fruit drinks, and sports drinks. Drinking sugar-sweetened beverages has been associated with obesity in children. They provide a lot of calories with little to no nutritional benefit. These beverages also lead to dental cavities. If you do serve 100% juice, limit to 4 ounces per day.

Suggested strategies:

- Offer water instead of sugar sweetened beverages every day.
- Implement policies that prevent using vending machines during program time.
- Restrict bringing drinks in from outside the program.



**Environmental Standard #2:
Serve water every day.**

Rationale: Water is a great drink choice for kids. It keeps them hydrated, it is calorie-free, and it is almost cost free from the tap! Replacing caloric beverages with water at snack time saves money, and is an easy way to eliminate calories from sugar-sweetened beverages. Our bodies are the best judge of how much water we need. Teach kids to take a drink whenever they are thirsty.

Suggested Strategies:

- Serve tap water- it costs only pennies!
- Serve water in a pitcher with cups at the snack table every day.



**Environmental Standard #3:
Serve a fruit and/or vegetable at every meal and snack.**

Rationale: Children should eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables daily. However, most U.S. children are only eating about 2½ servings each day. Fruits and vegetables contain vitamins, minerals, and fiber. They protect against heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, and some cancers. The fiber and water in fruits and vegetables also help you feel full. Serving 100% fruit juice does not substitute for whole fruit because juice does not contain fiber.

Suggested strategies:

- Use taste tests to learn kids' preferences and to find new fruits and vegetables that kids like.
- Cut and peel fruits and vegetables before serving so they are easier for kids to eat.



**Environmental Standard #4:
Do not serve foods with trans fat.**

Rationale: The type of fat you eat is more important than the total amount of fat in your diet. Avoid foods with trans fat, which is a type of unhealthy fat. Trans fat has many harmful effects on your body. It is commonly found in packaged bakery foods (like muffins, brownies, cookies, and crackers) and deep fried foods (like chicken fingers, fish sticks, and french fries). Products labeled as 0 grams trans fat can still have up to 0.49 grams per serving by law. Avoid foods with the words "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil" on the ingredient list; this means the food contains trans fat.

Suggested strategies:

- Read nutrition labels and only select foods with 0g of trans fat.
- Review vendor lists and only order foods without trans fat.



Environmental Standard #5:
When serving grains (like bread, crackers, and cereals), serve whole grains.

Rationale: Whole grains contain fiber, vitamins, and healthy fats that can lower your risk for heart disease and diabetes. They can also help you feel full longer. Refined “white” flour and sugar do not have these nutrients or health benefits. Serve whole grains instead of refined ones whenever possible. Whole grain options are often available at the same price as refined options.

Suggested strategies:

- Select breads, crackers, and cereals that list a whole grain as the first ingredient on the label. Examples are whole wheat, barley, oats, and rye.
- Select foods containing at least 3 grams of fiber and 5 grams of sugar or less per serving.



Environmental Standard #6:
Eliminate broadcast and cable TV and movies.
Limit computer time to less than 1 hour each day.

Rationale: Children should spend no more than a total of 2 hours each day watching TV, playing video games, or surfing the web. These activities can lead to overeating, less physical activity, and a higher risk for becoming overweight. TV watching also may influence children to make unhealthy food choices because they see a lot of advertisements for foods that are high in sugars and calories. Setting limits on kids’ TV, video game, and computer time is important for their health.

Suggested strategies:

- Remove TVs from the out-of-school time space or cover them with a cloth so they can’t be seen.
- Try new indoor games or an arts and crafts project if weather limits outdoor playtime.



Environmental Standard #7:
Provide all children with at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity every day.
Offer 20 minutes of vigorous physical activity at least 3 days per week.

Rationale: Children 6-17 years old need at least 60 minutes or more of physical activity every day. Most of the 1 hour or more a day should be moderate or vigorous physical activity. Children should participate in vigorous activity on at least 3 days per week. Examples of moderate physical activity are bike riding, hopscotch and playground play. Vigorous activity are more intense and make you sweat, like running, basketball, and aerobic dancing. Regular physical activity is important for preventing chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and osteoporosis.

Suggested strategies:

- Schedule at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day.
- Convert cafeteria or classroom areas for dance or fitness if space is limited.

References

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