

Healthy Celebrations



Holidays and celebrations are exciting and special moments in children’s lives! ECE programs can support healthy habits by celebrating events in a healthy way. As children grow, they begin to learn the significance of celebrations and holidays. The earlier children learn to celebrate in a healthy way, the easier it is to convince them that healthy celebrations can be fun. Older children may be more skeptical of changes to celebrations, so make changes slowly and explain to them why celebrating in a healthy way is important. Here are some suggestions to help plan a fun and healthy celebration:

General Tips

- Celebrate holidays in ways that don’t focus on food: sing songs, play games or do an art project.
- Encourage children to help you make a special, healthy treat.
- Think of healthy alternatives to traditional party foods such as fruit kebabs, pita pizza or mini muffins instead of a large cake. If you feel strongly about having a traditional treat, make healthy substitutions (e.g., substitute unsweetened applesauce for oil in cakes, cupcakes, breads and muffins).
- If you provide favors for birthdays or small gifts for holidays, try small age-appropriate toys like stickers, crayons, modeling dough or trading cards instead of sweets.
- Make a piñata for the class and fill it with small favors (e.g., crayons, stickers, temporary tattoos, scarves or small, age-appropriate small favors) instead of candy.



Suggestions for Healthy Celebration Foods

- Fruit smoothies (blend ice, fresh or frozen fruit, fat-free yogurt, and fat-free milk)
- Birthday kabobs (use a straw instead of a sharp stick) with any kind of fruit
- Small low-fat oatmeal cookies or whole grain fig cookies
- Prepare one of the children’s favorite dishes (in a healthy way) and serve snack-size portions for the class.
- 100% fruit juice freezer pops
- Fruit pizzas using whole grain tortillas topped with low-fat whipped cream and fruit
- Make ice cream cone cakes. Fill ice cream cones with pudding (made with fat-free milk) and decorate with sprinkles.
- Make-your-own pizzas using whole grain English muffins and veggie toppings.
- Mini cupcakes or muffins (decreasing portion size is good, too!)



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Suggestions for Healthy Foods for Celebrations:

8 - 12 Months

- Pureed or soft fruits and vegetables cut into ¼ inch cubes
- Whole grain crackers
- Shredded or cubed ¼ inch natural cheese
- Plain yogurt (made with whole milk)
- Water, formula or breast milk

1 - 6 Years

- Fresh, frozen or canned fruits and vegetables cut into small pieces
- Whole grain crackers
- Low-fat cheese cubes or string cheese
- Low-fat or fat-free yogurt
- Water or milk (following age recommendations)

6 - 12 years

- Fresh, frozen or canned fruits and vegetables
- Whole grain crackers
- Cheese cubes or string cheese
- Low-fat or fat-free yogurt
- Water, 1% (low-fat) or fat-free milk, 100% juice

Healthy Ways to Celebrate:

- Allow children to help plan activities and a healthy menu to complement the celebration.
- Serve healthy foods that are the holiday's traditional colors. For example, serve cantaloupe, pumpernickel bread and low-fat cheddar cheese balls at a Halloween party, or vanilla yogurt with blueberries for Hanukkah.
- Decorate using fun holiday centerpieces made out of fruits and vegetables.
- Pass out party favors that promote physical activity (e.g., jump ropes, balls or Frisbees®).
- Plan parties at locations that encourage physical activity, such as a local park, pool or playground.
- Honor the birthday boy or girl with treats other than food, such as allowing them to choose a game or special activity or letting them wear a special crown, sash or badge on their birthday.
- Let children choose a favorite book to read to the class or a favorite physical activity.
- Take a field trip or walk to a fun new destination.
- Host a treasure hunt around the early care and education program, playground or neighborhood.



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