

## UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA Agriculture and Natural Resources



### Niños Sanos, Familia Sana

## Part One: A Guide for Educators

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### GOAL

***Niños Sanos, Familia Sana* (Healthy Children, Healthy Family) is a nutrition education curriculum, designed for Latino parents with young children. The goal is to improve nutrition and physical activity to prevent childhood obesity and promote health.**

### CHILDHOOD OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY

Obesity is a serious health concern among U.S. children. Compared to other ethnic groups, Latino children are more likely to be overweight or obese. In 2011–2012, 38.9% of Latino, 35.2% of nonLatino black, and 28.5% of nonLatino white children ages 2–19 years old were overweight or obese (body mass index above the 85th percentile for their age and



**Though obesity and diabetes are growing health problems in Mexico, childhood obesity is still more common among Mexican-heritage children in the United States compared with children in rural Mexico (Vera-Becerra and Kaiser 2013).**

gender) (Ogden et al. 1014). Overweight and obese children are at higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease (Messiah et al. 2012; Breslin et al. 2012).

Throughout this introduction and the background sections, the terms overweight (between the 85th and 94th percentile) and obese (at or above the 95th percentile) are used. However, families in the *Niños Sanos, Familia Sana* study preferred the term “overweight” (*sobrepeso*) over obese (*obeso*). Therefore, the specific messages directed to the families in the classes and handouts use “at risk of overweight” instead of overweight and “overweight” instead of obese.

### NEED FOR EDUCATION

To prevent obesity and promote health, community-based educational programs are needed, along with environmental or policy changes in schools, communities, health care settings, and food assistance programs. Family nutrition education that focuses on parenting skills can help slow weight gain and improve health in Latino children (Barkin et al. 2012; Slusser et al. 2012). A particular aim of the *Niños Sanos, Familia Sana* program is enabling families to support their children’s development—not just slowing down weight gain. Families want to help their children do well in school; thrive socially, mentally, emotionally, and physically; and remain close to the family as they grow older.

### NEEDS OF AN IMMIGRANT AUDIENCE

*Niños Sanos, Familia Sana* was primarily developed for Latino families with young children ages 3–8 years old. This age includes the child’s entry into elementary school. Immigrant parents often see this time as frustrating because their children begin to reject healthy cultural foods and ask for American-style fast foods.

Though obesity and diabetes are growing health problems in Mexico, childhood obesity is still more common among Mexican-heritage children in the United States compared with children in rural Mexico (Vera-Becerra and Kaiser 2013). In our discussions with immigrant families, the parents identified possible reasons, including

- less physical activity in the United States
- a need for both parents to work in the United States, making family meals more difficult
- poor quality of U.S. foods (“not fresh, too many chemicals”)
- not enough variety of fruit and vegetables available locally
- too much fast food
- parents give in too easily to children’s demands
- poor quality of school food



**Encouraging parents to be positive role models is important for family unity, as well as for promoting good nutrition and physical activity.**

## ACCULTURATION AND DIETARY CHANGES

Over time, immigrant children consume certain foods and beverages more often, especially pizza, hamburgers, hot dogs, sugary beverages, instant noodles, fried potatoes, and chips (Kaiser et al. 2015). These foods replace traditional foods, like beans, soups, and stews that may be lower in fat, added sugar, and/or sodium. Maintaining a regular routine of meals and snacks, especially family meals, may help retain healthy traditional foods in the diet. Our research shows that children who skip family meals have less healthy diets. In contrast, children who eat meals with an adult consume a variety of vegetables more often. Latino parents who give in too easily to their children's demands for sugary beverages and snack foods are more likely to have overweight and obese children (Tovar et al. 2012).

