

# United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service

## 52 Messages for Faith-based and Community Organizations

The following short messages can be placed in weekly newsletters, bulletins, email listservs and other methods of communication your organization may use. Please help us improve access to nutrition assistance programs, materials, and nutrition education by spreading the word about these important programs and resources.

Messages 1-34 are messages about the nation's nutrition programs and resources and include hyperlinks to more information.

Messages 35-52 are nutrition messages based on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Core Nutrition Messages. These messages have been focus group tested by mothers and children participating in nutrition assistance programs.

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### The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)

No one should go hungry in America. The federal government provides children and low-income people access to food, a healthful diet, and nutrition education. We help nearly one in five people with nutrition assistance programs such as SNAP (formerly the Food Stamp Program), the National School Lunch Program, and WIC. Check out these and our programs at <http://www.fns.usda.gov> to see if we can help you or your family.

**To connect with nutrition assistance programs in your community, contact the National Hunger Clearinghouse at 1-866-3-HUNGRY**

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### Team Nutrition: Child Nutrition Resources

Are you familiar with USDA's Team Nutrition? Team Nutrition is dedicated to improving children's lifelong eating and exercise habits through nutrition education. See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn> for these free nutrition education resources for families, schools, caregivers and communities. Be sure to share these important resources with your child's school. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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3101 PARK CENTER DRIVE, ROOM 1441  
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22302  
PARTNERSHIPS@FNS.USDA.GOV  
703-305-1504

### **Team Nutrition: Making the Family Connection**

“Making the Family Connection” is a collection of activities and lessons about gardening, shopping for fruits and vegetables, how to read nutrition labels, and the importance of physical activity for you and your child. These activities and lessons are a great opportunity to spend a quality time with your child while supporting their nutrition and health education. The collection can be found here:

<http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Parents/familyconnection.html>. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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### **Fact Sheets for Healthier School Meals**

Are you or is your organization interested in supporting healthy school meals? The USDA Food and Nutrition Service has many resources to help schools provide the healthy meals to students. You can help school food service providers make healthy choices by sharing USDA resources. See [http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/dgfactsheet\\_hsm.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/dgfactsheet_hsm.html) for useful fact sheets about healthier school meals and tips for staying healthy while keeping costs down. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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### **ChooseMyPlate.gov: Build a Healthy Plate**

Looking for reliable information about a healthy diet? Visit [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov) to get started, create a personal food and physical activity plan, and use free on-line tools only available at [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov). For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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### **SuperTracker: My Food. My Fitness. My Health**

With today’s busy schedules, it can be hard to plan healthy meals for yourself and your family. SuperTracker, available at [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov), can help you create a personal food and physical activity plan. You can even use it to plan meals that are specific to each family member’s needs. Visit [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov) and click on the “SuperTracker & Other Tools” to get started. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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### **MyPlate: Keeping Your Healthy Diet and Exercise Routine on Track**

Are you interested in learning whether your food choices and exercise routine are keeping you as healthy as possible? MyPlate offers an in-depth assessment of your diet and physical activity level using reliable guidelines. You begin by looking at your current diet and exercise routines and then keep track of the changes you make based on MyPlate’s recommendations. Visit [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov) and click on “SuperTracker & Other Tools.” For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Moms**

Are you or is someone close to you currently pregnant or breastfeeding? [Choosemyplate.gov](http://Choosemyplate.gov) is a great resource that can help answer your questions about healthy eating during pregnancy and while breastfeeding. Visit [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov) and look under “Resources for Nutrition & Health” to find valuable information about changing nutritional needs, weight gain, weight loss and other special health issues. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Teaching Kids to Eat Right**

Having trouble getting kids to eat vegetables? Check out [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov) for resources and tips to help you make healthy eating fun for children. The website includes an exciting and educational computer game for kids called “The Blastoff Game” to help teach kids about choosing a balanced diet. Go to <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/children-over-five.html> to get started! For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Helping Parents Make Healthy Choices**

