

Nutrition Nuggets

Food and Fitness for a Healthy Child

September 2017



Cardinal Joseph Bernardin Elementary School
Nurse / Student Health Coordinator

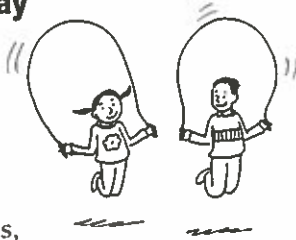
BEST BITES

Choose cafeteria meals

Changes in school meal requirements have made cafeteria food healthier than ever. And September is the perfect time for your youngsters to get used to eating school lunches. Get them excited by reading the menus together and talking about what they will select. *Note:* Look for an application in their backpacks for free and reduced-price meals.

Time to play

Make it a point to go to places where your children can run around, such as fields, parks, or school playgrounds. Bring along balls, bats, jump ropes, or anything else that your youngsters enjoy. *Idea:* Add to the fun by letting them bring a friend along or arrange to meet a friend there.



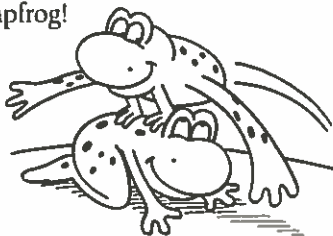
DID YOU KNOW?

An apple and a can of soda may have the same number of calories. But the apple will give your child nutrients, including minerals and fiber, that contribute to a healthy diet—while the soda offers only empty calories. Talking about this will help your youngster understand that all calories aren't equal.

Just for fun

Q: What is a frog's favorite game?

A: Leapfrog!



The family that eats together...

When families have meals together at least three times a week, their children are less likely to be overweight. Kids also tend to do better in school and to stay away from drugs when they have regular family meals. Consider these ideas for your household:



- Each Sunday, look at your calendar for the week, and write in dinner times. They might change based on each day's activities, and that's okay. *Idea:* If dinner isn't possible, try having breakfast or lunch together that day.
- Get everyone involved. Ask one youngster to find a recipe and another one to choose a green or an orange vegetable (asparagus, sweet potato). Rotate jobs like setting the table and making a salad.
- Do you have picky eaters? Let your children be the taste testers. You'll make

them feel like "insiders"—and pique their interest in dinner—by giving them samples ahead of time.

- At dinner, have fun conversations that teach about cooking. Let everyone guess how much brown rice you used ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup, perhaps) or how many cans of tomatoes went into the spaghetti sauce. Or ask family members to describe the menus they would create at their own restaurants.
- Use mealtime to catch up on what happened in each other's days. Keep conversations light and pleasant—this isn't the time for criticisms or fighting. *Note:* Turn off the TV and put away cell phones so you can focus on, and enjoy, each other! ●

Healthier breakfast cereal

Your child's first meal of the day can be a healthy one with these tips for cereal lovers.

Read labels. Go shopping together, and give your youngster words and numbers to look for on cereal packages. He could use a magnifying glass to "spy" a whole grain like oats or whole wheat listed as the first ingredient. Or have him find boxes with 10 grams or less of sugar and 5 grams or more of fiber.

Top with fruit, milk. Increase the nutrients by encouraging him to try different fruits on his cereal. He might like peaches, blueberries, or dried cranberries, for instance. Then, let him pour in fat-free milk. ●



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One small step

Have you been trying to get your kids to eat better and exercise more? One mistake many people make is expecting too much at once. Instead, aim for gradual progress with one change at a time. Here's how.

Explain your goal

You might say, "I want all of us to be healthy and have strong bodies so we can play hard and do well in school and at work." Tell your family that this is something you can all accomplish together.



Ask for input

Let each person contribute three ideas. For instance, your youngster might suggest eating more fruit or playing together outside after dinner. You could recommend drinking more water or taking hikes on weekends. *Tip:* Have your child record all the ideas.

