

potpourri

February 2026

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***What's Inside?
Heart Health February
Turn Your Plate Red
Healthy Hearts from the Start
Infant Sleep Safety
& More!***

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February brings Heart Health Month—a perfect opportunity to highlight the important role nutrition plays in supporting children’s long-term health. While heart health may seem like more of a concern for adulthood, the habits children form now lay the foundation for a lifetime of wellness. The meals you serve each day help shape those habits in meaningful and lasting ways.

This month, we encourage providers to spotlight heart-healthy foods in fun and engaging ways. Bright red fruits and vegetables like strawberries, tomatoes, beets, and red peppers are not only kid-friendly and visually appealing, but they’re also packed with vitamins, fiber, and antioxidants that support cardiovascular health.

February is also a wonderful time to introduce simple conversations with children about caring for their bodies: moving, playing, and fueling up with foods that help them grow strong. These early lessons, taught through routines and meals in childcare settings, make a powerful impact.

Thank you for the intentional care you bring to your menus, your classrooms, and your work each day. Your commitment to nourishing children supports their health both now and for years to come.

Wishing you a warm and heart-healthy month ahead.

Denise Meyer
 Executive Director

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Heart Health February!

February is Heart Health Month! Here are some heart-healthy recipes to try!

Turkey Sliders with Avocado, Mushrooms, and Swiss Cheese

8 servings
recipes.heart.org

Ingredients

8 whole-grain slider buns (lowest sodium available)
 1 1/4 pounds ground skinless turkey breast
 1/4 teaspoon salt
 1 cup sliced brown (cremimi) mushrooms
 4 slices low-fat Swiss cheese, cut in half
 1 medium avocado, peeled, pitted, and mashed with a fork
 1 medium tomato, cut into 8 slices (about 1/4-inch thick)

Instructions

- Preheat the oven to 450°F.
- Arrange the buns with the cut side up in a single layer on a baking sheet. Set aside.
- Using your hands or a spoon, shape the turkey into 8 patties, each about 3 inches in diameter. (The uncooked patties will be larger than the bun and will shrink as they cook.) Sprinkle the salt over each patty.
- Heat a large nonstick skillet or griddle pan over medium-high heat.
- Cook the patties for 2 to 3 minutes. Turn over. Cook for 2 to 3 minutes, or until the patties are no longer pink in the center and register 165°F on an instant-read thermometer.
- Transfer the patties to the bottoms of the buns.
- In the same skillet, cook the mushrooms over medium heat for about 3 minutes, or until

soft, stirring frequently.

- Spoon the mushrooms onto each patty. Top with the Swiss cheese.
- Place the baking sheet on the middle rack of the oven. Bake the sliders for 1 to 2 minutes, or until the Swiss cheese is melted and the buns are heated through. Remove from the oven.
- Spread the avocado over the Swiss cheese. Top with the tomato slices. Put the tops of the buns on the sliders.

⊕ **Meat/Meat Alternate** ⊕ **Vegetable**
 ⊕ **Grain**

Turkey Chili

6 servings
recipes.heart.org

Ingredients

1 1/2 tablespoons canola or corn oil
 1 medium or large onion, chopped
 20 ounces ground skinless turkey breast
 2 large garlic cloves, minced
 OR 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
 2 teaspoons chili powder
 1/2 teaspoon pepper
 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
 1 15.5-ounce can no-salt-added pinto beans, rinsed and drained
 1 15.5-ounce can no-salt-added black beans, rinsed and drained
 1 14.5-ounce can no-salt-added diced tomatoes, undrained
 1 3/4 cups fat-free, low-sodium chicken broth
 1 cup frozen whole-kernel corn
 1 6-ounce can no-salt-added tomato paste
 4 medium green onions (green part only), sliced

Instructions

- In a Dutch oven, heat the

oil over medium-high heat, swirling to coat the bottom. Cook the chopped onion for 3 minutes, or until soft, stirring occasionally.