[Choosemyplate.gov](http://Choosemyplate.gov) offers health and diet advice for children over the age of two. This USDA resource is great for adults looking to teach children about eating right and staying healthy. Visit and download free materials and activities for kids, families and teachers. Visit <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/children-over-five.html>. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Help Your Preschooler Eat Well and Be Active.**

Choosemyplate.gov offers nutrition information for children 2 to 5 years of age. This USDA website offers many tools to help your young child start forming healthy eating habits including growth charts, tips for feeding picky eaters, and family activities. You are the most important influence on your child... help your preschooler develop healthy eating habits for life. Visit <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/preschoolers.html>. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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### **Summer Food Service Program: Hunger Doesn't Take a Summer Vacation**

Many low-income children take advantage of free or reduced price meals during the school day. During the summer many families struggle to provide meals or must look elsewhere for assistance. The USDA's Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) can help schools, non-profits, faith-based and community organizations fill the summer meal gap by serving reimbursable meals to low-income children. If you know of an agency that already serves congregate meals to low-income children during the summer, the program may be eligible to have meal costs reimbursed by SFSP. This program is operated by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service and administered through State agencies. Learn more at:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/summer>. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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### **Summer Food Service Program: Seamless Summer**

Many low-income children take advantage of free or reduced priced meals during the school day. During the summer many families struggle to provide meals or must look elsewhere for assistance. A school that serves meals through the National School Lunch Program and/or the School Breakfast Program can continue serving reimbursable meals through the SFSP during the summer months. This arrangement is known as "Seamless Summer." Your child's school may already participate. If not, let a school official know that information is available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/summer>. Let school officials know that hunger doesn't take a summer vacation. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit

[www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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### **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

SNAP helps low-income people and families buy the food they need for good health. You can apply for benefits by completing a state application form. Benefits are provided on an electronic card that is used like a debit card and accepted at most grocery stores. SNAP puts healthy food within reach. To use an online pre-screener to find out if you might be eligible for benefits, please see: <http://www.snap-step1.usda.gov/fns/>. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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### **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

SNAP is our nation's first line of defense against hunger. Each month, SNAP helps 46 million low-income people put healthy food on the table. While SNAP is the Federal name for the program, State programs may have different names. You may be eligible for benefits even if you are working or own a car. For more information about SNAP, please visit <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/>. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Myths and Facts: Seniors and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

Many people believe that SNAP benefits are not for them. Here are a few common myths and facts:

**MYTH:** SNAP is welfare.

**FACT:** SNAP is a nutrition assistance program. It helps low income people buy nutritious foods.

**MYTH:** Older individuals only receive \$10 a month in SNAP benefits.

**FACT:** The new minimum benefit is \$16 a month. The average amount of SNAP benefits for a qualifying senior can be over \$100 per month..

**MYTH:** Older Individuals must go to the SNAP office for an interview.

**FACT:** If an applicant is not able to go to the SNAP office, he or she may request a telephone interview. The person may also ask a relative, pastor, neighbor, or other trusted person to attend the interview as an authorized representative. Applicants for and recipients of SSI may also apply for SNAP benefits at the Social Security Office.

To find out about where to apply see: [http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant\\_recipients/apply.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant_recipients/apply.htm)

For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Myths and Facts: The Working Poor and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

Many people believe that SNAP benefits are not for them. Here are a few common myths and facts:

**MYTH:** Only unemployed people can get SNAP benefits.

**FACT:** You may qualify for SNAP if you are working. Many working people use SNAP benefits to help make ends meet.

**MYTH:** You can't get SNAP benefits if you get unemployment.

**FACT:** People who get unemployment may still qualify for SNAP benefits.

**MYTH:** You can't get SNAP benefits if you own a car.

**FACT:** You may qualify for SNAP benefits, even if you own a car. Most States exclude the value of a car when you apply for SNAP. Please contact your local office for more information on your State's policy. Your home and personal things, like clothes, jewelry, furniture, and household goods do not count as resources.

To find out where to apply for SNAP benefits, please see:

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant\\_recipients/apply.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant_recipients/apply.htm).

