



Pamela Fergusson, RD, PhD

www.pamelafergusson.com

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Menu review

Discovery Child Care Centre

Overall impressions

I'm impressed with the overall quality and variety offered in this menu. Options like Vanilla Oatmeal and Mixed Berries, Apple, Chocolate Hummus, Whole Wheat Crackers, and Summer Squash Soup with White Beans & Kale offer colourful and fun options that kids will enjoy. This menu is rich in fruit and veggies, but also the plant-based proteins and healthy fats that children need for optimal growth and development.

The menu is diverse and it generally offers a wide variety of foods and meal options. A lot of care has been taken in offering a variety of nutrients, colours, flavours and textures that will help children to thrive and to develop an appreciation for plant-based foods. Plant-based foods are generally high in fibre and rich in antioxidant vitamins which can be helpful in preventing chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes and some cancers. Setting children up with a foundation intake of and appreciation for these foods is a wonderful start to their lives as eaters.

Plant-based diets are also more environmentally friendly. This change in the menu at Discovery Child Care Centre is a great step toward reducing their carbon and water footprint. It is great to see that Discovery is continuing to offer a plant-based menu and that their options are so innovative, environmentally friendly, tasty and healthy.

Key nutrients

Protein

[Protein needs for children ages 1-3 are 5-20% of calories and for children 4-18 are 10-30%.](#)

These needs are relatively modest and easy to meet on a plant-based diet. This roughly translates into 10-13 grams of protein per day for most 1-3 year olds, and 17-20 grams of protein for most 4-8 year olds.

Some good sources of protein on a plant-based diet include:

Chickpeas, ½ cup: 7 grams

Tofu, ¼ block: 13 grams

Soy milk, 1 cup: 7 grams

Oatmeal, 1 cup cooked, 6 grams

Pumpkin seeds ¼ cup, 5 grams

Note: Discovery Child Care Centre's menu is rich in plant-based proteins. Chickpea, Sweet Potato, Green Bean Curry, Quinoa & Brown Rice, Red Lentil & Mushroom Spaghetti Bolognese, White Beans, Carrot, Potato, Mushroom Ragout, Ratatouille Baked Penne with Zucchini, Kidney Beans

Fat (including omega-3s)

Fat is a very important macronutrient in the diet of children. Children ages 1-3 and 4-18 need fat intake of 30-40% and 25-35% of calories, respectively. This should include unsaturated fats (plant fats are naturally rich in unsaturated fats)

Plant-based sources of fat include:

Avocados

Coconut shreds and coconut milk

Nuts and seeds and nut and seed butters

Flax seeds, walnuts and chia seed are particularly good sources of omega-3s.

Oils

Plant-based spread

Note: Discovery Child Care Centre's menu is rich in plant-based proteins. Sweet potato hummus, Mac and Cheese and Bagel with Sunflower Seed butter are a few examples of menu items which are good sources of fat. Adding flax seeds, tahini or hemp hearts to recipes will further increase the healthy fats, including omega-3s.

Calcium

Calcium is important for healthy growth and development. Children ages 1-3 require 700 mg of calcium and ages 4-8 require 1000 mg of calcium. Calcium is well distributed across a plant-based diet, and most foods contain some calcium. The calcium in most plants is very easily absorbed by the body.

Sources of calcium on a plant-based diet include:

Fortified plant-based milk: 300 mg per cup (may vary slightly by manufacturer)

¼ block of tofu: 400 mg

2 tbsp tahini: 120 mg

1 cup of kale: 90 mg

¼ cup sunflower seeds: 25 mg

small box raisins: 20 mg

Note: Calcium is well -distributed across this menu. Fortified plant-based milk beverage, pan-seared tofu and blueberry kale smoothie are good examples of calcium sources.

Iron

Iron is a key nutrient for healthy child development, and it is unfortunately a common nutrient deficiency among all types of eaters; iron deficiency is not more common among vegan or vegetarians. The iron in plants is not as easy to absorb, so it is important that children meet requirements.

Children ages 1-3 require 7 mg of iron per day, while those ages 4-8 require 10 mg.

Good sources of iron on a plant-based diet include:

Fortified cereals (for example Cheerios) 1 cup, 5.5 mg

½ cup lentils 3 mg

½ cup black beans 2 mg

1 cup cooked oatmeal 14 mg

1 large potato with skin 3 mg

Iodine

Iodine is important for health brain function development in infants and healthy thyroid function in children and adults. Although trace amounts of iodine can be found in plant-based foods, especially root vegetables or nori, it is a good idea to use iodized salt in cooking to ensure that iodine needs are met.

B12

B12 is produced by bacteria, and there are no whole food, plant-based sources of B12. Fortified plant-based milks and nutritional yeast are good sources. If some of the children at Discovery Child Care are also eating a plant-based diet at home, their parents may want to consider supplementation for their family with B12. Speak with your doctor or dietitian for further advice.



Recommendations

This is a strong menu with an excellent range of meals appropriate to meet the nutritional needs of toddler and preschool-aged children. Families should bear in mind that these meals are intended to provide a morning snack, lunch and an afternoon snack to children, and that breakfast, supper and any other snacks should be provided at home by parents. These meals are not intended to meet 100% of nutrient requirements, but in combination with nutritious offerings at home, this menu is an excellent offering to children.

Fat and iron are two nutrients of particular importance to this age group. Please ensure that each meal and some snacks contain a source of fat. This can include: vegan spread, coconut milk, seeds or seed butters (sunflower seed butter, tahini etc). The addition of flax and hemp seeds to recipes will further enhance the omega-3 content. Beans, lentils, greens and fortified cereals are good sources of iron. Continue to offer these at meals and snacks. Calcium is another key nutrient for this age group. Including one cup of plant-based milk in the daily menu will provide 30-40% of the children's calcium requirements (depending on age).

Recipes should be reviewed occasionally to determine if they are well-received and any that are not well-liked even after a period of adjustment should be replaced with something that is better received.

Dr Pamela Fergusson PhD, RD |

College of Dietitians of BC #2105 |

College of Dietitians of Ontario #14160

College of Dietitians of Alberta #2777

pfergusson.consultant@gmail.com

2-1004 Eighth St

Nelson, British Columbia V1L 3B3