- Reduce the heat to medium. Stir in the turkey. Cook for 5 minutes, or until browned, stirring frequently to turn and break up the turkey.
- Stir in the garlic, chili powder, pepper, and cumin. Stir in the remaining ingredients except the green onions. Cook for 5 to 7 minutes, or until heated through, stirring frequently. Just before serving, sprinkle with the green onions.

⊕ **Meat/Meat Alternate** ⊕ **Vegetable**

Cauliflower Rice

8 servings
recipes.heart.org

Ingredients

Cooking spray
 1 head cauliflower
 1/4 teaspoon salt
 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
 1/4 cup chopped, fresh parsley
 OR 2 teaspoon dried parsley

Instructions

- Cut the cauliflower in to florets. In batches, add cauliflower to food processor (or blender) and gently pulse until cauliflower becomes the texture of rice. Be careful not to over-pulse.
- Coat large skillet with cooking spray and add cauliflower, salt and pepper. Sauté over medium heat for 5 minutes until cauliflower is tender, stirring occasionally.
- Top with chopped parsley.

⊕ **Vegetable**

Meals & Menus

CACFP Requirements



CACFP	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	
BREAKFAST	1. GN/BP OR MT** 2. FT OR VG 3. MK	1. WG Banana Pancakes 2. Apple Slices*** 3. Milk	1. Scrambled Eggs w/Cheese 2. Mango Chunks*** 3. Milk	1. WG English Muffin Half 2. Orange Wedges 3. Milk	1. WG Blueberry Muffin 2. Pear Slices 3. Milk	1. WG Mini Bagel 2. Grapes (halved)*** 3. Milk
LUNCH/DINNER	1. MT 2. GN/BP 3. VG 4. FT OR VG 5. MK	1. Turkey/Veg Stir Fry 2. Brown Rice 3. Steamed Broccoli 4. Pears 5. Milk	1. Baked Tilapia 2. WG Roll 3. Sweet Potato 4. Diced Peaches 5. Milk	1. Bean/Cheese Quesadilla 2. WG Tortilla 3. Corn 4. Pineapple 5. Milk	1. Chicken/Veg Pasta 2. WG Rotini 3. Vegetable of Choice 4. Apple Slices*** 5. Milk	1. Beef & Barley Stew 2. Barley 3. Green Beans 4. Orange Wedges 5. Milk
SNACKS*	1. MT 2. GN/BP 3. FT 4. VG 5. MK	1. Hard Boiled Egg 2. WG Bread Rounds 3. Kiwi Slices 4. Sweet Peppers*** 5. Milk	1. Black Bean Hummus 2. WG Tortilla 3. Cantaloupe 4. Cucumber*** 5. Milk	1. Yogurt 2. WG Corn Muffin 3. Fresh Apricots*** 4. Carrots*** 5. Milk	1. Cottage Cheese 2. WG Rice Cakes 3. Pineapple 4. Green Beans 5. Milk	1. Turkey Cubes 2. WG Crackers 3. Blueberries*** 4. Cherry Tomatoes*** 5. Milk
(*) Choose two food groups from "Snacks" list.			(**) MT may be substituted for GN/BP up to 3x a week. (***) Choking hazard for children under age 4.			
FT: Fruit VG: Vegetable GN: Grain WG: Whole Grain MK: Milk BP: Bread Prdt. MT: Meat/Meat Alternate						



REMINDERS:

December 2025 final claim due: **February 23, 2026 (Mon.)**

- Please remember to submit enrollments/renewals in a timely manner.
- Please open any mail that comes from ACD. Also, please check your email and spam folders for news and information from us.
- Please remember to mark children out of school and to call in daycare closures.
- Send enrollments to: **Michigan:** mifrontdesk@acdkids.org | Fax: (517) 332-5543
Illinois: ilcustomerservice@acdkids.org | Fax: (708) 236-0872

Heart Health Month: Turning Your Plate Red for Kids' Nutrition

February is Heart Health Month, making it the perfect time to explore fun, colorful ways to help children build lifelong habits that support a strong and healthy heart. One of the simplest and most engaging approaches is to “turn your plate red” by filling meals and snacks with naturally red, nutrient-rich foods. These foods not only brighten a child’s plate but also deliver antioxidants, vitamins, and fiber that growing bodies need.

