

## Color Me Healthy, Preschoolers Moving and Eating Healthfully

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### INTRODUCTION

Childhood overweight continues to increase at alarming rates.<sup>1</sup> Lack of adequate physical activity and poor eating patterns are 2 widely recognized contributors to the problem.<sup>2</sup> However, a very small proportion of children and youth have adopted healthful eating and physical activity patterns that would be appropriate for decreasing their risk of overweight.<sup>3</sup> Addressing the issue of healthful eating and physical activity needs to begin early to help children develop healthful habits for a lifetime of good health. Color Me Healthy was developed to help young children develop healthful eating and physical activity behaviors at a young age.

### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Color Me Healthy is a program designed to reach children ages 4 and 5 years. It provides fun, interactive learning opportunities on physical activity and healthful eating. It uses color, music, and exploration of the senses to teach children that healthful food and physical activity are fun. The Color Me Healthy kit includes a teacher's guide, 4 sets of picture cards, 3 classroom posters, 2 parent posters, a compact disc (CD) and cassette tape with 7 original songs, a hand stamp, and 14 reproducible parent newsletters (Figure 1.).



Figure 1.

The classroom posters, parent posters, picture cards, and parent newsletters are also available in Spanish.

The Color Me Healthy teacher's guide contains 12 lessons designed to be used during "circle time," the time during the day when children are gathered for group activities and learning. The lessons provide caregivers with quick, easy ideas that can be taught in a variety of ways. Lesson duration is between 15 and 30 minutes, and the lessons can be taught daily or weekly. Also included in the teacher's guide are 6 imaginary trips that allow children to use their imagination to travel to different places and events. The Color Your Classroom section of the guide provides teachers with suggestions for bulletin boards and classroom enhancements. Because teachers are role models for children, the teacher's guide includes a section on how the teacher can eat healthfully and stay active. Resources for the child care provider are also included in the teacher's guide.

Four sets of picture cards are included in the Color Me Healthy kit. They are used in many of the circle time activities. The sets include dairy foods, colors of foods, where foods grow, and places to be active. Classroom posters bring color to the classroom and are used as educational tools in many of the circle time activities.

The CD and cassette tape enhance the lessons in Color Me Healthy. Children and teachers enjoy the upbeat tunes and lyrics as they sing and dance along. The songs' messages include the colors of foods, trying new foods, playing outside, and how your heart beats faster when you move. A hand stamp is included with the program and can be used as a fun way to reward participation in Color Me Healthy.

The program reaches out to families with a series of 14 reproducible newsletters that reinforce the messages that children are learning in the classroom. Color Me Healthy NEWS is designed to provide families with information on healthful eating and physical activity, such as how their family can be active together or how to encourage more fruit and vegetable consumption, and is written at a fifth-grade reading level. The newsletters are duplicated by the child care center and given to parents. Parent posters convey a basic message about healthful eating and physical activity. They can be used in the child care facility where parents gather.

## DISSEMINATION

Color Me Healthy is designed to be used in family daycare homes, Head Start classrooms, and child care centers. Color Me Healthy uses the Train the Trainer model.<sup>4</sup> Agents with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service and their county partners (eg, health department personnel, Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants and Children [WIC] personnel, 4-H agents) are trained annually (beginning in 2002) on how to disseminate Color Me Healthy to child care providers in their county. This training includes background information on nutrition and physical activity for preschool children, training strategies to use with child care providers, and information on marketing the program at the local level. Agents and their county partners provide comprehensive training for child care providers that teaches creative and effective ways to use the program. Training sessions are held at night or on weekends to accommodate child care providers. After attending training, child care providers receive the Color Me Healthy curriculum at no cost.

## EVALUATION

Experts in the areas of nutrition, physical activity, and education developed Color Me Healthy. All materials were reviewed by a Color Me Healthy Advisory Committee made up of child care providers, subject matter experts, child development experts, and parents. Suggestions from the Advisory Committee were incorporated into the final version of the materials.

The response to Color Me Healthy has been overwhelmingly positive. To date, over 4000 child care providers have attended Color Me Healthy training in North Carolina. Ten other states are currently using the curriculum. Preliminary evaluation indicates that child care providers are using Color Me Healthy and that it is having a positive impact on healthful eating and physical activity in the preschool classroom (Dunn C, Thomas C, Ward D, Pegram L, unpublished data). The success of Color Me Healthy has prompted state WIC staff to request Color Me Healthy training for county staff. Color Me Healthy will then be used by county WIC staff to address childhood overweight prevention.

## NOTES

Color Me Healthy offers annual national training for states interested in implementing Color Me Healthy in their setting. This training provides participants with training materials, evaluation instruments, and all of the information needed to implement the program in their state. To order a preview kit or to learn more, go to [www.colormehealthy.net](http://www.colormehealthy.net).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## FOOTNOTES

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Color Me Healthy was supported by North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Department of Family and Consumer Sciences; the North Carolina Division of Public Health, Physical Activity and Nutrition Branch, Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Branch, and Nutrition Services Branch (WIC); and the Dannon Institute.

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