

Nutrition Nuggets

Food and Fitness for a Healthy Child

April 2008

Richardson Independent School District
Child Nutrition Department

BEST BITES



Role models

When your youngsters have playdates, notice who eats well (likes fruits and vegetables, doesn't eat a lot of junk food). Then, try to have those kids over for meals or take them along when you eat out.

Your children may pick up habits from friends who are good role models.



Exercise for all

If your child has disabilities, talk to his doctor or physical therapist about safe ways to exercise. He might be able to swim, play wheelchair basketball in a community league, or participate in Special Olympics programs. You can also adapt backyard games by using larger balls or lowering nets.



DID YOU KNOW?

Zinc and iron are the two nutrients most linked to brain development. Encourage your youngster to eat iron-fortified products, such as cereal, and foods high in zinc like meat, poultry, seafood, soy, nuts, beans, whole grains, and milk. A good goal is 8–10 mg of iron and 9–11 mg of zinc a day.

Just for fun

Dad: What did you think of your first soccer game?

Annie: It was okay, but those girls never learned how to share.

Dad: Why do you say that?

Annie: They kept fighting over who gets the ball!



Supermarket learning

The grocery store is the perfect place to teach your child about healthy foods and good nutrition. Try these ideas to turn your next trip to the supermarket into a fun learning adventure.

Food label hunt

Your youngster can help you find the healthiest choices for her favorite foods. Start by looking at a food label together. Point out the different kinds of information (calories, fat, fiber, and so on). Then, guide her with questions. *Examples:* Which apple juice has the least sugar? Which yogurt has the most calcium?

Around the world

Have your child search for nutritious foods from various countries. In the bread aisle, for example, she can look for words like “whole grain,” “high fiber,” and “reduced fat.” She might find healthier versions of pita (Egypt), naan (India), baguettes (France), or ciabatta (Italy).

Rainbow of health

The produce aisle is the most colorful in the store. And for good reason—each color represents an important nutrient. Ask your youngster to pick fruits or vegetables of several different colors each week (red cherries, yellow apples, white cauliflower, green broccoli, purple plums).

Tip: Try to plan your shopping trips for after meals or



snacks. Children are less likely to beg for candy and soda if they're not hungry. ♥

TV alternatives

Is there too much TV time in your house? Here are 10 active things your family can do during TV Turnoff Week April 21–27 (or any week!):

1. Play hide-and-seek or follow the leader.
2. Try a karate class.
3. Roller-skate at an indoor rink.
4. Organize a neighborhood baseball game.
5. Visit a museum you've never been to before.
6. Have a marching band with household “instruments” (pots and pans, wooden spoons).
7. Take your dog to a dog park.
8. Go fishing at a nearby pond.
9. Draw a hopscotch game with sidewalk chalk, and have a tournament.
10. Take a nighttime walk, and look for constellations. ♥

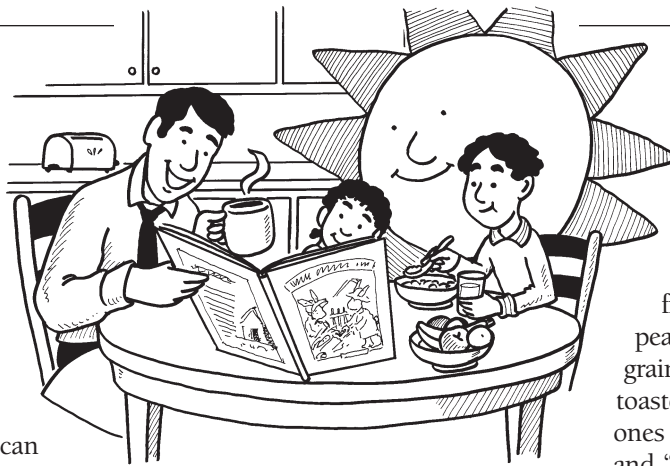


Breakfast time

“Wait! You didn’t eat breakfast!”
 “I know, Mom. I don’t have time!”