Red fruits and vegetables are powerful nutrition boosters. Many contain compounds known for supporting heart health such as lycopene and anthocyanins.

- Strawberries, cherries, raspberries, and red grapes are packed with vitamin C and antioxidants that help reduce inflammation.
- Red apples offer fiber to support healthy digestion and help kids feel full longer.
- Red bell peppers provide more vitamin C than an orange, and their sweet, crunchy flavor makes them a kid-friendly favorite.
- Beets, red cabbage, and tomatoes deliver deep red pigments that contribute to overall cardiovascular wellness.

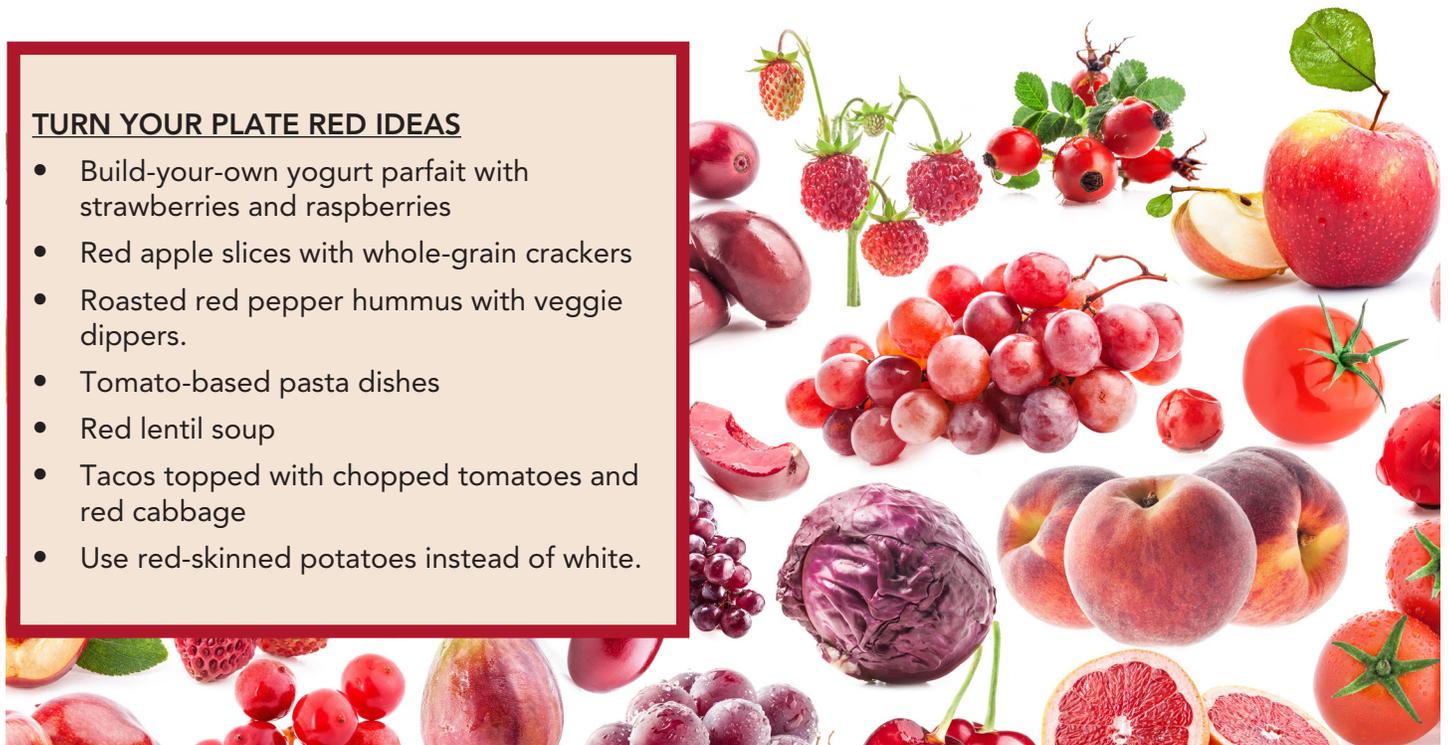
In childcare environments, “turning your plate red” can be an easy and fun theme for meals throughout the month. Even simple swaps add extra nutrients without changing the familiar taste kids enjoy.

