

Nutrition Nuggets

Food and Fitness for a Healthy Child

March 2008

Richardson Independent School District
Child Nutrition Department

BEST BITES

Fruit without bruises

Maybe you can't judge a book by its cover, but it seems children judge fruit by the peel. Ask any cafeteria manager, and she'll tell you: Kids don't like bruised pears, bananas, peaches, or other fruit. So when you're buying fresh fruit for your family, try to select pieces without marks.

Only 15 percent of children walk or bike to school today, compared with 50 percent in 1969. Consider safe ways to start your kids' day with exercise, such as organizing walking or biking groups and using side-walks. If you live far from school, you might drive partway and walk the rest of the way together.

Check blood pressure

Even young children can have high blood pressure, and the risk is greater if they are overweight. Ask your pediatrician to check your child's blood pressure, and discuss whether he needs changes in his exercise and eating habits. Left untreated, high blood pressure can lead to kidney and other health problems.

Just for fun

Mom: Eat your spinach. It'll put color in your cheeks.

Peter: But I don't want green cheeks!



Fitness testing

Your child has recess every day and plays outside some days after school. But how can you tell if he's getting more physically fit?

Find out by having a monthly family fitness day. You can test each other's fitness levels with these exercises.

- **Running.** Run a mile as fast as you can (a half mile for younger children or less-fit adults). What is each person's time? *Measures cardiovascular fitness.*
- **Curl-ups.** Lying flat on your back with arms extended toward your knees, curl up slowly until your fingers touch your knees. Then, curl back down until your shoulders touch the floor. How many can everyone do? *Measures abdominal strength.*
- **Push-ups.** With feet together, chest touching the ground, and palms flat on the floor near your shoulders, raise your body up (keeping your back straight), and lower back down. Count the number of push-ups you do. *Measures muscular strength.*
- **Sit and reach.** Sit on the floor with your legs straight out, and reach for your toes. Can you touch them? *Measures flexibility.*
- **Trunk stretch.** Lying on your back with your arms by your sides, lift your



upper body using your back muscles. How high can you lift off the ground? (Have another family member use a ruler to find out.) *Measures trunk strength.*

Jot the results in a notebook or on a poster board hung on the wall. Then, encourage daily physical activity for everyone (walks, after-school sports, lunchtime workouts). Repeat the fitness test monthly to watch for progress. ♥

Kitchen helpers

Youngsters love to cook. Let your child pitch in when you're making healthy meals, and she'll be happy to eat the results. You can let her:

- Wash and tear lettuce for a salad.
- Measure dry and liquid ingredients.
- Whisk eggs, fat-free milk, and pepper for scrambled eggs (an adult should use the stove).
- Snap ends off fresh beans, put them in a bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and microwave.
- Squeeze oranges, lemons, and limes for juice, sauces, or seasonings.
- Make a fruit salad: Rinse grapes, peel tangerines, and add pineapple chunks (canned in their own juice, drained). ♥



Where's the fat?

Unsaturated fats. Saturated fats. Trans fats. What's the difference? Help your youngster make good food choices by teaching her what to look for.

Unsaturated fats are the healthiest. They're in many plants and fish and come in two forms: mono-unsaturated (olive oil, canola oil, nuts, and avocados) and polyunsaturated (safflower, sesame, corn, and soybean oils, and fish such as salmon and trout). These fats can actually lower cholesterol.



Saturated fats come mostly from animals (meat, dairy, eggs). Watch intake of these fats—they can clog the heart's arteries and raise cholesterol.

Trans fats are added to processed foods like cookies, cakes, and donuts to keep them fresh longer. It's best to avoid trans fats altogether. They have no nutritional value and can raise cholesterol.

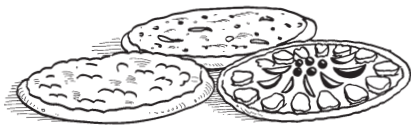
When you're shopping, show your child how to check the fat content on a food label. Have her find items higher in unsaturated fats, lower in saturated fats, and without any trans fats. *Note:* Try to limit overall fat to 25%–35% of your family's daily calories, with most of it in unsaturated fats. ♥

IN THE KITCHEN

Pizza party

Here are three quick and healthy takes on kids' number one favorite food—pizza. *Hint:* Start with a whole-grain crust from your grocer's freezer section.

■ **Taco pizza:** Layer cooked lean ground beef, canned corn, taco sauce, and shredded cheddar cheese. Bake until the cheese melts. Top with guacamole and fat-free sour cream.



■ **Veggie pizza:** Top the crust with spaghetti sauce. Add grated carrots and zucchini, frozen peas, and chopped onion. Cover with shredded skim mozzarella cheese, and bake until the cheese bubbles.

■ **Fruit pizza:** Bake the crust, and spread on thin layers of low-fat cream cheese and sugar-free jelly. Arrange fruit in circles on top. Try strawberry slices on the outside, apple slices next, and blueberries in the center. ♥



Q & A Diabetes alert

Q: I've heard that children who are overweight might get diabetes. What symptoms should we be watching for in our children?

A: It is true that more youngsters are being diagnosed with Type II diabetes, the kind that is caused by being overweight or obese. Symptoms to watch for include thirst, tiredness, frequent urination, and weight loss. Children may also complain of stomachaches and headaches or exhibit behavior problems. If you see these signs over several weeks, take your child to your pediatrician or health clinic. They might do blood tests to check for diabetes.

To cut your youngsters' risk for diabetes, steer them toward a diet of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and proteins like fish and lean meat. And try to make sure they're at a healthy weight by helping them work up to an hour of physical activity a day. ♥



ACTIVITY CORNER

Make a food pyramid

What's a healthy diet for a frog?

Use your child's favorite animals to get her interested in a healthy diet for herself. You can start by showing her the food pyramid at www.mypyramid.gov/kids. Point out how the eating plan is divided into five sections: grains, vegetables, fruits, milk, and meat and beans.

Then, ask your youngster what she thinks her favorite animals eat. Help her research their diets online or in library books. With markers and construction paper, let her

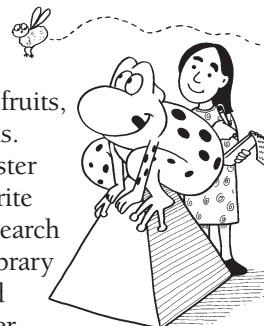
draw a food pyramid for each one. Suggest these ideas.

▲ Frog: a large section for insects and smaller ones for worms, minnows, and spiders

▲ Polar bear: mostly seals, along with birds, fish, eggs, and berries

▲ Horse: mainly grass and hay, with some apples, carrots, and grains

When your child is finished, hang up her animal food pyramids—right next to the one that shows her how to eat a healthy human diet! ♥



OUR PURPOSE

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

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