

Smart nutrition – Back-to-school edition

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The month of August is designated as Kids Eat Right Month by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics to raise awareness about healthy eating and active lifestyles for children. August also marks the start of many kids heading back to school, which means they’ll require healthy food to fuel them throughout the day. Consider these tips to start the school year off right.

Breakfast

Eating a balanced breakfast can improve school performance, increase energy levels and make a difference in overall health and well-being.



Tip: Instead of serving a sugary cereal, create a balanced breakfast that includes a protein-rich food (eggs, 100% natural peanut butter, Greek yogurt, low-fat milk, beans, cottage cheese and deli meats) and a whole-grain carbohydrate (whole-grain toast, whole-wheat tortillas, wheat English muffins, wheat pita bread and whole-grain frozen waffles).



Ideas: Top a toasted frozen waffle with Greek yogurt and berries. Make a breakfast sandwich: put a fried or poached egg and a slice of Canadian bacon inside a toasted wheat English muffin. Top a slice of whole-grain toast with peanut butter and sprinkle with ground flaxseed for added fiber. Feel free to add a piece of fruit!

Lunch

Sometimes children skip lunch at school because they don’t like what’s on the school cafeteria menu or the lunch line is too long. This can cause difficulty concentrating, a lack of energy for after-school activities and a greater chance of eating less nutritious snacks.



Tip: Whether your child eats a school-provided lunch or brings a lunch to school, help your child aim for balance. A healthy lunch includes one item from each food group: one protein, one whole grain, one fruit, one vegetable and one dairy choice. If a school-provided lunch is the best option, help your child make healthy choices without you by explaining beforehand what a healthy lunch is and why it’s important to eat healthy and not skip lunch!



Ideas: Try using a lunch box with several small compartments. Here are some yummy combinations of kid-friendly foods to include: a half of wheat pita bread filled with sliced turkey and cheese with a side of berries and baby carrots; whole-grain crackers with a side of hummus, cucumber and apple slices, and a carton of low-fat milk; two wedges of chicken and cheese quesadillas with a side of sliced bell peppers, grape tomatoes and cubed mango.

After-School Snacks

Whether your child is gearing up for an after-school activity or getting ready to study, a healthy snack before dinner is important to keep energy levels up. Don’t forget to pack plenty of water if your child is participating in a sport!



Tip: Incorporate fruit and vegetables as healthy snacks to replace highly processed snack foods like cookies and chips. Make them fun by adding dips (hummus, dressings, peanut butter and Greek yogurt).



Ideas: Create a homemade trail mix (nuts, dried fruit and whole-grain pretzels). Heat up turkey breast and cheese wrapped in a whole-wheat tortilla. Have these easy healthy snacks at the ready: string cheese and fruit slices; celery and almond butter; baked tortilla chips and salsa; carrot sticks and dressing.