For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Myths and Facts: Non-Citizens and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

Many people believe that SNAP benefits are not for them. Here are a few common myths and facts:

**MYTH:** Children can't receive SNAP benefits unless their parents are citizens.

**FACT:** Children of non-citizen parents can get SNAP benefits if the children are citizens or lawful permanent residents.

**MYTH:** Non-citizens who ask about SNAP or live with others who get SNAP benefits are reported to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

**FACT:** SNAP information is confidential. But, the SNAP office checks the immigration documents you give them with USCIS. If you apply for SNAP on behalf of others, you won't be asked for your immigration documents. Other members of the household may be eligible even if you are not, like your children.

**MYTH:** You have to bring your own interpreter to apply for SNAP.

**FACT:** If there are a large number of people who speak the same language, the local SNAP office must provide arrangements for interpreter services. You do not have to pay for an interpreter.

To find out where to apply for SNAP benefits, please see:

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant\\_recipients/apply.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant_recipients/apply.htm).

For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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### **The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Helps Local Communities**

Everyone needs help making it through hard times. Unfortunately, many people who are eligible for SNAP do not participate. SNAP benefits are spent at grocery stores and other food retailers and help low-income families put food on the table while helping the local economy. Research shows that every \$1.00 in new SNAP benefits generates \$1.80 in total community spending. With SNAP, healthy food is within reach for low-income families and individuals. You or someone you know might be eligible for SNAP. For more information, please visit <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/>. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

To find out where to apply for SNAP benefits, please see:

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant\\_recipients/apply.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant_recipients/apply.htm).

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## **Myths and Facts: Individuals with Disabilities and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

Many people with disabilities believe that SNAP benefits are not for them. Here are a few common myths and facts:

**MYTH:** You can't get SNAP benefits if you get SSI, disability-related Medicaid, or other disability or insurance benefits.

**FACT:** If you get SNAP benefits, you can still get other benefits.

**MYTH:** You have to go to the SNAP office every few months to keep getting benefits.

**FACT:** Individuals with disabilities can get benefits for up to two years at a time. You can also ask for a telephone interview or a friend or family member can go for you.

**MYTH:** You have to work if you get SNAP benefits.

**FACT:** Individuals with disabilities don't have to look for a job or register for work to get SNAP benefits. You can't be denied SNAP benefits for not working if you are disabled.

To find out where to apply for SNAP benefits please see:

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant\\_recipients/apply.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant_recipients/apply.htm).

For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Myths and Facts: People Experiencing Homelessness and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

Many people who are experiencing homelessness believe that SNAP benefits are not for them. Here are a few common myths and facts:

**MYTH:** You have to have housing and a mailing address to get SNAP benefits.

**FACT:** You can get SNAP benefits even if you don't have your own residence and don't have a mailing address. If you live in a shelter, bring a letter from a shelter employee that says you live there when you apply.

**MYTH:** People who live in shelters can't get SNAP benefits because they already get free meals.

**FACT:** You can get SNAP benefits even if you live in a shelter with meals. You can't be turned down only because you live in a homeless shelter with meals.

**MYTH:** Homeless youth have to provide their parent's income when they apply for SNAP benefits.

**FACT:** Homeless young people can apply for SNAP benefits on their own. Their parent's income does not count. If you live in a shelter, bring a letter from a shelter employee that says you live there when you apply.

To find out where to apply for SNAP benefits please see:

[http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant\\_recipients/apply.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant_recipients/apply.htm).

