



Section

22

Food and Nutrition

Healthy eating habits are best formed during childhood. Parents and schools need to work together to ensure that children's bodies are fueled properly at home and at school. In this section you will find information about the state of nutrition in schools, and ways that PTAs can work to improve the school nutrition environment. In addition, we offer examples of local PTAs that are already making strides in this arena so you can learn from their experiences.

Also included are reproducible handouts that you can give to parents to help them make simple changes at home that will result in positive improvements in their families' health.

Fact Sheet: The State of Nutrition in Schools Today



*Did you know?
Poor nutrition, even in
non-overweight children,
can affect brain
development and
performance in school.³
Children without proper
nutrition may have a
shorter attention span,
more irritability, and
more suspensions. In
addition, a 2004 study
showed that overweight
kids are more likely to
be bullies or victims of
bullying than children
of normal weight.⁴*

First, the bad news

- Junk food is readily available to students in most schools. Although foods provided through federal school lunch and breakfast programs must meet certain nutritional guidelines, there are few federal laws dealing with other food available on school grounds, such as food sold in vending machines, school stores, fundraisers or a la carte cafeteria snack lines. These foods are known as “competitive” foods because they “compete” with the service of nutritious school meals. Competitive foods are available in almost all high schools, and in half of all elementary schools.¹
- 75 percent of the drinks and 85 percent of the snacks in school vending machines are junk foods like sweetened soda, candy and chips.²
- Childhood obesity is costing schools money. A study showed that obese students tend to have higher rates of absenteeism. Because schools’ state funding is determined by attendance, absenteeism can cost small districts hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, and losses for large city school districts could be in the millions.⁵

Now, the good news

- Many schools have found that replacing junk foods with healthier foods and beverages (e.g., bottled water, 100% juice, yogurt, fruit) in vending machines has not hurt their revenue, and in some cases has even increased revenue.⁶
- Many studies show that improvements in the school food environment have a positive effect on students’ dietary choices while at school.⁷
- The School Breakfast Program provides students with at least one-fourth and the National School Lunch Program at least one-third of the recommended levels for key nutrients. Over 8 million children participate daily in the School Breakfast Program, and over 28 million in the National School Lunch Program.^{8,9}
- Children who participate in school meal programs have better nutritional intake than those who do not. In addition, participation in the School Breakfast Program has been shown to improve standardized test scores, improve attendance, decrease tardiness, and improve participation in class.¹⁰

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- 1 Center for Science in the Public Interest. 2003. *Pestering Parents: How Food Companies Market Obesity to Children*. www.cspinet.org/pesteringparents
 - 2 Center for Science in the Public Interest. 2004. *Dispensing Junk*. www.cspinet.org.
 - 3 California Project LEAN. *Successful Students Through Healthy Food Policies. Healthy Food Policy Resource Guide*. www.californiaprojectlean.org
 - 4 Janssen, et al. Associations Between Overweight and Obesity With Bullying Behaviors in School-Aged Children. *Pediatrics*. 2004; 113: 1187-1194.
 - 5,6,10 Action for Healthy Kids. *The Learning Connection: The Value of Improving Nutrition and Physical Activity in Our Schools*. www.actionforhealthykids.org/devel/pdf/LC_Color_120204_final.pdf
 - 7 Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. 2004. *Fact Sheet: Schools Can Play a Role in Preventing Childhood Obesity*.
 - 8 Food Research and Action Center. *Child Nutrition Fact Sheet: School Breakfast Program*. www.frac.org/pdf/cnsbp.PDF
 - 9,10 Food Research and Action Center. *Child Nutrition Fact Sheet: National School Lunch Program*. www.frac.org

