

# Eating Healthy While Keeping Up With an Active Family

Finely cutting or chopping vegetables and using them in sauces, pastas, soups, or casseroles is a great way to introduce kids to new vegetables, or incorporate those that they haven't yet developed a taste for.

Reward kids for trying new foods and vegetables even if they do not like them after they have tried. It can take many exposures to new foods before a child will decide to try it on their own, so be persistent, but do not force them.

Set a good example! Kids will decide they do not like foods that parents do not like even before they have tasted them. Don't use terms like "gross" or "bad" when talking about foods that you do not like, so that you don't influence kids who haven't had a chance to decide if they enjoy those foods.

When younger children are learning colors and numbers, use different colored fruits and vegetables (or pictures) as fun visual props. Children are more likely to try foods that they have been exposed to in these types of settings.

Have children help with meal planning and preparation. Ask them to think of ways to prepare the foods that they would like to eat in the healthiest ways, like baking whole, lightly breaded cubed chicken instead of chicken nuggets.

Here are some great summer treats that kids will love!

- Freeze fresh fruits such as grapes, small melon cubes, or peaches and serve as a snack.
- Frozen fruit chunks or berries serve as a fun replacement for ice cubes in a glass of water for a refreshing, fruity flavor.
- Cut up fresh fruits in bulk and store them ready-to-eat in the fridge or freezer so that kids have a quick, nutritious snack on hand when they need to cool off.
- Add grapes, pineapple, or mixed fruit to sugar-free Jell-O and pour into individual serving cups before chilling and serving.
- Make your own popsicles by freezing 100% fruit juice in an ice cube tray with a toothpick or popsicle stick handle. Kids will enjoy mixing different juices to see what flavor popsicles they can make!
- Smoothies made with non-fat Greek yogurt and fresh fruit topped with granola make a delicious, protein packed cold treat.
- Blend up yogurt smoothies and portion into an ice cube tray, freeze with a toothpick handle, and enjoy a delicious frozen yogurt bar! Thaw for 10 min before serving for easy removal.
- Grilled fruit such as pineapple or peaches go great with barbeque foods on the grill.
- Visit the MyPlate link at [www.ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://www.ChooseMyPlate.gov) for more great recipes and nutrition information.

## Make Breakfast Count

Children who eat breakfast perform better in the classroom and on the playground, with better concentration, problem-solving skills and eye-hand coordination. Start them off on a breakfast full of foods high in the important nutrients they need. Add prunes to a bowl of yogurt for a breakfast high in antioxidants, potassium and fiber. Try whole grain cereals, hot or cold, with low-fat milk or yogurt with 1-2 tablespoons of slivered nuts on top. Walnuts, almonds, and flaxseed are great sources of Omega-3 fatty acids. If the cereal box label says there are 3 grams of fiber or more per serving that means there is significant fiber. Serve 1-2 pieces of whole-grain toast or whole-wheat English muffins or

toasted whole-grain waffles topped with peanut butter and a glass of low-fat milk. Oatmeal or granola topped with fruit and low-fat milk makes a tasty start to the day. Children who eat oatmeal versus cold cereal or no breakfast at all perform better on tasks of memory and spatial memory, which is important for math and geography skills. Eggs are rich in choline, which help with memory retention. Eggs are a good source of Omega-3 fatty acids, too. Omega-3 fatty acids play a crucial role in brain function as well as normal growth and development. The body does not produce these acids; we can only get them through the foods we eat.

### **Plan Nutritious Snacks for Between Meals**

Occasionally children need a little something to tide them over between lunch and dinner. Having healthy snacks on hand will help to prevent you and your child from visiting the vending machine for some midday fuel. Stock up their backpacks with nutritious snacks that are packaged to stay fresh and hold up en route to any destination. Try mixing dried fruit with almonds for a snack high in iron, which improves mental alertness and energy levels. Pack some trail mix containing raisins and dried cherries. Fruits and vegetables are packaged in single serving sizes that can be easily transported. These fruits and vegetables are high in antioxidants, which have been linked to improved memory and brain function. Try dried strawberries and blueberries that enable improved coordination, concentration and short-term memory.

