



*Developed to  
encourage  
and enhance  
a young  
child's healthy  
beginning.*

# **BLEND Beginnings**

**A Nutrition and Physical Activity Program**

Children aged 3–5 years old

BLEND (Better Living: Exercise and Nutrition Daily)  
CentraCare Health Foundation  
[www.BLENDCentralMN.org](http://www.BLENDCentralMN.org)

**2010**



# BLEND Beginnings

*Starting Early, Starting Healthy*

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## WELCOME TO THE BLEND BEGINNINGS PROGRAM

Experts agree that obesity is a public health crisis in the United States. According to a report issued by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), *"If we don't succeed in reversing this epidemic, we are in danger of raising the first generation of American children who will live sicker and die younger than their parents' generation."*

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the incidence of obesity in children has doubled over the last 20 years, while at the same time tripling among adolescents. Overweight or obese children have higher incidence of asthma, sleep apnea, skin infections, and complaints of joint pain. Other, more serious, health threats include: high blood pressure and Type 2 Diabetes. Research also indicates obese children have lower self-esteem and self-confidence than their thinner peers, both of which have been linked to poor academic performance, fewer friends, and depression.

Over the last six years the RWJF has worked with numerous partners to explore not only the myriad and complex issues that cause childhood obesity, but also the approaches that show promise in reversing this wide-spread trend. Research has confirmed that our ultimate goal must be to restore "energy balance" in children's lives. This means children should not take in more calories than they burn through physical activity. Programs which address both sides of the equation – nutrition and physical activity – have the best chance to succeed. Experts agree the learning starts in the early years and caregivers have the perfect opportunity to introduce this foundation for better living.

BLEND (Better Living: Exercise & Nutrition Daily) and the CentraCare Health Foundation are excited to provide a Nutrition and Physical Activity program that was developed through the cooperative efforts of experienced early child care providers, nutritionists, and educators. Designed for ease of incorporation into existing curriculums, the BLEND Beginnings Program is an excellent, age-appropriate resource for improving the health of children ages 3–5. This program builds a foundation for a healthy active lifestyle by teaching children how to make healthy food choices and the importance of physical activity.

BLEND Beginnings offers many ways for children to learn about healthy food choices and an active lifestyle beyond food names and places to play. Concepts that include the body, the five senses, healthy foods, and where food grows are all available in the program and are essential for children to learn. In fact, these concepts are critical to building a solid foundation for healthy development and healthy habits.

Caregivers play a vital role in helping children develop healthy eating and active living habits to last a lifetime and in restoring the "energy balance" that is often times overlooked. Your role is to give children the opportunity to learn about healthy food choices while ensuring the children are physically engaged in activities to motivate their minds and bodies. I am genuinely excited that you and your staff have chosen to incorporate the BLEND Beginnings Program to make a difference in the health of young children.

Sincerely,

Jodi Rohe  
BLEND Project Coordinator



## KEY UNITS AND TIMELINE

BLEND (Better Living: Exercise & Nutrition Daily) designed the BLEND Beginnings Program to expose children repeatedly to positive food messages and to encourage an active lifestyle. This program will actively engage children to play, participate, and interact with age-appropriate nutrition and physical activity games and activities.

**Week 1 – My Healthy Body**

**Week 2 – My Healthy Body**

**Week 3 – My Healthy Body (Heart & Lungs)**

**Week 4 – My Senses (Sight)**

**Week 5 – My Senses (Smell)**

**Week 6 – My Senses (Taste)**

**Week 7 – My Senses (Sound)**

**Week 8 – My Senses (Touch)**

**Week 9 – My Healthy Foods (Milk Group, Grains Group)**

**Week 10 – My Healthy Foods (Meat & Beans Group)**

**Week 11 – My Healthy Foods (Fruit Group, Vegetable Group)**

**Week 12 – My Food Grows Where?**

**Bonus Unit – Color Challenge (6 weeks)**



### BLEND BEGINNINGS PROGRAM LEARNING OBJECTIVES

#### My Healthy Body

- Participate in learning sessions, child's play, games, and activities
- Identify the parts of the body (*e.g., arms, legs, head, heart, and lungs*)
- Locate named parts of the body on themselves and on other children (*e.g., arm, leg, knee, eye, ear, nose, tongue*)
- Explore physical activity through movement, games, skill challenges, and activities