Improving Student Nutrition: 10 Things PTAs Can Do



- 1. Make copies of the handouts** provided in this notebook and distribute them to parents in your school.
- 2. Make Healthy Lifestyles at Home and School** a focus of your PTA meetings. (See the ideas and activities included in this notebook).
- 3. Help make school dining facilities appealing to students.** Take a look at your cafeteria. Is it a nice place to eat? Ask your kids what they think of the room. Is it dark or sunny? Are the seats comfortable? If the walls are drab, ask your school's art teachers to have students create artwork (featuring healthy foods) for the walls. Or ask your principal for permission to have a PTA painting party, and paint murals on the walls.
- 4. Suggest selling bottled water** at the school store, front desk and all school events.
- 5. Eat with the kids:** Go in one day and join kids at lunch. (Ask your school for permission first). Pack a healthy lunch or eat what the kids eat. Find out what choices are available at your school, and what they taste like. What do kids pick from the menus, how long do they have to wait in line, and how much time do they have to eat?
- 6. Make sure your school participates in the School Breakfast, National School Lunch and Afterschool Snack programs.**
If your school does not participate in these programs, encourage school leaders to do so.
- 7. Meet with the food service staff** at your school and learn about their daily challenges in preparing meals and their suggestions for healthy improvements. Write their ideas down.
- 8. Use the PTA Fact-Finding Project** (included in this notebook) to assess your school's health. For example, take inventory of the number of vending machines on campus and the kinds of foods they contain. Also take notes on what is for sale in your school store or in other places on or near campus. Are there fast-food restaurants nearby?
- 9. Talk to students** about the food at school. They will definitely have opinions about the time they eat lunch, whether they are rushed, what the food is like, and what they would like to see changed. It's important to get students' support for healthy changes in the school environment.

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10. Armed with all the information you have gathered, speak up about what changes are needed. Enlist the help and support of your principal, the school food service staff, and teachers for making improvements in your school's "nutrition environment." With the strength of the PTA behind you, you can make a big difference and change your school for the better!

Healthy Fundraisers for PTAs



Refer to PTA Fundraising Essentials in print or online at www.pta.org for more fundraising ideas and tips.

Hold a trike/bike-a-thon for which families seek sponsors for each lap around the track.

Invite chefs from local restaurants to donate healthy hors d'oeuvres and desserts for a "Taste of [your town]" event. Charge for admission.

Have a PTA yard sale or auction (ask students, teachers and parents for donations).

Seek support from local businesses. Ask them to donate a certain portion of sales from a given date or time to the school. Avoid fast-food chains and try to promote restaurants that provide only nutritious options.

Organize events like walk-a-thons, dance-a-thons or rock-a-thons for which sponsors pledge money by the mile or hour.

Hold a book reading contest for which families seek sponsors and raise money based on how many books are read.

Hold a spelling bee for which families seek sponsors.

Organize a car wash.

Plan a parent-teacher talent show or basketball game and sell tickets.

Have local businesses and community members donate items (e.g., weekends at vacation homes, pool or lawn care, baby sitting, lunch with a local celebrity) for a silent auction.

Sell fruit (citrus or other in-season fruit), gift wrap, or other items rather than candy.

Local PTA Action Stories: Food and Nutrition



Juanamaria Elementary School Ventura, California

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The Ventura Unified School District's Healthy Schools Project was initially started by the Juanamaria Elementary School PTA, which, along with the Community Alliance with Family Farmers, sought and was awarded financial support to get the ball rolling. They received a \$25,000 grant from The California Endowment, the state's largest health foundation. The Project was piloted at Juanamaria and now, only four years later, Ventura's Healthy Schools Project has grown to include all 17 elementary schools and is moving up this year to middle schools.

In addition to building a school garden that gives students the opportunity to explore the interconnectedness of food, classes also visited local farms to learn about the community that provides them with

these healthy options. Along with providing a chance to talk about proper nutrition, these activities teach students about what it takes for a seed to grow, and the value of sustainable practices such as composting and recycling.

Juanamaria PTA worked with Community Alliance with Family Farmers and the school district's child nutrition services department to create a salad bar program featuring fresh, locally grown and seasonal produce at the school. The salad bar is available twice a week; under the supervision of staff and parent volunteers, students are able to create their own meals, choosing from dairy, protein, breads, fruits and vegetables. One day each week the salad bar has a theme that may include a baked potato with chili or a hamburger to accompany the salad bar.

The project has shown that when given the opportunity, a majority of children choose salad when it is offered. When it first started, the salad bar was served as an alternative choice to the hot lunch and nearly eight out of 10 students who participated in the school lunch program chose the salad bar over a hot lunch when it was available. Plus, 20 percent more students bought cafeteria lunches on salad bar days.

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In order to run the Healthy Schools Project, Ventura Unified School District now has a project coordinator, salad bar coordinator and two part-time garden coordinators. They have received Nutrition Network funding through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and, in addition, just this year the Ventura Unified School District received a federal grant that has allowed the school district to hire two physical education specialists charged with bringing together both nutrition and physical activity in order to help students form healthy habits that will last a lifetime. The integration of nutrition and fitness into the policy and philosophy of the district is taking place as a result of the Healthy Schools Project.