Encouraging children to explore red foods can also become an educational activity. Talk with them about where these foods grow, what makes them red, and how they help keep hearts healthy. Letting children help wash, stir, or assemble ingredients increases their willingness to try new foods, especially colorful fruits and vegetables.

Heart Health Month is a chance to remind us that small, consistent choices can support long-term wellness. By using red foods to spark curiosity and excitement, caregivers and providers can make nutrition education both delicious and fun. Whether it’s a bright bowl of berries or a hearty veggie-packed soup, turning your plate red is a simple way to celebrate heart health and help children build habits that last a lifetime.

TURN YOUR PLATE RED IDEAS

- Build-your-own yogurt parfait with strawberries and raspberries
- Red apple slices with whole-grain crackers
- Roasted red pepper hummus with veggie dippers.
- Tomato-based pasta dishes
- Red lentil soup
- Tacos topped with chopped tomatoes and red cabbage
- Use red-skinned potatoes instead of white.



Heart Healthy Eating in Childhood: Building Strong Hearts from the Start!

Establishing heart-healthy eating habits early in life is one of the most powerful ways to set children up for lifelong wellness. While heart disease is often viewed as an adult concern, the foundations of cardiovascular health are laid in childhood. The foods children eat—and the habits they develop—directly influence their energy levels, growth, and long-term heart function. By offering balanced meals now, caregivers can help prevent future health problems and support thriving, active kids.

A heart-healthy diet for children begins with fruits and vegetables. These colorful foods are rich in fiber, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that protect the heart and support healthy blood vessels. Encouraging “eating the rainbow” helps children get a wide range of nutrients. Fresh, frozen, or canned options in light syrup or water all count—what matters most is offering produce consistently and making it appealing. Turning fruits and vegetables into fun shapes, serving them family-style, or modeling enthusiasm can all make a big difference in acceptance.

Whole grains are another essential component of heart-healthy eating. Foods like whole-wheat bread, brown rice, oatmeal, and whole-grain pasta provide lasting energy and help stabilize blood sugar levels. Their naturally high fiber content also supports digestion and keeps kids feeling full longer.

Lean proteins—such as beans, lentils, tofu, eggs, lean poultry, and fish—contribute to healthy muscles and strong hearts. Fatty fish like salmon or trout offer heart-protective omega-3 fatty acids, which are beneficial even in small servings. Plant-based proteins, especially beans and legumes, add both fiber and nutrients and are affordable options for childcare programs.

Healthy fats play an important role as well. Unsaturated fats found in avocados, nuts, seeds, and olive or canola oil support brain development and heart health. These fats can replace solid fats like butter or shortening during cooking or baking. Simple changes—such as using olive oil in place of margarine or offering nut butters as a snack option for children without allergies—can have a meaningful impact.

Finally, limiting added sugars and sodium helps protect children’s heart health. Choosing water or milk instead of sugary beverages, selecting lower-sodium canned goods, and offering fresh ingredients when possible can reduce strain on the cardiovascular system.

By fostering heart-healthy eating patterns early on, caregivers empower children to grow strong, stay active, and build lifelong habits that support a healthy heart.



Crunchy Yogurt Parfait With Berries

Yield: 6 servings

Ingredients:

24 ounces fat-free plain yogurt (4 oz serving each parfait)
1 1/2 cups whole-grain cereal
4 1/2 cups fresh, frozen, or canned berries

Instructions:

1. Spoon 2 tbsp yogurt into a tall glass and smooth surface.
2. Spoon 1/8 cup whole-grain cereal over yogurt.
3. Add 4 to 5 berries over top of cereal.
4. Repeat the above process, ending with berries over top of the parfait.

