

Use Individual Education Programs (IEP) to Meet Students' Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Needs

The IEP can include healthy eating goals and services to meet students' educational and behavioral needs and to prevent the short and long-term health effects of unhealthy eating habits.

HEALTHY EATING

Before writing goals, the IEP team needs to understand the cause of the student's eating challenges. The team may recommend that the family or caregiver consult the student's healthcare provider to rule out any underlying physical problems. Once the cause of the eating problem is identified, the team can determine which professionals can develop a treatment plan, provide support and write the goals to help the student.

Professionals to consider:

- Behavioral Psychologist
- Occupational Therapist
- Speech and Language Pathologist

Guiding questions to consider to develop healthy eating goals:

Remember each student is unique and the guiding questions will vary.

- Does the student need to eat more fruits and vegetables for their health?
- Does the student have difficulties that prevent them from eating a healthy diet? For example: sensory issues, chewing or swallowing problems?
- Does the student seem to be overly fixated on food?
- Does the student have disruptive behavior at snack and mealtimes that interfere with their own ability to eat or has a negative impact on their peers?
- Is food used in the student's special education or behavior plan? If yes, have preference assessments that do not include food items been conducted?



Healthy Eating Goal Examples

- By (date) *student* will receptively and expressively identify 3-5 healthy food choices from a larger list of healthy and unhealthy foods with 80% accuracy over 3 sessions.
- By (date) *student* will independently make a healthy food choice from 3-5 options during a snack or meal time in 4 out of 5 opportunities.

TIP

Eating problems are complex and generally require professionals and caregivers to work together to support the student in different settings including classrooms, the cafeteria and in the community. Consistent messaging is key to helping students adopt healthy behaviors.

TAKE A TEAM APPROACH

All members of a student's team can help students develop and maintain healthy habits by teaching and reinforcing health related skills and attitudes including self-regulation, self-management, choice making, and problem solving.

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PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Physical education is a required component of special education. A student's IEP team develops goals based on the student's strengths and needs in order to increase fitness, function and independence. The team can recommend adapted physical education services when more specialized support is needed.

When comprehensive physical activity goals and services are included in the IEP, students can access and benefit from all the opportunities to be physically active during and after school. In addition to physical education class, other times to be physically active include recess, movement breaks during class time and after-school activities.

Guiding questions to consider to develop physical activity goals:

Remember each student is unique and the guiding questions will vary.

- How can the physical education lessons be modified to address the student's strengths and needs? Is there enough structure? Is information shared visually as well as verbally? Are sensory needs addressed?
- Does the student have movement breaks during class? Are new or more breaks needed?
- Are there any reasons why a student is not able to participate in movement breaks? (Behavior? Didn't finish work?) If yes, how can these barriers be addressed?

- Does the student have any difficulty with social skills during physical education class or recess? (For example: turn taking, getting along with peers, etc.) If yes, how can the necessary social skills be taught?
- Is the student physically active during recess? If not, is it due to social or motor skill deficits? Are there safety concerns?
- Can the school offer semi-structured recess? This type of recess provides structure and supervision and is a good option for students who have difficulty engaging in free play.
- Which after school activities can the school offer the student? What supports would be provided if the student wished to participate?

Example of a physical activity goal:

By (date) *student* will participate in 3-5 actions or 10 minutes of active movement, during a physical movement activity with peers.

By (date) *student* will demonstrate strong social skills by getting along with peers while participating in designated activity.

TIP

Families and caregivers can ask the child's healthcare provider to recommend goals, services or modifications to improve a child's eating habits and/or level of physical activity.