



**“Wellness is what makes children successful in all areas.”**

— Brenda Rouzer, CACFP/Federal Reporting Manager  
Cesa #11 Head Start, Turtle Lake

## Healthy Bites Plate-by-Plate

Brenda Rouzer at CESA 11 Head Start feels that the responsibility of childcare providers is to remove obstacles preventing children from having the best day possible. Throughout the CACFP Child Care Wellness grant, Brenda and her staff have worked hard to implement nutrition strategies into each of their 10 centers that span seven counties.

According to Brenda, staff education and engagement was the key to getting started with the Wellness grant. A local chef provided a healthy cooking demonstration to staff that emphasized using herbs and seasonings to reduce sodium in recipes, how to create sauces to scale back on processed foods and additional, healthy scratch-cooking techniques. A dietitian also reviewed the center’s menu and provided suggestions on adding whole grains and reducing fat, sugar and sodium content.

Staff educators taught lessons in the classroom tailored to each age level regarding the USDA MyPlate model, portion control and the importance of a balanced diet. Each child received a MyPlate placemat to be used as a model for portions at meal time. In addition, children received a MyPlate magnet for home to encourage family involvement. Both activities have encouraged children to repeatedly try new foods, a strategy that Brenda recognizes as a key method to getting children to accept unfamiliar foods.

Brenda expanded the program to their home visit program which serves children birth to 4 year olds, as well as children with special needs. Wellness activity kits were developed that include a nutrition and physical activity component designed to meet the needs and educational goals of each family involved. The home visits have provided a quality experience for the entire family further encouraging interest in healthy foods on a regular basis.

Brenda assures other childcare providers that while implementing nutrition strategies takes a significant amount of time and organization upfront, the benefits outweigh the challenges. Her advice is to be organized and provide staff with the necessary tools and training to develop a strong knowledge base and increase enthusiasm. Brenda is confident that the nutrition changes that have taken place throughout the grant are changes that can be sustained long-term.

### Why Healthy Bites Matters

Shaping eating behaviors at an early age helps establish life-long health.

#### Proper Nutrition benefits children’s:

- Physical growth
- Immune system
- Brain development

#### Healthy eating benefits everyone

##### Children who are well-nourished:

- Have energy to play and grow
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Are able to concentrate and focus on learning
- Enjoy a variety of foods

Early child care providers can improve child health and wellness by establishing policies that follow the expert recommendations about the nutrition environment and foods served in their programs.

The *Healthy Bites* guide gives providers concrete strategies to get kids eating well.



Healthy Bites

<http://dpi.wi.gov/fns/cacfpwellness.html>