Fayette County Public Schools Lexington, Kentucky

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The progress made at the Fayette County Public Schools in Lexington, Kentucky, started when the Lt. Governor's Task Force on Childhood Nutrition and Fitness proposed legislation that, among other things, set some nutrition standards for what could be sold to students in school vending machines. Though the bills ultimately didn't pass, they came close and received widespread grassroots support from across the

state. In fact, the "school junk food bill" became a household phrase around the state due to the high level of awareness that was raised.

Anita Courtney, a member of the Task Force and the Director of Health Promotion at the Lexington Fayette County Health Department decided to take up the issue at the local level. She knew that a 5-year-old beverage vending contract would expire for the Fayette County Public Schools that summer and she saw this as a great opportunity to make a change. A survey of Fayette County schools taken at that time found that only one percent of the snacks and 13 percent of the beverages available to students through school vending fell in the "healthy" category. The three most common items sold were soda, candy, and fried snacks.

She initially tried to get the school district involved, but they were worried about what it might mean to the schools' budgets if this source of revenue was threatened. Finally, Courtney decided to take her cause to the 16th District of Kentucky's PTA meeting, where she received a lot of support for her ideas. She was also fortunate enough to meet Treasurer Roger Kirk, who happened to have over 20 years of experience in the food industry.

Kirk and Courtney met the next morning. Because the beverage vending contract would soon expire, they knew that the district would be required to design a new request for proposal (RFP) in order to solicit bids for a new contract. They worked together to create a new RFP design that would reward the competing companies for providing and promoting healthier beverages. Under the new process, when determining the

best proposal, half of the points awarded would be based on practices the company would institute that would favor the sale of healthier items. Kirk and Courtney brought their ideas to the district, and the plan was accepted.

In the end, the beverage company that won the contract agreed to some important changes. In order to promote healthier options, water and sports drinks now cost \$1.00, while soda is \$1.25 and all machine exteriors also feature images of young people engaging in physical activity instead of huge brand logos. Where in the past donated products from the company had consisted entirely of soda, half must now be healthier beverages. The company also agreed to sponsor a President's Fitness Challenge/Field Day, including the donation of five mountain bikes to be used as prizes.

Throughout the process, Kirk's background proved to be an invaluable strength in negotiating an outcome that would most greatly benefit the district's students. He knew the language and tricks of the industry, which helped level the playing field in the discussions. However, it was not just his unique strengths that made him an asset in this change process. His affiliation with the PTA also made it clear that his interests were aligned with what would be best for the children, that he was not working under a hidden agenda. His creative ideas also spurred the competing companies to use their business skills to create ways to provide and promote healthy foods. In addition, all involved worked hard to put a positive slant on the cooperative aspects of the process along the way, which resulted in the contract negotiation process ending with everyone on good terms.

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**Walnut Creek Middle School
Erie, Pennsylvania**

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It has become a common goal and philosophy at Walnut Creek Middle School in Erie, Pennsylvania, that healthy learners make better students. The family and consumer science teacher initially applied for and received a few grants that helped the school establish programs that raise awareness of nutrition and physical activity. Two years later, she approached the Walnut Creek PTA to request \$250 to fund prizes for an Eat Smart Move More essay contest that would reach 600 students, and the PTA agreed to participate.

Students took a pledge and recorded the number of minutes of physical activity and number of vegetables eaten each day for an eight-week period. The physical education department encouraged the students to participate, and classroom teachers took time to help the students write essays for the contest at the conclusion of the pledge period. The PTA funded the awards, and individual PTA members took the pledge themselves and served as judges in the essay contest.

Walnut Creek's activities to promote healthier lifestyles among its families do not end there. In October, the school kicks off a year-long program at an event that includes student demonstrations and role playing. In November, it holds "Wild for Wellness Day," which involves the entire school in physical activity and includes nutrition presentations and a motivational speaker. Throughout

the year it hosts speakers to address nutrition issues, and fitness activities led by community leaders. At the end of the year, the school goes to a local community center where it conducts physical aerobic and conditioning activities, as well as healthy food demonstrations, and serves a healthy lunch.