## BARRIERS TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Concerns about neighborhood safety, lack of transportation, time constraints, and cost of sports programs may be barriers to physical activity in Latino children. However, parental perceptions of neighborhood safety may have a stronger effect on children's physical activity than actual neighborhood crime rates, traffic, and distance to parks (O'Connor et al. 2014). As Latino children grow older, they spend more time in sedentary activities and less time in moderate and vigorous activities (Belcher et al. 2010;

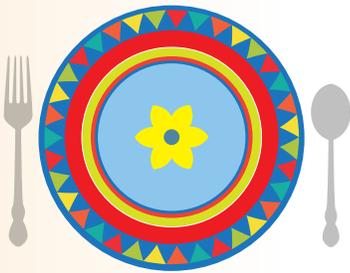
Butte et al. 2014). These trends are stronger in crowded households and those with Spanish-speaking and older parents.

Educational programs that target parents of young children should strengthen parenting skills, enabling families to enjoy healthy meals together and establishing daily routines for meals, snacks, active play, and bedtime. Latino families want to maintain close family ties with their children. Encouraging parents to be positive role models is important for family unity, as well as for promoting nutrition and physical activity.

## HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM

This curriculum includes background information for educators and short lesson guides (in English and Spanish) for 1-hour classes for delivery in a community setting.





**A learner-centered approach focuses on the participant—his or her experiences, perspectives, interests, motivators, talents, and needs (Kaiser et al. 2007).**

Recipe ideas for food demonstrations are also provided. To encourage participation in activities, planning for small classes of 12 or fewer parents is recommended. The curriculum is intended for an interactive program delivery.

## KEY MESSAGES

Based on recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics (Davis et al. 2007), the lessons reinforce nine key messages to prevent obesity and promote overall well-being of children:

- Enjoy family meals together.
- Provide more vegetables and fruits.
- Allow the child to select kid-sized portions of food.
- Increase outdoor family playtime.
- Reduce time spent watching television and using other screen devices.
- Reduce sugary beverages.
- Establish a healthy routine to get enough sleep.
- Eat a healthy breakfast.
- Cook at home more often and make healthy choices when eating out.



## A LEARNER-CENTERED APPROACH TO EDUCATION

A learner-centered approach focuses on the participant—his or her experiences, perspectives, interests, motivators, talents, and needs (Kaiser et al. 2007). Though this curriculum provides lesson guides, educators should adapt the content and activities for their audiences. Adults often learn best when their curiosity and emotions are aroused. The educator also needs to establish a safe and comfortable classroom setting.



**Among peers, children may be more likely to try a new food.**

### **Below are the steps to learner-centered education:**

**Set the stage for learning:** Arrive early to be ready to greet participants as they arrive. Have visual aids, any handouts, and the setting arranged to peak curiosity and help people feel respected and safe.

**Opening (Anchor):** Use a warm-up exercise or question to help people connect to the topic. With immigrant audiences, asking a question that prompts people to reflect on changes before and after immigration can be a good starter.

**Lesson (Add):** Motivate participants by linking the key messages to their hopes for their children and by sharing experiences as immigrant families in their community. Provide a few relevant facts. Use open questions (i.e., questions that do not have a yes/no or right/wrong answer) to help parents share their challenges and find acceptable, workable solutions.

**Activities (Apply):** Include activities and teaching aids so that the learners can see, hear, and do as they learn. Pair up or put people into small groups to help them engage and apply new skills. Provide and taste a new recipe with fruits or vegetables.

**Goal setting (Away):** Provide a take-away message and/or do a goal-setting exercise to reinforce the learning. Keep goals simple, doable, and specific. Encourage small steps over a short time frame (a week or month). The time frame depends on how frequently the classes are offered. Participants may choose among suggested goals or make up their own goals. Encourage participants to write down their goals and seek support from family or friends in making changes.

## **CHOOSING RECIPES FOR FOOD DEMONSTRATION**

A food demonstration and tasting is a key component of every lesson. The classes end with the food demonstration so that parents and children can sample the recipe together. Among peers, children may be more likely to try a new food. Their parents can also learn how to offer small tastes of a new food to their children, without pressure.





