Dear Child Care Provider,

Some of the most important elements of foods are the things that have nutritional value when we digest them. Protein, fats, vitamins, and minerals all get absorbed by the body and help it stay healthy. But what about the parts we don’t digest? Strangely enough, fiber is an essential part of a healthy diet, and something the body doesn’t digest at all. Fiber is a type of carbohydrate. Instead of being broken down into sugar molecules, like most carbs, fiber travels through the body without being broken down. In this Tasty Times we’ll explain the different kinds of fiber, foods that have them, and why they’re good for us. Stay Fresh,

—Julia Whiting, Healthy Food Program Intern

Fiber is a crucial element of a child’s healthy digestive system. Not only will it help kids have regular bowel movements—a concern for almost every childcare giver—it will also help set them up for a healthy life later on. Serving an appropriate amount of fiber now will lower children’s chances of developing heart disease, diabetes, and cancer later on.

A Tale of Two Fibers

There are two different types of fiber: soluble and insoluble. What that means is that some fiber dissolves in water (soluble) and some fiber does not dissolve in water (insoluble). Picture how oatmeal gets soft and gel-like if you add water—that is soluble fiber action. Cucumbers, for example, do not get soft in water—insoluble fiber.

Even though soluble fiber dissolves in water, that doesn’t mean it gets broken down in your stomach. That is good news. Soluble fiber is like applying the brakes to your stomach. It slows down the time Continued
it takes for your stomach to empty, which means that you feel full longer. This fiber also regulates your body’s sugar intake, slowing it down. That prevents blood sugar spikes and crashes after meals. This helps protect you from type 2 diabetes, and helps regulate the condition if you have it. Soluble fiber attaches itself to cholesterol and escorts it out of your system, the heart’s own body guard. Removing cholesterol helps lower the risk of heart disease. Insoluble fiber stays the same as it makes its way through your digestive system. Because of this, it pushes food through your system, keeping you regular and preventing constipation. This fiber also keeps the balance in your intestines, which makes sure that your entire system is working properly. Insoluble fiber, like soluble fiber, helps keep your stomach full for longer. This makes sure that you don’t eat more than your body needs. Both types of fiber help prevent high blood pressure and reduce the risk of breast cancer.

How much is enough?
Children and adults both need 20-30 grams of fiber per day. Most Americans only eat about half that, just 15 grams. How can you increase the amount of fiber that you serve? Most foods with high amounts of fiber have both types, so don’t stress about getting them individually! Foods naturally have more of one type that the other though. Soluble fiber is particularly high in oatmeal, kidney beans, pinto beans, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, spinach, zucchini, apples, oranges, grapes, prunes, and whole-wheat bread. Some foods high in insoluble fiber are brown rice, whole-grain bread, carrots, cucumbers, tomatoes, dark leafy greens, and the peels of fruits and vegetables. Leave the peels on apple slices and potatoes as a quick way to boost fiber intake! Other ways to increase fiber include:

- replacing white rice, bread, and pasta with whole grain products and brown rice (this also ensures that you meet the daily requirement of at least one serving of whole grains too!)
- choosing cereals that have a whole grain as the first ingredient
- snacking on raw veggies
- opting for whole fruits instead of fruit juice
- serve oatmeal with berries for breakfast
- add beans to chili and soups

Be careful when you’re increasing the amount of fiber you serve. Like most changes, increasing the amount of fiber you serve is better done gradually, instead of all at once. Increase the amount of water you serve alongside your increase in fiber, because fiber absorbs water.

Attention Providers!
New Rule—1 Serving of Whole Grains Per Day
Effective October 1st, 2017, the new CACFP meal pattern went into effect for the Healthy Food Program. As part of these changes, the USDA has instituted a new rule that child care providers must offer at least 1 serving of whole grains per day.
This requirement can be fulfilled by offering oatmeal at breakfast, using whole grain bread in a sandwich at lunch, or by using brown rice in a dinner. But each day, Healthy Food Program providers must offer 1 meal that contains a whole grain food.
Failure to meet this requirement will result in a deduction of the lowest reimbursing meal or snack offered by the provider that day.
Contact the Healthy Food Program office with any questions you may have.