The school also makes efforts to reach out to its local community. It tapes healthy cooking shows and airs them on the educational channel of the local cable company so the community can be made aware of fitness, nutrition and the activities taking place at the school. In addition, the school presents preschool nutrition programs in the community 16 times a year. Students from Walnut Creek perform "Eat Healthy Food" and "Move Around Enough" to 1200 students at three area elementary schools. Walnut Creek's PTA makes sure that all parents know what is going on by publicizing the activities in its newsletter.

Recently, a local restaurant asked students to help develop healthy recipes. The restaurant chose winners among those recipes that were submitted and served these for about a month. The contest proved to be a great success as 123 students participated and one of the recipes, strawberry spinach salad, will be served all summer because it was such a hit. In addition, a portion of the resulting profits were donated to the Walnut Creek PTA to be used for future wellness activities.

As a result of the wide variety of activities that Walnut Creek has implemented at its school, 6th grade teachers have reported an increase in the number of healthy snacks that students bring to share with their classes. The school has

managed to get the entire school and its community involved in eating healthier foods and increasing physical activity.

**Banning Junk Food Sales;
Aptos Middle School;
San Francisco, California**

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A few years ago, a can of soda and a bag of chips seemed to be the typical lunch for kids at Aptos Middle School in San Francisco, California. The school's vending machines stocked nothing but soda and its "Beanery" (the a la carte alternative to the National School Lunch Program) featured giant bags of potato chips and other junk foods.

The school's principal decided to establish the Aptos PTSA Student Nutrition Committee, convened by a PTSA member and including parents, teachers and other staff. The committee sought to ban junk food from being sold in the school and to replace those items with healthy alternatives.

In seeking the approval of the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), the committee submitted a proposal for eliminating junk food at Aptos to SFUSD's superintendent. The superintendent was interested in Aptos' efforts because the district was in the middle of developing a resolution that called for the gradual elimination of soda and unhealthy snacks in San Francisco public schools beginning in the 2003-2004 school year.

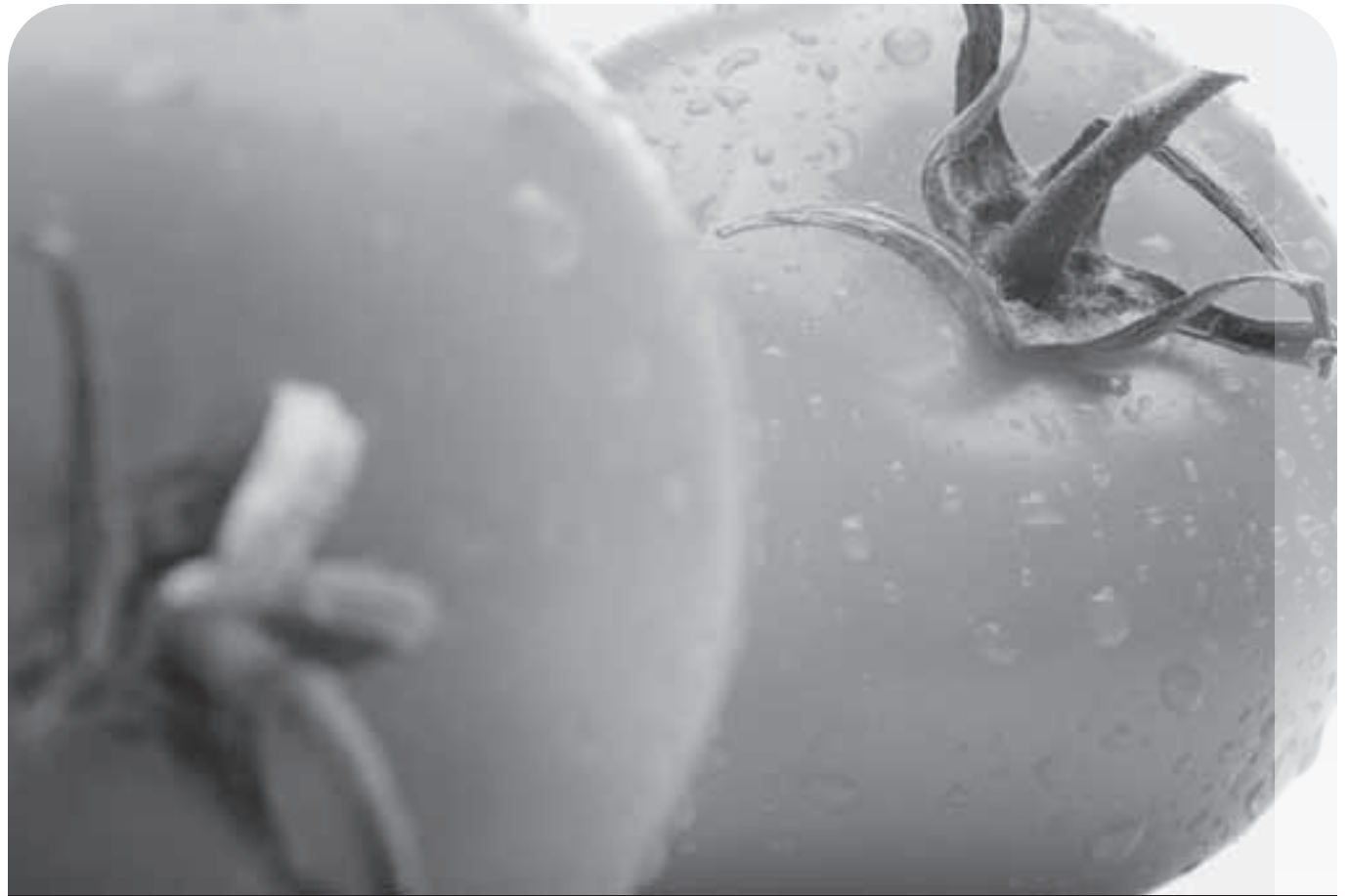
The proposal outlined how the new menus would be chosen and laid out a plan for tracking revenues during a pilot phase, December 2002 through June 2003. To ease the transition, non-nutritious foods were eliminated