Safety notes: *Small berries can be a choking hazard.*

⊕ Grain ⊕ Meat/Meat Alternate ⊕ Fruit



Southwestern Style Breakfast Casserole

Yield: 9 or more servings

Ingredients:

Nonstick cooking spray
6 slices hearty whole-grain bread, cut into cubes
1 (10-ounce) package frozen chopped spinach, thawed and liquid squeezed out
1 (7-ounce) jar roasted red peppers, drained and chopped, or 1 red bell pepper, roasted and chopped
1 1/2 cups shredded Mexican blend cheese or sharp cheddar cheese
3 cups nonfat milk
5 eggs
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon cumin
1/2 teaspoon black pepper
1/2 teaspoon salt

Instructions:

1. Layer the bread in a 9 x 13-inch baking dish coated with the nonstick cooking spray. Sprinkle evenly with spinach, red peppers and cheese.
2. Combine nonfat milk, eggs, garlic powder, cumin, black pepper, and salt in a large bowl. Pour over the bread mixture.
3. Cover and refrigerate at least 4 hours or overnight.
4. Preheat oven to 350°F.
5. Bake, uncovered, for 45 minutes or until a knife inserted into the center comes out clean. Let stand for 10 minutes before serving.

Safety notes: *Keep kids away from the hot oven.*

⊕ Grain ⊕ Meat/Meat Alternate ⊕ Vegetable

■ Source: fruitsandveggies.org | eatright.org

■ Image: fruitsandveggies.org | eatright.org



Get Kids Moving with Items from the Dollar Store



You can create dollar store workouts for kids using items like pool noodles, hula hoops, and painters tape to build obstacle courses and games for balance, coordination, and strength. Other effective options include using kitchen tools for fine motor skills, creating sensory bins, and making pretend weights.

For example:

Obstacle course: Use painters tape to create a "laser" maze or a straight-line course on the floor for kids to step over, or build tunnels with pool noodles and duct tape.

Hula hoops: Use hula hoops for jumping through, spinning, or as targets.

Bean bags: Incorporate bean bags into games of tossing, catching, and obstacle courses to work on coordination.

Kites and balls: Fly kites, throw foam footballs, or use beach balls to improve gross motor skills and social skills like sharing.

Jump ropes: Make a balance beam by laying a jump rope on the floor.

Plastic cups: Line five or six plastic cups half a foot apart from each other. Give the kids mini basketballs or whatever soft small size balls you find. Watch them enjoy kicking the cups down.

By picking up these simple items at a dollar store, you can set up some fun physical activities for the kids to enjoy and get moving!

■ Source: hgTV.com

Active Play, Healthy Hearts!

Supporting Heart Health the Fun Way!

February's Heart Health Month is a perfect reminder that building lifelong wellness starts in childhood. While we often think of heart health in terms of diet, physical activity is just as essential, especially for young children whose bodies and habits are still developing. When kids play, they aren't just having fun - they're strengthening their cardiovascular system, boosting endurance, improving circulation, and supporting a healthy weight. Regular active play also nurtures emotional well-being and helps children build confidence as they explore what their bodies can do.

For childcare providers, encouraging movement doesn't require special equipment or large spaces. Active indoor play can be structured or spontaneous and still deliver meaningful heart-healthy benefits. Here are some fun ideas to try:

- Set up movement stations such as jumping jacks or hopscotch made with painter's tape.
- Make a "follow-the-leader" obstacle path using pillows, tunnels, or soft mats.
- Dance to upbeat music! Children can shake scarves, copy choreographed movements, or

freeze in place when the music stops.

- Try "animal walks," such as crab walking, bear crawling, or hopping like a bunny. These are both cardio-boosting and great for motor development.

Even in the winter months, outdoor play remains an important component of heart health. Fresh air and open space encourage kids to move more freely, run longer, and use larger muscle groups. With proper cold-weather clothing, children can safely enjoy activities like stomping in the snow, building snow structures, pulling sleds, or going on a nature scavenger hunt. Short, frequent outdoor sessions can be just as beneficial as longer ones and help children burn energy, strengthen their hearts, and stay connected to the natural world.