For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Food When You Need It**

Nothing is more important than providing food assistance when people find themselves in need following a natural disaster. When a State has received a Presidential Major Disaster Declaration for Individual Assistance, it may request permission to operate a Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP) in the affected areas. D-SNAP provides eligible disaster survivors with one month's worth of benefits on an EBT card which can be used to purchase food at SNAP authorized retail stores. You may qualify for a D-SNAP operating in your area if you have out-of-pocket, unreimbursed disaster-related expenses or loss of income due to the disaster. People who already participate in SNAP and were affected by the disaster may be eligible for additional benefits to bring them to the maximum benefit level for their household size. To learn more about this program, please see:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/disasters/disaster.htm>. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations**

The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) is a Federal program that provides a food package to low-income households, living on Indian reservations and to Native American families residing in designated areas near reservations and in the State of Oklahoma. Each month, participating households receive a food package to help them maintain a nutritionally balanced diet. Participants may select from over 70 products. To find out if you and your family might be eligible and to find out how to apply for this benefit, please see: [http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/fdpi/fdpi\\_eligibility.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/fdpi/fdpi_eligibility.htm). For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)**

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program works to improve the health of low-income pregnant and breastfeeding women, other new mothers up to one year postpartum, infants, children up to age six, and seniors who are at least 60 years of age by supplementing their diets with nutritious foods purchased by the USDA. The program is only available in select states. If you belong to one of these groups and think you may be eligible for this benefit, see <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/programs/csfp/> to find out if CSFP is available in your state and where to apply. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **The National School Lunch Program: Healthy Students are Ready to Learn**

The National School Lunch Program provides low-cost or free meals to children attending participating schools. Children whose families already participate in other programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly the Food Stamp Program) and TANF are automatically eligible for free school lunches. Participating in the School Lunch Program ensures that your child will eat a healthy lunch to fuel his or her mind during the school day. Participating in the program can also help low-income families stretch food dollars during difficult times. Contact your child's school to find out more about participating. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **The School Breakfast Program: Starting the Day Right**

Research has shown that starting the day with a nutritious breakfast helps students stay alert and perform better in school. Having breakfast in the morning also helps children develop healthy eating habits and contributes to their overall well-being. It can be very difficult to get kids, especially older students, to eat a nutritious breakfast at home before the school day. Participating in the School Breakfast Program will help your student start the day off right whether or not he or she eats breakfast at home. It operates just like the National School Lunch Program and provides free or low-cost meals to students each day. Contact your child's school to find out if the School Breakfast Program is available. If your child's school does not participate, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service has resources for you to start the conversation about starting and expanding school breakfast programs in your community. See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Breakfast/expansion/default.htm> to find out more. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **HealthierUS Schools Challenge**

Childhood obesity is a problem in communities across the country. Schools can do their part to encourage healthy eating and lifestyles both in and outside of cafeterias. Many schools have already made changes to their school nutrition environments, improved the quality of the foods served, and now provide students with more nutritious, healthy choices. USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) wants to encourage schools to achieve such results, and has established the HealthierUS School Challenge to encourage schools to go further and to recognize those who chose to do so. If you would like to learn more about how your child's school can apply to be a HealthierUS school, see: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthierus/index.html>. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Expanding School Breakfast Programs**

Only one third of students who participate in the School Lunch Program participate in the School Breakfast Program. The USDA has a web-based resource called "Expanding Your School Breakfast Program" that provides a step-by-step guide to create a breakfast-focused team, explore alternative service methods, design and implement an action plan, and market the program effectively to improve participation and positively impact student health and academic potential. The resource includes downloadable letters to principals, teachers, and parents, a PowerPoint presentation, and other materials to build community support and encourage more students to eat School Breakfast. The Expanding Your School Breakfast Program site can be found here: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Breakfast/expansion/default.htm> For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Eat Smart. Play Hard.™**

Eat Smart. Play Hard.™ is about encouraging and teaching kids and adults to eat healthy and be physically active every day. At the Food and Nutrition Service's Eat Smart. Play Hard.™ website, you will find activities for kids, adults and educators. Resources include a children's website full of fun nutrition education activities, a parent's website full of tips, and an educator's page full of resources for schools. Visit Eat Smart. Play Hard.™ today at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/eatsmartplayhard/>. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP): Quality Meals for Day Care**

The CACFP plays a vital role in improving the quality of care for many low-income families by reimbursing child and adult day care centers, family day care homes, and homeless shelters to provide low cost or free nutritious meals and snacks to low-income adults and children. The CACFP also provides support for meals served to children in emergency shelters, and for snacks and suppers served to youth participating in eligible afterschool care programs. Find out more about the CACFP and how to connect more day care providers with this important resource here: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/care/>. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)**