**After the Niños Sanos, Familia Sana program, participants reported that their children were consuming fast food and convenience food items less often than children of nonparticipants (Aguilera et al. 2015).**

### **Here are some tips to consider in planning food demonstrations:**

Include seasonally available fruit and/or vegetables. We leave recipe selection open to allow educators to feature seasonally available options, like sweet potatoes in winter or strawberries in spring and summer. In some lessons, certain recipes are suggested to achieve a better fit with specific key messages. For example, the granola recipe goes well with the “Off to a Good Start” breakfast lesson. Ask your families which foods they would like to sample, and then seek recipes to feature that item when it is in season.

Find recipes that pair fruit and vegetables. Many children like fruit more than vegetables. For that reason, several recipes pair a favorite fruit with a vegetable (for example, mango-tomato salsa or strawberry-spinach smoothies).

Introduce culturally familiar ingredients in different ways. Sometimes this involves adding a vegetable to a traditional Latino recipe (for example, chopped, stir-fry broccoli to quesadillas or pumpkin puree in *atole* drinks). Another strategy is to take a familiar food and prepare it in an entirely new recipe. For example, garbanzo beans are traditionally used in soups. Families may enjoy trying garbanzos as hummus, used as a dip with cucumbers, pepper strips, and tomatoes.

Bring the food containers to explain why certain ingredients are healthier choices than others. For example, show that low-fat plain yogurt has fewer calories and less added sugar than flavored, sweetened yogurt.

Choose recipes that are easy to prepare (fewer steps) and with ingredients available locally. This lowers the burden on families when making the recipe at home. Also, feature items that are commonly given free to families on food giveaway days. For example, the apple crisp recipe was selected to use oatmeal from a food giveaway event.

Ask families at enrollment if there are any food allergies that need to be considered. Modify recipes accordingly.

## EVALUATION

The *Niños Sanos, Familia Sana* study evaluated the program with a 26-item child nutrition survey related to consumption in the past month of specific foods or beverages and four items related to child feeding practices. These items were tested in studies in Mexican and Mexican-American households (Vera et al. 2016; Kaiser et al. 2015). In these studies, interviewers asked parents how often their children ages 3 to 8 years old consumed each of the foods or beverages; ate with an adult; had a regular schedule of meals and snacks; and skipped meals. After the *Niños Sanos, Familia Sana* program, participants reported that their children were consuming fast food and convenience food items less often than children of nonparticipants (Aguilera et al. 2015).

## LESSONS BY TOPIC FOR THE NIÑOS SANOS, FAMILIA SANA CURRICULUM

**Level 1 Topics:** Suggested for parents with children ages 3–8 years old.

- Eat more fruits and vegetables.
- Use MyPlate to plan family meals.
- Shop with a list.
- Read nutrition labels.
- Enjoy family meals at home.
- Serve kid-sized portions.
- Offer healthy snacks.

**Level 2 Topics:** Suggested for parents with children ages 3–8 years old.

- Grow healthy children (understanding childhood obesity).
- Get ready to play (motor development).
- Play together (ideas for indoor play—Part 1).
- Play together (ideas for indoor play—Part 2).
- Set healthy routines.
- Turn off the TV.
- Go for a walk.

**Level 3 Topics:** Suggested for parents with children ages 3–8 years old, especially kindergarden and older.

- Refresh with water (reduce sugary beverages).
- Get off to a good start (breakfast).
- Sleep: dreaming is free.
- Make better choices when eating out.
- Be aware of food advertising.
- School's out: Stock the pantry with healthy foods.



Figure 1. Fruit island.



Figure 2. Fun with fruit.



Figure 3. Fruit and vegetable face.

All lessons are designed for parents with children ages 3–8 years old, though topics presented at level 3 probably are most relevant to families with children in kindergarten or elementary school. “Growing healthy children” should be offered as early as possible or as soon as educators feel they have developed sufficient rapport and trust to discuss a sensitive topic.