#### My Senses (sight, smell, taste, touch, hearing)

- Experience, explore, and use their five senses through child's play, games, and activities
- Name the five senses and ways they use each sense
- Identify the body part associated with the sense of smell, sense of taste, sense of touch, sense of sound, and sense of sight
- Explore physical activity through movement, games, skill challenges, and activities

#### My Healthy Foods

- Discover healthy foods through child's play, activities, and games
- Explain why Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Carbohydrates, Calcium, and Proteins are important for a healthy body
- Classify food groups from the USDA MyPyramid
- Explore physical activity through movement, games, skill challenges, and activities

#### My Food Grows Where?

- Explore agriculture in fun, age-appropriate lessons and activities
- Classify growing patterns of food: in the ground, above the ground
- Explore physical activity through movement, games, skill challenges, and activities

#### Color Challenge (Bonus Unit)

- Identify fruits and vegetables by colors: blue, green, orange, purple, red, and yellow
- Participate in 6 healthy tasting opportunities
- Explore physical activity through movement, games, skill challenges, and activities



### OVERVIEW OF BLEND BEGINNINGS

As a child care provider, you will offer many children in your care experiences that can influence the rest of their lives. Attitudes and habits formed during the early years are likely to be carried into adulthood. BLEND (Better Living: Exercise & Nutrition Daily) wants to enhance their experiences even more by giving you, the provider and educator, the tools to help children develop positive nutrition attitudes and physical activity behaviors.

To encourage these positive and healthy behaviors, BLEND staffs – along with child care providers, early childhood educators, and Extension educators – have developed the BLEND Beginnings Program as a tool to help educators provide opportunities to increase children’s physical activity level and their knowledge of healthy eating, including the promotion of increased fruit and vegetable consumption. The BLEND Beginnings Program promises to teach children (ages 3–5) about nutrition and active living in ways that are most suitable for this age group. Children learn best through active play – especially using repetition, color recognition, music and songs, and imaginative activities. Children also learn more effectively if lessons and activities are carried out over a period of time and then repeated again at a later time.

Over the course of 12 weeks (2 days a week), the BLEND Beginnings Program will use key units selected specifically for young children and their learning capabilities. Units include: *the body, the senses, healthy foods, and agriculture education*. An additional color unit was added to promote eating a rainbow of colors everyday.

The first two units, “My Healthy Body” and “My Senses,” will focus on body awareness and will emphasize the “physical” nature of the program. Teaching children about their body initially will help them develop a consciousness and connection of the body and how to keep it strong and healthy through physical activity. Though physical activity is a significant part in a child’s healthy start, it’s not the only piece to the puzzle. Healthy foods also play a critical role in the early development of children and in fueling their bodies to be active. During the last units, “My Healthy Foods,” “My Food Grows Where?” and “Color Challenge,” BLEND Beginnings focuses intentionally on nutrition. Research shows that developing healthful eating habits early in life will likely lead to healthy food choices as the child grows up.



## OVERVIEW OF BLEND BEGINNINGS (cont'd)

Each unit provides the educator with all the information needed to effectively teach nutrition and physical activity to young children. Within each unit, you will find the following sections:

- **Educator Key Messages**

*These messages will inform the educator about the importance of the unit; including “tips” for teaching young children. Statistics and/or research information is available in this section, too.*

- **Circle Time Instruction**

*This section offers information about the specific unit – what to talk about, how to prep the environment, and key points of interest. Circle Time is the centerpiece of this program – it is a great opportunity to share short and meaningful learning experiences. Young children have a short attention span and it is important to keep Circle Time to no more than 10 minutes. Children will likely participate more if you follow a standard pattern – no surprises.*

- **Lesson Plans**

*This section breaks down each unit—including activities, games, songs, etc. Incorporated in each day are the following:*

- **Circle Time** – 10 minute conversation about the specific topic. This may include songs, rhythms, and picture cards.
- **Activity Time** – 15 minutes of activities, which can include art projects, group projects, etc.
- **Energy Time** – 30 minutes to promote physical activity through active play, skill-based games, activities, and exercises.