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gradually and replaced with healthy alternatives. When tracking the sales of its competitive foods (those sold outside of the National School Lunch Program) during the pilot phase, the committee found that revenues decreased slightly during the first week of the new program but then gradually increased. By the end of the 2002–2003 school year, the Beanery—now selling only healthy food items including bottled water, 100% fruit juice, and milk —

netted a \$6,000 profit for the school district’s Student Nutrition Services department. During the 2001–2002 school year and prior to introducing a healthier menu, Aptos’ food program was operating at a deficit.

As a result of the pilot’s success, the program was permanently instituted at Aptos, and it has served as a model for the school district’s efforts to improve nutrition at its other middle and high schools.



Handouts

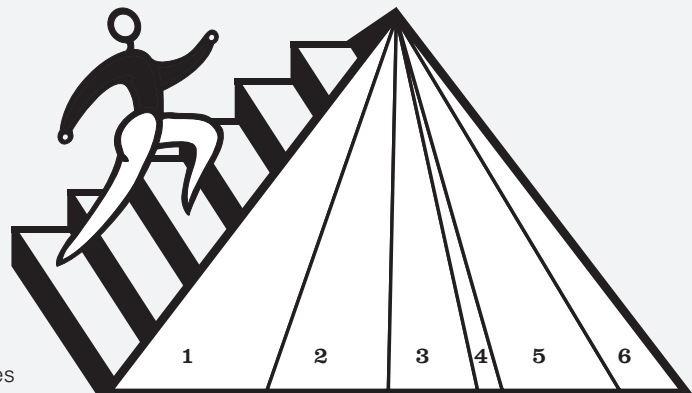
Food and Nutrition

Please make copies of these handouts and share them with parents.

The New Food Pyramid and How It Applies to Children

The newest version of the Food Pyramid was released in April 2005. On the back are a few notes on the new Food Pyramid, pictured here, and what it means.

One of the most recognizable methods of teaching people about nutrition in the United States is the Food Pyramid, developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Food Pyramid is based in part on the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, which are recommendations for people over the age of 2 on how to eat a balanced, healthy diet.



1. Grains
2. Vegetables
3. Fruits
4. Oils
5. Milk
6. Meat & Beans

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Steps to a Healthier You

The figure running up the side of the pyramid emphasizes the importance of exercise. **The USDA recommends that children get 60 minutes of physical activity every day, if possible.**

Kids should participate in regular physical activity (such as physical education programs in school) because it helps them both physically and mentally. According to the University of Michigan, physical education programs can help children do well in school, improve their self-image, and decrease bad behavior and drug use.¹

Food Groups

Each stripe in the pyramid represents a different food group. Almost all choices from each food group should be healthful, which leaves a small number of calories each day that can be from foods your children want to “splurge” on.