### **Stash Healthy Foods in Your Car or Purse**

After school you and your child(ren) are on the go attending extracurricular activities. It is important to keep them fueled when transporting them to their destinations and level of activity. Instead of handing them a sugar-filled candy bar, keep healthy snacks in the car for those days you find yourself moving from one activity to another. Keep bottled water in the trunk to avoid reaching for a soda.

### **End the Day on a Healthy Note**

After a busy day, replenish your family in both body and mind with a healthful dinner. Experiment with new recipes and put new spins on old favorites. Dinner is a great time to squeeze in extra vitamins and minerals to your family's diet. Incorporate dried fruit, such as cherries, blueberries, or cranberries into salads. Shred carrots or zucchini and add to your spaghetti sauce. Serve whole wheat pasta in your pasta dishes. Add oatmeal to your meatloaf recipe instead of breadcrumbs. Add bulgur to your chili recipe. It is nutritious, whole grain that adds texture. Top pizza with spinach and a variety of peppers for color and taste. Try chunks of grilled chicken instead fat loaded pepperoni or sausage.

### **Healthy Alternatives for Your Child's Birthday Treat at School!**

There are many alternatives to the cookies, cupcakes, or candies brought to school that are served as a birthday treat.

Healthy snack items include:

**Pretzels or popcorn** bagged into individual baggies with a ribbon tied around them.

**Baked tortilla chips with salsa**, especially if it can be served on individual "Happy Birthday" plates.

**Teddy Grahams, Graham Crackers, Animal Crackers or Vanilla Wafers**, are alternatives to cookies or cupcakes. Serve a combination of all in individualized bags tied with a ribbon.

**Lowfat string cheese** served with **lowfat crackers**

**Small bottles of water or 100% juice boxes** are a healthy drink offering.

**Frozen Fruit Bars.** These healthy snacks provide a cool treat for the kids with a nice serving of Vitamin C in each serving. Frozen Fruit Bars are an excellent choice for your child to bring in to school on their birthday if the special day occurs at the beginning or end of the school year when the weather is typically warm. You may need to send a note to the child's teacher beforehand to make sure that your child will be able to store the frozen fruit bars in the cafeteria freezer before they are handed out.

**Veggie Platter.** A large tray of cut up celery, carrots and cherry tomatoes is a very healthy snack for children to enjoy during the course of the school day. Cover the tray or platter with pretty colored plastic wrap and send in Happy Birthday plates and napkins for the children to use. A carton of ranch dressing for dipping will surely be appreciated by the children.

**Fun Fruit Tray.** A tray of strawberries, grapes, apple slices and orange wedges arranged in a smiley face is a cute and healthy treat for your child's class to enjoy on the special occasion.

**Granola Bars.** A single granola bar with a ribbon wrapped around each one can be brought in and distributed to the class to add to their lunches or enjoyed at snack time. Not all granola bars are created equal, though, so be sure to choose a variety with a low sugar content and that does not contain nuts to accommodate the children in the class who have allergies.

**Here is a recipe for Trail Mix chock full of vitamins and nutrients!**

#### Trail Mix

- 3 Cups Cheerios
- 1 Box any flavor Teddy Grahams
- 2 Cups Pretzels
- 1 Cup of Raisins
- 1 Cup Dried Cranberries
- 1 Cup Dried Banana Chips
- 1 Cup Chocolate Chips

1. Mix all ingredients together.
2. Serve in large bowl or in individual baggies.

#### **Other Non-Edible Birthday Treats Include:**

- Small Play-Dough Containers
- Pencils with fun erasers
- Yo-Yo's
- Bouncy Balls
- Bubbles
- Crayons
- Stickers
- Rulers
- Erasers
- Folders
- Bookmarks
- Decks of Cards
- Mini Puzzle Books