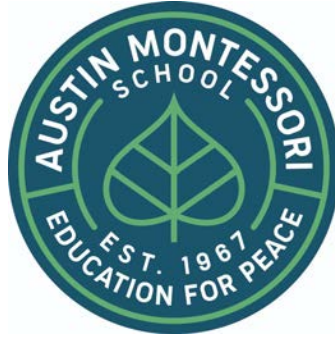




Austin Montessori School Food and Nutrition Guidelines

Introduction

Austin Montessori School recognizes the importance of healthy nutrition for children. Our policy is intended to clarify which foods can be included in school lunch, and those that are best kept for home and other settings. Children often do not require large amounts of food, so we want to ensure that what they do eat is wholesome, organic (if possible), and as “close to the vine” as possible. We also want to encourage children to eat food at school that is reflective of their cultural and ethnic norms. This not only serves to provide a bridge between school and home but exposes fellow students to different types of cuisine. Children, as they are growing in all areas of their development, are growing in their acceptance of new foods as they cultivate a palate that allows a wide range of foods, tastes, and textures, and our school’s guidelines aim to support this. Essentially, our aim is to help children develop a healthy relationship with food and to instill a food culture at school that empowers students to make [“Every Bite Count.”](#)

As recommended by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Austin Montessori School supports the following framework in our approach to food and nutrition:

1. Follow a healthy dietary pattern at every stage of life. As such, our staff also follow the same guidelines in what they bring to lunch so they can model their food choices.
2. Customize and enjoy nutrient-dense foods and beverages to reflect personal preferences, cultural traditions, and budgetary considerations.
3. Focus on meeting food group needs with nutrient-dense foods and beverages.
4. Limit foods and beverages high in added sugar, saturated fats, and sodium.

Additionally, we encourage parents to follow recommendations for helping children develop a positive relationship with food from the Center for Discovery:

1. **Avoid using food as a reward or a punishment.** The problem with using food in this way is that certain foods are elevated, while other foods become a chore. Children see the reward foods as more desirable and the chore foods as something to be avoided. Non-food rewards like special activities or a day out with a parent can be just as effective. This also avoids putting foods into “good” and “bad” categories, a moralizing that often carries over into a child’s relationship with food and can have a huge influence on the foods they feel safe eating.

2. **Let go of “finishing the plate.”** It can be scary to let go of how much children eat. Children are inherent intuitive eaters, though. They know when they are hungry and when they are full. They might gravitate toward some foods more than others, and in that case you can explore more foods together.
3. **Prioritize family meals.** Family meals are essential for several reasons: it normalizes eating and eating together, it's an opportunity to model intuitive eating, and it builds family relationships. Even ordering food to enjoy together can be a positive family experience.
4. **Be weight neutral with children.** Rather than focusing on a child's size, which can (and will) change over time, try to be neutral. Note the diversity of bodies and how they naturally come in different shapes and sizes. Encourage children to eat a variety of foods, and encourage them to do physical activities that bring them joy.

Breakfast

The children's work at school is directly affected by the nutritional quality of their meals. We expect children to arrive at school having had a nutritious breakfast.

A breakfast that includes a balance of protein, carbohydrates, and healthy fats such as whole grain bread, oatmeal, eggs, nuts, beans, fruits, or vegetables is essential to the child's development, learning, and enjoyment at school. We encourage parents to review the labels of the foods you buy, and avoid sugar, corn syrup, artificial sweeteners or coloring, artificial flavoring, and other additives. Good nutrition directly affects a child's health, concentration, and behavior.

Snacks

In the Youngest Children's Community, the children enjoy a meal together each day. Also, there are opportunities for a child to prepare their own small snack. Parents sign up to provide food for the community for the week based on the guide's shopping list.

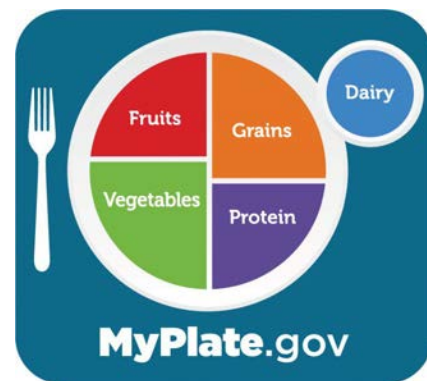
In the Children's House, the children are offered a healthy morning snack each day. Parents sign up to provide food for the community for the week based on the guide's shopping list. Children who stay in the Children's House until 3:00 p.m. bring their lunches from home.

All Elementary and Adolescent Community students bring their lunches from home. Snack procedures vary from class to class and year to year. You will hear the specifics from your child's guide at the first Community Back-to-School Night in August.

Box Lunch at School

We ask that all box lunches at school include a nutrient-dense balance of fruits, vegetables, protein, and grain. For information on how much of each food group is recommended daily by age and gender, please visit www.myplate.gov.

Children, guides, and assistants all bring their lunches from home, and the adults and children have lunch together as a community. Lunch is a social experience and an opportunity to refine manners. Each classroom reflects a particular guide's approach to lunch procedures. However, as a school, we share common attitudes and expectations about lunches.