WIC provides nutritious food to low income women, infants and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk. Participants also get information about healthy eating and referrals to health care and other social services. To find out if you qualify for WIC, contact your state WIC agency. You can find a list at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/Contacts/statealpha.HTM>. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Farmers Market Nutrition Program**

The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) is a part of WIC. The WIC Program provides supplemental foods, health care referrals and nutrition education at no cost to low-income pregnant, breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding post-partum women, and to infants and children up to 5 years of age, who are found to be at nutritional risk. The FMNP provides fresh, unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables to WIC participants, and to expand the awareness, use of and sales at farmers' markets. The FMNP operates in 46 states please check this website to find out if your state participates: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/WIC-FMNP-Fact-Sheet.pdf>. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program**

The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program provides resources in the form of fresh, nutritious, unprepared, locally grown fruits, vegetables, and herbs from farmers' markets, roadside stands and community supported agriculture programs to low-income seniors 60 and older. The program operates in 46 states during varying periods of time during the harvest season. Please look at this fact sheet to find out if your state participates: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/SFMNP-Fact-Sheet.pdf>. For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **National Hunger Clearinghouse**

Everyone needs help at some points during their lives. It can be confusing to know where to turn. The National Hunger Clearinghouse is an online directory that contains information on thousands of organizations across the country that are working on hunger, poverty, nutrition, agriculture and food issues. This directory will assist you in locating food resources in your community. To find help in your area, see: [http://www.worldhungeryear.org/nhc\\_data/nhc\\_01.asp](http://www.worldhungeryear.org/nhc_data/nhc_01.asp). For information about other USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Nutrition Messages for Mothers and Children**

### **Cooking With Your Kids: Support Healthy Habits**

Cooking at home is a great way to save money and teach your children valuable lessons. Kids love to copy what parents do and even small children can help with the cooking process. Cooking healthy food with your children will teach them about eating healthy foods and show them that you care about what they eat. Also, Kids like to try foods they help make. It's a great way to encourage your child to eat fruits and vegetables. For information about USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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### **Cooking With Your Kids: Fitting in Family Time**

Cooking and eating at home with your kids is a great way to fit in quality family time. Kids feel good about doing something "grown-up." Give them small jobs to do and praise their efforts. Their smiles will light up your kitchen. For information about USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Family Dinners Are Worth the Effort**

It takes a little work to bring everyone together for meals, but it's worth it and the whole family eats better. Start eating meals together as a family when your kids are young. This way, it becomes a habit. Plan when you will eat together as a family and write it on your calendar. You may not be able to eat together every day. Try to have family meals at least four times a week. For information about USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Talk to Me: What to Talk About During Family Meals**

Make meal time count as family time. When you eat together as a family, go around the table and share things about your day. Try these questions:

- What made you feel really happy today?
- What did you have to eat at lunch today?
- Tell me one thing you learned today.
- What made you laugh today?

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## **Cooking With Your Kids: Learning at Home**

Kids love helping in the kitchen. Parents love knowing that their child is also learning skills they'll use for many years. It can be hard to find time to help support your child's learning both in and outside of school. Cooking together can support your child's education without taking extra time in the evening. Help teach them to follow instructions, count, and more. Make meals and memories together. It's a lesson they'll use for life. For information about USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Teaching Kids About Portions**

Let your kids learn by serving themselves at dinner. Teach them to take small amounts at first. Tell them they can get more if they're still hungry. Taking smaller amounts will keep your children not to waste food and to only take what they are hungry enough to eat. For information about USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Introducing New Foods to Children Takes Time**

We all want our kids to eat a variety of foods- especially fruits and vegetables. It can be very difficult to get your children to eat foods they have never seen. Kids don't always take to new foods right away. It helps to offer new fruits and veggies many times. Give them a taste at first and be patient with them. For information about USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Patience Works Better Than Pressure When Introducing New Foods**