Grains

Grains are foods such as bread, oatmeal, rice and pasta. At least half of the grain products your child eats should be whole grains. These are foods that contain the whole grain seed and have not been processed. Examples include whole wheat bread, brown rice, and whole oats/oatmeal. Whole grain products have more fiber and nutrients than processed foods, like white bread and other foods made with bleached white flour or white rice. Fiber helps

keep kids’ digestive systems regular. Grains are also sources of carbohydrates, or “carbs.” They provide the body with quick energy.

Vegetables

There are 5 main categories of vegetables:

- Dark green, like spinach
- Orange, like carrots
- Legumes (dried beans), like lentils
- Starchy, like sweet potatoes
- Other vegetables, like onions

Eating a variety of vegetables of different colors can reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and some cancers. Vegetables also contain important nutrients like Vitamins A and C as well as fiber.

Fruits

Examples of fruit are oranges, apples, pears, strawberries and melon. Fruits are important sources of vitamins and minerals that your child needs. It is better to eat whole fruit than fruit juices because whole fruit has more fiber than fruit juice.

Oils and Fats

This group includes vegetable oils, like canola and corn oil, and foods that contain a lot of fat, like butter and shortening. The two types of fat we worry about most are saturated and *trans* fats, because they contribute to overweight and heart disease. You should avoid giving foods containing a lot of saturated or *trans* fats to children. This includes many cookies, pastries, french fries, high-fat

cheeses and hamburgers. In addition, foods that say “partially hydrogenated vegetable oil” on the label contain a lot of saturated and *trans* fats.

Milk Products & Calcium-Rich Foods

This group includes milk, hard cheeses and yogurt. It is especially important that children get enough servings of this group because calcium builds bone strength. If children are under 2, they should have whole milk, and cheese and yogurt made with whole milk. For kids over the age of 2, choose low-fat or fat-free milk products. If children are lactose intolerant, lactose-free products are available. Children who do not consume cow’s milk for various reasons can have calcium-containing soy milk or tofu.


Proteins

This group includes meat (choose lean cuts of meat) and fish and also includes beans, eggs and soy-based foods like tofu. Proteins help build muscle.

How Much of Each Food Group Should Children Eat?

A child’s age, gender and activity level are all factors that determine how much he or she needs to eat every day to stay healthy. Boys and girls even of the same age grow at different rates and thus may be of different size and need more or less calories. You can go to www.mypyramid.gov to get information tailored to your child.

¹The University of Michigan and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Fitness for Youth Program www.fitnessforyouth.umich.edu/frames/frameset_research.html



How Much of Each Food Group Should My Child Eat Daily?

A child's age, gender and activity level are all factors that determine how much he or she needs to eat every day to stay healthy. Boys and girls even of the same age grow at different rates and thus may be of different size and need more or less calories. Daily food recommendations for children who exercise 30 minutes a day are listed on the following pages. For information on food intake recommendations for children with other activity levels, go to www.mypyramid.gov.

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2 to 3 year-olds

FOOD	AMOUNT PER DAY	EXAMPLES
Grains	3 ounces	1 ounce could be 1 slice of whole wheat bread, ½ cup of oatmeal or ½ cup of brown rice
Vegetables	1 cup	Carrots, peas, sweet potatoes, zucchini <i>Remember: Give them a little at each meal and a variety!</i>
Fruits	1 cup	Cut up strawberries or melon, or a small apple
Milk Products	2 cups	Low-fat milk or yogurt; 1½ ounces of cheese counts as 1 cup
Proteins	2 ounces	Lean cooked meat or chicken; 1 egg counts as 1 ounce

4 to 8 year-olds

FOOD	AMOUNT PER DAY	EXAMPLES
Grains	4-5 ounces	1 ounce could be 1 slice of whole wheat bread, ½ cup of oatmeal or ½ cup of brown rice
Vegetables	1½ cups	Carrots, peas, sweet potatoes, cucumber, tomatoes <i>Remember: Give them a little at each meal and a variety!</i>
Fruits	1½ cups	A small apple counts as 1 cup; a small banana counts as ½ cup
Milk Products	2 cups	Low-fat milk or yogurt; 1½ ounces of cheese counts as 1 cup
Proteins	3-4 ounces	Lean cooked meat or chicken; 1 egg counts as 1 ounce