We help the children become consciously aware of the flavors and textures of their food. This expands their vocabulary as well as their eating pleasure. We may discuss the sources of the foods we eat. If it comes from a plant, we discuss the part of the plant we are eating: stem, leaf, fruit, or root. Other discussions may cover how the food product is made, where or how it grows, its nutritional value or group, etc. Home Cooked ethnic foods are often the source of enlightening conversation that can spark interest in other cultures.

Although we bring our lunches, we do not eat out of our lunch bags. Lunch is set up pleasantly with placemats, plates, and cloth napkins. The children enjoy learning to prepare, serve, and clear away after a meal. They learn to wait for everyone to be ready before beginning to eat. The children are helped to peel and pour for themselves. They also learn to offer help to one another and to request, accept, and decline help as needed.

Each child is encouraged to eat only as much as their hunger requires, although ample time is provided. When a child is through eating, they wrap uneaten food and return it to their bag or box. Cores, pits, and peelings are put in the compost bucket. We send home all leftover food so that you and your child can determine from it the amount appropriate for the following day. Continue decreasing portions of any food left over each day. When no food comes home, you will know for the present time that you have determined the proper amount. Of course, there will always be fluctuations. If your child continues to bring home an empty lunchbox for days, ask if they would be

hungry for a slightly larger lunch or try sending a little something extra. Continue to increase the lunch size until something leftover comes home; then cut back just a bit.

We hope these suggestions will help us to be sure each child has enough, but not too much, for their own individual needs. The more we do, taking the lead from the needs shown to us by the child, and the less we say about the size of their appetite, the better we will help them eat what is really needed.

In a nutshell, we ask that you are helping your child always to pack protein, grains, fruit, and vegetables while refraining from sending the following foods to school:

- Flavored yogurt. Instead, pack plain yogurt naturally sweetened with fresh fruit.
- Candy, cupcakes, cookies, fruit rolls ("fruit leather"), pudding, Jell-O, snack packs, or gum. These will be returned home unopened.
- Chips
- Carbonated drinks, fruit juice, flavored milk.
- Frozen foods or other uncooked or highly processed "convenience" foods.

Elementary children who forget their lunches may call home to have their parents bring lunch if they wish. Another option available is to have the other children in the community offer them small portions of what they got, and the cumulative effect of this generosity is a balanced lunch.

If something in your child's lunchbox does not meet our school's nutritional aspirations, the guide will send the item home with a friendly reminder that it is not appropriate for school lunch.

Ideas for Lunches

As mentioned previously, the best lunches are those reflective of your family's cultural and ethnic cuisine. The easiest lunches to pack are right after dinner with leftovers. However, for those families wanting new ideas for inspiration, please refer to [this list](#).

Developing Skills and Responsibility in Lunch Preparation

This is a sample pattern of involving children in responsibility for their own lives. Children develop into responsible adults through gradually increasing responsibilities over their toddler, childhood, and adolescent years. Cheerful, firm, and consistent examples and experiences are children's teachers.

AGES	STAGES
2 years old	The parent talks about preparing the child's lunch. The parent prepares lunch while the child watches. The parent prepares lunch slowly and methodically so that it makes sense to the child.
2.5 years old	The child hands things to the parent or gets things out for the parent; cutting board, dish towel, lunch box, apple from the refrigerator, etc. The child stays with the parent until the task is complete.
3 years old	The child is shown slowly and carefully how to prepare a part of the lunch; how to peel and slice the banana and mix it into a container with 1/2 cup of plain yogurt, how to rinse off the cutting board and knife and place them in the drainer basket; how to place the banana peel in the compost bucket.
4 years old	The child prepares that part of the lunch shown, as described above, while the parent prepares the rest of the lunch. This continues for three weeks or so.
4.5 years old	The child is shown how to prepare another part of the lunch very slowly and carefully, how to make a yogurt dip for raw vegetables, how to peel and slice a cucumber, or how to prepare carrot sticks.
5 years old	For a period of time, the child prepares some part of the lunch which has been demonstrated while the parent prepares the rest.
5.5 years old	The child prepares two parts of the lunch, the fruit, and the vegetable, while the parent prepares the sandwich. The child watches the parent prepare the sandwich slowly and methodically. The child sees how to

	assemble ingredients, how to make the sandwich and store it, and how to clean up afterward. Emphasis is upon preparing food TOGETHER FOR THE CHILD. The parent doesn't leave the child to do it. The child doesn't leave the parent to do it.
7 years old	The child prepares the entire box lunch while the parent is close by for supervision.
8 years old	The child prepares the entire box lunch while the parent is doing another task in close proximity for company and acknowledgment.
9 years old	The child prepares the entire box lunch while the parent is in and out of the room. The parent gives advice, acknowledgment, and reminders.

Guidelines for selecting lunch bags/containers

We request the lunch be sent in lunch bags that have short straps and are free of distracting characters or logos. Food should be packed in containers that can be opened independently and should fit comfortably in the lunch bag. All containers must be reusable (please do not pack food in plastic wrap or foil). Small insulated containers allow portions of food to be kept cold or hot, as needed. Examples of appropriate containers include:



References

U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025*. 9th Edition. December 2020.

Melinda Sineriz, Center for Discovery. [*How Parents Can Help Kids Develop a Positive Relationship With Food*](#).