This Heart Health Month, celebrate the power of play. Whether indoors or outside, every jump, skip, and giggle helps lay the foundation for strong hearts and healthy futures.

■ Source: aha.org ■ Image: Adobe Stock Images



Valentine's Day Love Bug Name Craft

- Red, pink, and black construction paper
- Pipe Cleaners
- Glue
- Scissors
- Marker and crayons
- Googly eyes

STEP 1

Figure out how many hearts you're going to need. You'll want one for each letter of each child's name and one extra for their love bug's head. Split up how many hearts needed between the two construction paper colors.

STEP 2

Fold the construction paper in half and use a marker to draw an outline of half a heart. If kids are old enough, go ahead and let them cut the hearts out themselves.

STEP 3

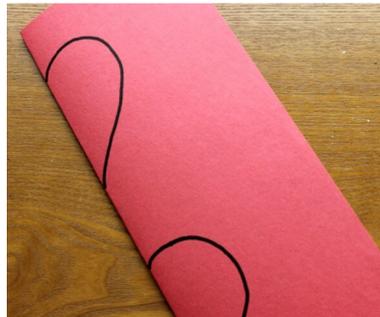
If the child already knows the letters of their name and how to write them, have them add one letter to each of their hearts. If not, use either a white crayon or a highlighter to write the letters on for them and then have them trace over those with a crayon or marker.

STEP 4

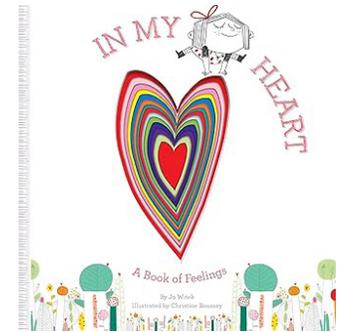
Give your lovebug a face! Add googly eyes, draw a face, whatever you like.

STEP 4

string all of your letters together, stick them with a little bit of glue and use your black construction paper to give him some feet and you're all set!



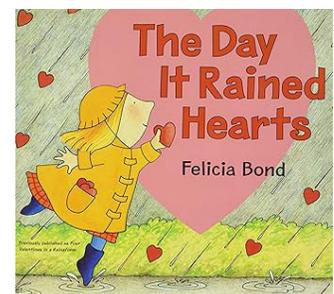
February brings Heart Health Month & Valentine's Day! Here are some books about feelings that come from the heart.



In My Heart: A Book of Feelings
by Jo Witek (Author),
Christine Roussey (Illustrator)



The Invisible String
by Patrice Karst (Author),
Joanne Lew-Vriethoff (Illustrator)



The Day It Rained Hearts
by Felicia Bond (Author,
Illustrator)

■ Books: [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

■ Source: [fromabcstoacts.com](https://www.fromabcstoacts.com) ■ Images: [fromabcstoacts.com](https://www.fromabcstoacts.com)

Focus on Infant Sleep Safety: Is Your Crib Safe?

Ensuring safe sleep for infants begins with choosing the right crib and creating a hazard-free sleep environment. Cribs should meet current safety standards with a firm, well-fitting mattress with no gaps along the sides. Soft bedding, like pillows, blankets, stuffed animals, and bumpers may seem cozy, but they increase the risk of suffocation and should always be kept out of the sleep space. By focusing on a properly assembled crib and minimalist bedding approach, caregivers can create a secure environment that supports healthy, restful sleep for even the youngest children.