9 to 13 year-old boys

FOOD	AMOUNT PER DAY	EXAMPLES
Grains	6 ounces	1 cup of ready-to-eat cereal counts as 1 ounce; or 1 cup of cooked whole wheat pasta counts as 1 ounce
Vegetables	2½ cups	Green beans, asparagus, beets, kidney beans
Fruits	1½ cups	A large orange counts as 1 cup; a small banana counts as ½ cup
Milk Products	3 cups	Low-fat milk or yogurt; 1½ ounces of cheese counts as 1 cup
Proteins	5 ounces	Lean cooked meat or chicken, 1 egg counts as 1 ounce

9 to 13 year-old girls

FOOD	AMOUNT PER DAY	EXAMPLES
Grains	5 ounces	1 cup of ready-to-eat cereal counts as 1 ounce; 1 cup of cooked whole wheat pasta counts as 1 ounce
Vegetables	2 cups	Green beans, asparagus, beets, kidney beans
Fruits	1½ cups	A large orange counts as 1 cup; A small banana counts as ½ cup
Milk Products	3 cups	Low-fat milk or yogurt; or 1½ ounces of cheese counts as 1 cup
Proteins	5 ounces	Lean cooked meat or chicken; 1 egg counts as 1 ounce

14 to 18 year-old boys

FOOD	AMOUNT PER DAY	EXAMPLES
Grains	7 ounces	1 cup of ready-to-eat cereal counts as 1 ounce; 1 cup of cooked whole wheat pasta counts as 1 ounce
Vegetables	3 cups	Green beans, asparagus, beets, kidney beans
Fruits	2 cups	A large orange counts as 1 cup; A small banana counts as ½ cup
Milk Products	3 cups	Low-fat milk or yogurt; 1½ ounces of cheese counts as 1
Proteins	6 ounces	Lean cooked meat or chicken; 1 egg counts as 1 ounce

14 to 18 year-old girls

FOOD	AMOUNT PER DAY	EXAMPLES
Grains	6 ounces	1 cup of ready-to-eat cereal counts as 1 ounce; 1 cup of cooked whole wheat pasta counts as 1 ounce
Vegetables	2½ cups	Green beans, asparagus, beets, kidney beans
Fruits	1½ cups	A large orange counts as 1 cup; A small banana counts as ½ cup
Milk Products	3 cups	Low-fat milk or yogurt; 1½ ounces of cheese counts as 1
Proteins	5 ounces	Lean cooked meat or chicken; 1 egg counts as 1 ounce



Healthy Eating Tips for Your Family

Parents are busy people—and when you're really busy, trying to make sure your family is eating a nutritious, balanced diet can seem overwhelming. Here are some suggestions for easy ways to make healthy eating a way of life for your family.

Have meals together on a regular basis.

Eating healthy foods together as a family will help your children learn healthy eating habits. Regular family meals also give you a chance to check in with each other.

- Cooking and food preparation are a team effort; have your family shop for, cook and plan meals together.
- You don't have to eat every meal together. If dinner is too hard, try for a regular family breakfast.
- If you're short on time, buy healthy, ready-to-eat foods from a store or restaurant.

Don't skip breakfast.

Studies show that kids learn better if they eat breakfast.

- Start the night before; mix juice, slice fruit, and set the table.
- Encourage your kids to make enough time to eat in the morning by offering them quick and easy foods they like, such as low-fat granola bars, fruit, and yogurt.

Make healthy foods available at home.

If you stock your refrigerator and shelves with healthy foods, that's what your family will eat.

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- Limit sugary sodas and soft drinks.
- Try to have at least two fruits or vegetables with every meal.
- Keep a bowl of fruit on your kitchen table or counter.
- Wash and cut up fruits and vegetables as soon as you get home from the store and keep them in the refrigerator, along with a low-fat dip or salsa.
- Canned and frozen vegetables are often less expensive and have a long shelf-life.
- Serve lean meats (like chicken and turkey) and other good sources of protein (like eggs and fish).
- Choose whole-grain breads and cereals.
- For children over age 2, choose 1% or fat-free milk rather than whole or 2% milk.

Limit fast-food and other low-nutrient foods.

There's no need to ban the chips and candy forever—just make these “once-in-a-while” foods.

Help your kids have healthy attitudes about food.