## CHILDREN’S ACTIVITIES

These activities are suggested in situations where parents prefer or need to bring children to the classes. Having an adult assistant or volunteer to supervise children is highly recommended, especially when more than one child needs attention. In some lessons, parents may need to discuss sensitive issues related to parenting, and thus separating children and parents might be desirable. In all cases, children and parents can be reunited and participate together in the food demonstration and tasting activities. The other activities below are mainly intended for preschoolers and older children. For toddlers, educators can provide a play space with soft (and quiet) age-appropriate toys in a corner of the room.

### Rainbow of Fruit and Vegetables

Bring a package of crayons and download fruit and vegetable coloring pages from the DLTK-kids website for the children. Tape different colors of construction papers (yellow, red, blue, orange, purple, green, white) on the walls around the room. Invite the children to tape their pictures to the appropriate colors on the wall. Ask them to talk about their favorite fruits and vegetables. Another variation is to hide plastic fruits and vegetables around the room and ask the children to find them. Each child who finds an item names the color and places the food near or on the matching colored paper.

### Make a Salad

Wash hands with soap and water. Place a clean plastic table cloth on a table. Wash fruit or vegetable with water. As needed, assist children in peeling, separating, or slicing fruit or vegetables on cutting boards. Give the children a paper plate each and let them make a fun salad picture or face. Figures 1, 2, and 3 provide some ideas.

### Get Active

SNAP-Ed Connection Physical Activity at [USDA’s SNAP-Ed Connection website](https://www.usda.gov/programs/snap-ed) has great tip sheets, games, and indoor physical activities for children and families to stay physically active. Yoga activities for children are a great way to be active and help both parents and children relax.



Figure 4. Simple ring toss game.



Figure 5. Colorful plate.



Figure 6. Craft activity fun.

### Homemade Toys

Children enjoy playing with toys made from recycled materials like milk cartons, large plastic bottles, and old sheets. “Play Together, Parts 1 and 2” have several examples of fun active games using toys from recycled materials.

#### Ring toss

Cut out an inner circle in a paper plate. Using markers, children can decorate their own rings from paper plates to throw in the ring toss game (fig. 4).

#### Paddle ball

Before class, use hot glue and strong tape to attach a large stick to a paper plate, making enough for each child to have a paddle. During class, children can decorate their paddles with markers. Practice tossing small yarn or foam balls with the paddles (fig. 5).

#### Butterfly craft idea

Make a butterfly snack bag with a clothespin and snack-size bag. Decorate the clothespin with markers. Glue two small googly eyes near the gripping end and let glue dry. Put grapes, popcorn, or cereal snack in the bag, filling it loosely. Seal the bag and clip it with the clothespin. Fold or curl down ends of a pipe cleaner and bend the entire piece in half to make antennae. Clip the pipe cleaner in the clothespin (fig.6)

### Sugar Search

While their parents learn to read labels, children 8 years or older can do a “Sugar Search” activity with Nutrition Facts labels from empty

boxes of single portion, ready-to-eat cereals to find cereals with the least amount of sugar. You might also use Nutrition Facts labels from whole, reduced fat, low-fat, or nonfat milk and yogurt containers to do a “Fat Search.”

### Story Books

Coloring story books about nutrition and physical activity can be downloaded for free from Público Press at the [Arte Público Press website](#). Other popular story books available in bilingual editions that work well with this age group include the following:

- *A sembrar sopa de verduras* (Growing Vegetable Soup) by Lois Ehlert
- *La tortillería* (The Tortilla Factory) by Ruth Wright Paulsen
- *D.W. la quisquillosa* (D.W. the Picky Eater) by Marc Brown
- *Alphabet Fiesta* by Anne Miranda

### Take a Walk

Attach jingle bells to a long rope and take a short walk with the parents and children (fig. 7). Along the way, play a game. For example, give each child a different colored crayon. Ask children to look for things that match the color of their crayon. Can they name it in both English and Spanish?



Figure 7. Walking to school.

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