- **Activity Time and Energy Time Instruction**

*Following the Lesson Plans are the instructions for the activities. They are explained in detail – and some will include a “What You Need” list. Many of these activities can be adapted for younger children (2–3 year olds).*



## MAKE BLEND BEGINNINGS A SUCCESS

### Preparing the Environment:

Preparing the environment can be easy and fun for everyone involved. The first step should be to designate an area where the “Circle Time” sessions will take place. This area or space should provide children a place to listen, learn, and recognize as the BLEND Beginnings Circle Time area. When considering a space, think about where you would hang posters, store the “Healthy Foods Sitting Mats,” arrange an assortment of books\* and other tools necessary to teach each unit, and have conversations with the children. Each unit may have specific recommendations to enhance the unit and your conversations with the children. Once you have established your space – feel free to add your special touches to encourage a positive and healthy atmosphere.

### Leading a Session:

The BLEND Beginnings Program consists of 12 weeks of lesson plans (2 sessions per week). The program is designed to be flexible and very adaptable to fit in any schedule. For example, if your schedule only allows for 1 session a week simply extend the program to 24 weeks. Each session will follow the same pattern: **Circle Time (Learn), Activity Time (Play), and Energy Time (Go)**. It is a simple and easy format to use in preparing for a session, the environment, and the activities.

#### Circle Time (10 minutes)

Contained in every unit, a detailed Lesson Plan will provide all the information for you to teach a Circle Time session. Specific topics will be identified and talked about, fun songs and rhythms will be recited, and activities to promote conversation will be included. During these sessions, we recommend the use of the Healthy Food Sitting Mats and the BLEND Beginnings Apron.

- *BLEND Beginnings Apron*

This apron is to be worn by the person teaching the Circle Time session. It has large pockets to hold picture cards and other tools to aid in your teaching experience.

#### Activity Time (15 minutes)

We have provided you with several activity choices to help assist you in this learning process for the children. You may choose to do all of the activities or select only those that are better suited for your age group or time allowance. These activities can be done in the designated Circle Time area in your activity room, or can be done in small groups or in teams.

#### Energy Time (30 minutes)

Again, we have provided you with several activity options. You may choose to include all of them or participate in only one of the activities. Depending on the activity, you may choose to include every child in the whole group or break them up into smaller groups.

\* “Books for Preschoolers” – Nutrition and Physical Activity Booklist for Young Children  
– is available in the BLEND Beginnings Program Binder or online at:  
[www.BLENDCentralMN.org](http://www.BLENDCentralMN.org)



## MAKE BLEND BEGINNINGS A SUCCESS

### Preparing Yourself

The BLEND Beginnings Program Guide is filled with valuable information to help you effectively teach young children about physical activity and nutrition. Starting on pages 139–140, we have provided a list of resources to help you gain more knowledge about the topics in the BLEND Beginnings Program. These credible resources offer research materials, articles, and recommendations that were essential to the creation of this program.

Though this program was designed for ease and flexibility, it will still take you and your staff a little time to prepare for each lesson. Preview each week's lesson plan in advance to help you understand the materials and activities, to gather information and supplies, and to prepare materials for the activities. Determine what activities you will use and which ones need to be adapted.

Preparing yourself and effectively teaching the BLEND Beginnings Program is just as important as the content. It is crucial the educator promotes a playful presence; positively role models a healthy lifestyle, and prepares the lessons in advance. Adapt the program and the activities to suit your child care site and the capabilities of the children involved.



### **Safety**

As child care providers, you are acutely aware and sensitive to the many safety issues concerning the young children in your care. Please use your expertise when encouraging participation with any of the activities in the BLEND Beginnings Program. This program promotes many physical activity opportunities and food activities – please use caution especially when exposing new foods to children because of the potential dangers of food allergies.

***A food allergy is a reaction to a food triggered by the immune system. With the number of children identified with food allergies rising, it's important for child care providers to pay special attention to the needs of the children in their care with identified food allergies. Since an allergic reaction can be life threatening, its essential child care providers follow all the instructions provided by parents and doctors to avoid exposing children to the allergy causing food. The eight foods responsible for 90 percent of all allergic reactions are:***

***Milk, Eggs, Peanuts, Fish, Soy, Wheat, Shellfish,  
Tree nuts (walnuts, pecans, and almonds)***