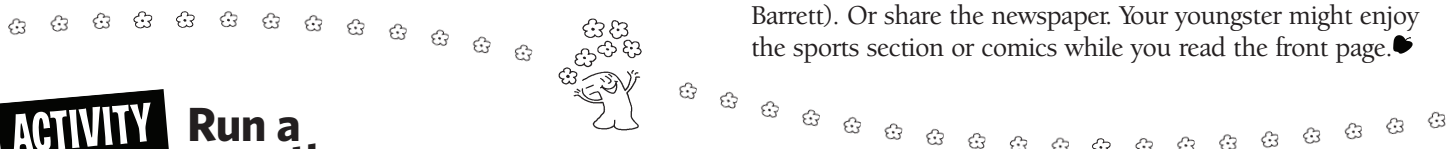
If your child skips breakfast, he misses out on a meal that would give him energy for the day. Plus, eating breakfast helps youngsters do better in school. Encourage your child to eat a healthy breakfast every day with these strategies:

☀ Show your child that even busy people can make time to eat in the morning. Take five minutes to have breakfast together. He’ll like being with you—and learn from your example that breakfast is important.



☀ Provide easy choices. For example, slice a banana into a bowl of instant oatmeal. Put out low-fat granola bars along with a tall glass of fat-free milk. Top fat-free fruit yogurt (blueberry, peach) with crumbled whole-grain cereal. Or offer frozen toaster sandwiches (choose ones that say “whole-grain” and “reduced-fat”).

☀ Make the time special by reading a favorite story while your child eats. Try food-related books like *Bread and Jam for Frances* (Russell Hoban) or *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (Judi Barrett). Or share the newspaper. Your youngster might enjoy the sports section or comics while you read the front page.♥



ACTIVITY CORNER Run a marathon

Imagine how great your child would feel if he ran a marathon! While he’s probably too young to run 26.2 miles all at once, he can do a marathon that’s spread over time.



Try this plan to get your youngster more active—and maybe help him develop a lifelong running habit.

Start with a history lesson by explaining that the marathon began in ancient Greece. Together, learn the story by reading *The First Marathon: The Legend of Pheidippides* by Susan Reynolds.

Then, map out quarter-mile, half-mile, and mile routes in your neighborhood, or find a high school track to use (four laps usually equal a mile). Each time your child runs, have him enter his distance in a logbook. Whether it takes a month or six months, he will be proud to know he has completed a marathon!♥

IN THE KITCHEN

Whole-grain magic

Serving whole grains is a great way to make your youngster’s diet healthier. Here are ways to put “whole-some” goodness into everyday foods.

Fruity rice: Combine cooked brown rice, dried cherries, chopped pecans, and mandarin oranges (canned in light syrup or pear juice). Toss with fat-free French or Thousand Island dressing.

Cornmeal pancakes: Mix 1½ cups cornmeal, ½ cup flour, 1 egg, 1 tsp. baking soda, 1 tsp. sugar, 2 cups fat-free milk, and 2 tbsp. vegetable oil. Drop spoonfuls onto a hot skillet (coated with cooking spray), and cook until golden brown on both sides. *Tip:* Serve with berries and bananas instead of syrup.

Chicken tenders: Beat 2 eggs. In a separate bowl, combine 1 cup whole-wheat breadcrumbs, 1 tsp. oregano, and a dash of pepper. Dip chicken strips into the egg and then into the breadcrumbs. Bake at 350° until cooked through, about 20 minutes.♥



PARENT TO PARENT

Food journal

My children seemed to be eating all the time, and they were putting on weight. So I asked the school nurse for ideas. She suggested that I have Carla and Robbie keep a food journal to help them eat “mindfully”—or to be aware of what they eat.



food and a title (“Carla’s Food Journal”). Each day, they draw a circle on a page and divide it like a pie with six pieces.

We label each section: Fruit; Vegetables; Meat, Fish, and Beans; Grains; Dairy; and Extras (cookies, chips).

Carla writes down what she eats in the correct wedge. Robbie, who is younger, draws pictures. And guess what? They’re both starting to eat a little better now that they are paying more attention to their food.♥

OUR PURPOSE

To provide busy parents with practical ways to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity for their children.

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