Follow these guidelines to create a safe sleep environment for baby:

Crib Safety

- The safest place for a baby to sleep is in a fully functional, properly assembled, Baby Safety Alliance Verified crib, bassinet, cradle, play yard, or bedside sleeper. When your child is ready for a toddler bed, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends waiting until they are at least 15 months old before making the transition.
- Before you use a sleep product, check to make sure it has not been recalled.
- Do not purchase or use secondhand sleep products, as they may not meet the most current safety standards. Drop-side cribs are no longer available for purchase and should NOT be used.
- Make sure there are no missing, loose or broken parts or improperly installed screws, brackets or other hardware on the crib or the mattress support. Check the stability and hardware on the crib often. Do not substitute hardware. Only use hardware obtained directly from the manufacturer.
- Always use a properly fitting mattress in baby's crib, as infants can suffocate in gaps between a poorly fitting mattress and the crib sides or ends. **Did you know?** The crib mattress should fit snugly with no more than two fingers, or approximately one-inch width, between the edge of the mattress and the side of the crib.
- Send in the product registration card that comes with every new product (most crib manufacturers offer this service online as well). Returning the card ensures that the consumer will be notified if the crib is recalled.



Bedding Guidelines

- To reduce the risk of SIDS/SUID, pediatricians recommend healthy infants be placed on their backs to sleep.
- ALWAYS use a tight-fitting crib sheet. NEVER place additional padding under an infant. Only a tight fitted sheet, mattress pad and/or waterproof pad should be used under the baby.
- NEVER place infants to sleep on pillows, sofa cushions, adult beds, waterbeds, beanbags or any other surface not specifically designed for infant sleep.
- Remove pillows, blankets and pillow-like stuffed toys from the crib when infants are sleeping. NEVER place additional padding under an infant.
- Do not overdress a baby. Consider using a sleeper, wearable blanket or other sleep clothing as an alternative to any covering. For newborns, consider swaddling. Discontinue swaddling when infants show signs of rolling over or can break free from the swaddle blanket or commercial products designed for swaddling.
- Check periodically for loose threads or stitching, which could cause gagging or choking.

February 2026

Submit quiz answers to your Field Monitor to receive FREE training credit.
Do not (e)mail quiz to the ACD office.

1. How much space should be between the mattress and the side of the crib?

- a. 1/2 inch
- b. 1 inch
- c. 1 1/2 inches
- d. 2 inches

2. What nutrient supports healthy digestion and help kids feel full longer?

- a. Carbohydrates
- b. Protein
- c. Calcium
- d. Fiber

3. Many red fruits and vegetables contain compounds known for supporting heart health such as lycopene and anthocyanins.

- a. True
- b. False

4. Whole grains do not help to stabilize blood sugar levels.

- a. True
- b. False

5. Limiting added sugars and sodium helps protect children's heart health.

- a. True
- b. False

6. Red bell peppers provide more vitamin C than an orange.

- a. True
- b. False

7. Encouraging movement doesn't require special equipment or large spaces..

- a. True
- b. False

8. (AAP) recommends waiting until what age before making the transition from crib to toddler bed?

- a. 12 months
- b. 15 months
- c. 18 months
- d. 24 months

9. Regular active play also nurtures emotional well-being.

- a. True
- b. False

10. Plant-based proteins include:

- a. Tuna
- b. Broccoli
- c. Oranges
- d. Beans & legumes

11. Beans, lentils, tofu, eggs, lean poultry, and fish are considered ____.

- a. Lean Proteins
- b. Fats
- c. Carbohydrates
- d. All of the above

12. Short, frequent outdoor play sessions can be just as beneficial as longer ones.

- a. True
- b. False

13. Before you use a sleep product, check to make sure it has not been recalled.

- a. True
- b. False

14. What should be in a crib with a sleeping infant?

- a. Fitted sheet
- b. Blankets
- c. Pillows
- d. Stuffed toys

15. Fatty fish like salmon or trout offer heart-protective omega-3 fatty acids.

- a. True
- b. False



The Association for Child Development educates parents and caregivers about nutrition to promote the development of children and establish healthy eating habits to last a lifetime.



As a nonprofit, ACD has been operating for 50 years in Illinois and Michigan. A large part of our work involves serving more than 36,000 children through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) – a program ensuring children have access to nutritious meals.

Alongside this critical work, ACD looks to make a greater impact by expanding our mission to include a safety component focused on decreasing the risk of harm or injury in homes children are cared for through outreach, education and safety products.

Support ACD's efforts to prevent child injury.

Donate today at www.acdkids.org.