Decide on a plan

Vote for your favorite—that will be the first change you attempt. Together, come up with a few steps for achieving it. *Example:* If your goal is "Eat more vegetables," you can list "Have vegetables for after-school snacks" or "Taste vegetables at dinner every night." Give yourselves a month to adopt the new habit. Then, vote on your next healthy change! ●

Q & A

"But I don't want to play sports"

Q: My daughter has no interest in playing sports. How can I make sure she gets enough exercise?

A: Sports are great, but they're not the only way for a child to get physical activity. Your daughter probably loves to have your attention—try spending time doing active things with her. Perhaps walk your dog or have hula hoop contests. Or take a class together, such as karate or rock climbing.

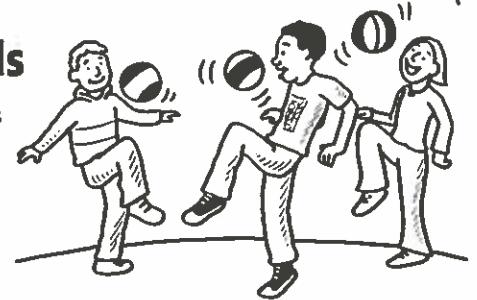


There's also a chance that your youngster just hasn't found the right activity yet. What does she like to do? If she loves sledding in the winter, she might try skating, running, or another activity where she can move fast. If she likes music, she could join a dance team. Let her experiment with different options, and she will probably find one she enjoys. ●

ACTIVITY CORNER

Fun with friends

When your child invites friends over, encourage them to forget the computer and video games and go outside to play instead. With games like these, they'll have a great time as they get healthy exercise.



Bubble pop. One person runs around blowing bubbles with a wand, and the other players have to chase after them and pop the bubbles. Have each person count the number popped—the winner blows the bubbles for the next round.

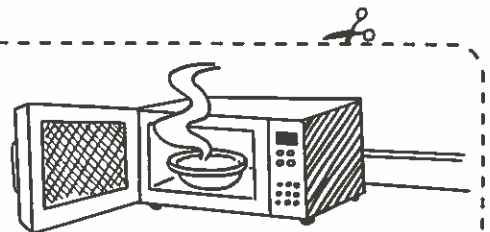
Ball in the air. Give each player a ball. Keep your ball in the air by bouncing it off your knee, and see who can go the longest without dropping the ball.

Stepping stones. Lay out paper plates into a stepping-stone path on the grass (place some close together and others farther apart). Take turns walking and jumping the course. If you miss a step and touch the ground, start over. ●

IN THE KITCHEN

Microwave it

For healthy—and fast—cooking, your microwave can be your best friend.



Eggs

Scramble eggs without butter! Whisk eggs with fat-free milk in a microwave-safe bowl. Cook for 1 minute. Stir, and continue cooking, 30 seconds at a time, until the eggs are set. *Tip:* Add vegetables or low-fat shredded cheddar cheese before cooking.

Vegetables

Trim fresh vegetables, rinse under running water, and place in a microwave-safe dish. Cover, and cook until tender (start with 2 minutes, test for

doneness, and continue in 1-minute increments). For frozen vegetables, follow the directions on the package.

Popcorn

Making your own popcorn is a great way to boost the healthy fiber in your child's diet. Just put 3 tbsp. popcorn kernels in a brown lunch bag, fold down the top, and microwave for 2½ to 3 minutes (until there are more than 2 seconds between pops). *Idea:* Sprinkle on grated Parmesan cheese. ●

OUR PURPOSE
 To provide busy parents with practical ways to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity for their children.
 Resources for Educators,
 a division of CCH Incorporated
 128 N. Royal Avenue • Front Royal, VA 22630
 540-636-4280 • rfcustomer@wolterskluwer.com
 www.rfeonline.com
 Nutrition Nuggets™ is reviewed by a registered dietitian. Consult a physician before beginning any major change in diet or exercise.
 ISSN 1935-4630