Offer your young children new foods. Then, let them choose how much to eat. Kids are more likely to enjoy a food when eating it is their own choice. It also helps them learn to be independent. Once you have introduced new foods to your children and they develop a taste for many types of foods, it's easier to plan family meals. For information about USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Making Fruits and Vegetables Available and Accessible in the Home**

Want your kids to reach for a healthy snack? Make sure fruits and vegetables are in reach. If you know your child will be eating a snack after school, prepare small containers or snack bags with cut-up veggies and dip. Preparing them in advance will help you make healthy snacks available even during very busy week days. Store snack packs in the refrigerator on a shelf where they are easy for your child to see. For information about USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Let Your Kids Help Pick Produce**

Take your kids to the grocery store with you and let them be “produce pickers”. If they help pick out the fruits and vegetables, they will be more likely to try the food you prepare. Grocery shopping together can be a way to get errands done while spending quality time with your kids. For information about USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Make Sure to Provide Low-Fat or Fat-Free Milk at Meals**

Your kids are still growing. Help them grow strong by making sure milk is available at all meals- not just with breakfast cereal. Fat-free and low-fat milk have the same nutrition as whole-fat milk without high fat content. For information about USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **What Kinds of Fruits and Veggies Should My Family Eat?**

Fresh, frozen, and canned fruits and vegetables are all smart choices. Buy some of each to last until your next shopping trip.

- Frozen vegetables have as many vitamins and minerals as fresh. Choose packages that contain vegetables and nothing else- no added fat, salt, or sugars.
- Buy canned fruits that are packed in “100% juice” or water.
- Rinse canned beans and vegetables with cold water to make them lower in salt.
- Look for canned vegetables that say “No added salt” on the front of the can. Buy them when they go on sale.

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## **Even Small Children Can Help in the Kitchen: 2-year-olds**

Cooking activities for 2-year-olds:

- Make “faces” out of pieces of fruits and vegetables.
- Scrub vegetables or fruits.
- Tear lettuce or greens.
- Snap green beans.

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## **Even Young Children Can Help in the Kitchen: 3-year-olds**

Cooking activities for 3-year-olds:

- Add ingredients.
- Stir
- Spread peanut butter or other spreads.
- Shake a drink in a sealed container.
- Knead bread dough.

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## **Even Young Children Can Help in the Kitchen: 4-year-olds**

Cooking activities for 4- to 5- year-olds:

- Peel some fruits and vegetables like bananas.
- Peel hard boiled eggs.
- Cut soft fruits with a plastic knife.
- Wipe off counters.
- Mash soft fruits, vegetables, and beans.
- Measure dry ingredients.

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## **Themes Can Make Family Dinners Special**

Family dinners are quality family time. Make them memorable by having “theme nights.” Try a “Make Your Own” night. Let your family put together its own soft tacos, sandwiches, pizza, or salads. You could also try naming your food after your child when they help cook. Make a big deal out of serving “Karla’s Salad” or “Corey’s Sweet Potatoes” for dinner. Or, Have a color contest and see how many green, red, yellow, and orange fruits and vegetables you can include in one meal. For information about USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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## **Make-Ahead Fruit and Veggie Snacks From the Fridge**

If you have fruits and veggies prepared and ready for when your child says “I’m hungry” you’ll be ready with a healthy snack fast. A few make-ahead ideas:

- Toss veggies with cooked pasta and fat-free Italian dressing.
- Slice apples. Dip them in pineapple or orange juice to keep them from turning brown. Store apples in plastic snack bags or covered bowls in the fridge.
- Kids love to dip fresh veggies in low-fat ranch dressing. Cut up veggies and store them near the dip in the fridge.

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## **Teach Your Kids: Food is Fuel**

Explain the importance of eating healthy foods in a way that your children can understand. Use fantasy with encouragement like “Eat smart to play hard!” Also, kids like to know what will make them stronger and faster. Explain that eating healthy foods will help them have more energy to play! For information about USDA nutrition programs, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov).

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3101 PARK CENTER DRIVE, ROOM 1441  
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22302  
PARTNERSHIPS@FNS.USDA.GOV  
703-305-1504