- Don't force your kids to clean their plates. Let them decide when they're full.
- Don't use food as a reward for good behavior. Try stickers for younger kids and physical family outings for older ones—like going to the park, to the zoo, or bowling.
- Don't use food as a way of showing your kids that you love them.



What to Pack:

Lunchbox Ideas

General Recommendations: Unless your child's lunch will be kept in a refrigerator at school, make sure you have a cool pack in the lunchbox to keep foods fresh. Proteins, dressings and dairy, especially, must be kept cold to keep them from spoiling.

Proteins

Use a variety of lean meats, such as sliced turkey or chicken breast. Other good sources of protein are tuna, peanut butter, low-fat cheese, hummus, or hard-boiled eggs.

Grains

Use whole-wheat bread for sandwiches. If your child is tired of sandwich bread, try whole-wheat pocket or pita bread, tortilla wraps, rice cakes or grain salads, such as couscous.

Dressing

Try mustard, light mayonnaise or low-fat salad dressing as a spread. If your child likes butter, try tub margarine. Salsa also makes a great dressing.

Fruit

Use any fresh fruit in season, applesauce, fruit cocktail cups (packed in fruit juice not sugar syrup), or 100% fruit juice boxes. Keep lunch interesting by choosing different fruits on occasion—for example, star fruit, kiwi or papaya.

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Vegetables

Use all the colors! Pack an assortment of carrot sticks, cherry tomatoes, green and red pepper strips, celery with peanut butter, broccoli or cauliflower florets with light dressing. You can mix up a medley of cooked vegetables and stuff them in pocket bread. If you add lettuce to a sandwich, remember to dry it well after washing it or you'll have a soggy sandwich.

Dairy products

Jazz up low-fat yogurt with fresh fruit or low-fat granola. Send string cheese.

Snack ideas

- Fresh fruit or dried fruit
- Whole-wheat pretzels, crackers or rice cakes

- Low-fat yogurt
- Cottage cheese
- Instead of potato chips, try baked chips, air-popped popcorn or whole-grain crackers.
- Instead of candy or cookies, offer trail mix or granola.
- Peanut butter and celery sticks
- Baby carrots or carrot sticks

Beverages

- Water or seltzer water
- Low-fat (1% or skim) milk for children over 2, whole milk for children under 2
- 100 % fruit juice
- Stay away from sweetened soft drinks, fruit punch, and juices that do not say "100% fruit juice"



Eating Out with Your Kids: Finding the Healthier Options

For today's busy families, eating out is a chance for parents to take time off from meal planning, cooking, and cleaning. But finding a place that's kid-friendly and nutritious can be difficult. Many kids' meals at popular family restaurants are too high in sodium and calories. These meals also tend to contain dangerous trans fat, which contributes to obesity and heart disease.

Here are some tips to help you and your family eat healthier when you're out:

Look out for the extras.

Kids' menus often offer a free soda or dessert with every entrée. This can add hundreds of calories without adding any nutrition to the meal. Ask for a substitution like water for the soda or fruit instead of the standard dessert.

Ask for a different side dish.

While many chain restaurants do not list any side dish other than french fries, most will allow you to substitute something healthier, like cooked vegetables, if you ask.

Think outside the kids' section.

Adult menus almost universally offer healthy options. Consider sharing an entrée like grilled chicken or fish with

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your child, or ask about ordering a half portion or lunch portion. Give your children a few choices and have them pick one. This gives them independence while teaching them examples of healthy foods.

Explore the salad bar.

Your kids will love the colorful options of all-you-can-eat salad bars. Let them build their own salads with lots of vegetables and fruits; just limit high-fat toppings like cheese, fried noodles and bacon bits. Keep creamy dressings to a minimum, and ask that dressings on pre-made salads be on the side.

Order water or low-fat or skim milk as your beverage.

(For children under age 2, stick with whole milk.) Avoid sweetened soft drinks, which are full of sugar.

Avoid high-fat condiments

such as sour cream, mayonnaise, tartar sauce, and butter. Ask for low-fat versions of these if you have to have them.

Try to limit eating out

to 2 times a week and when you do eat out, choose restaurants that you know have healthy choices.

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What's The Big Deal About Breakfast?

Does your family skip breakfast? If so, you are not alone. As our society has become more mobile, with parents and kids having multiple commitments, we often skip this meal altogether. Over the past twenty years the United States has seen a steady decrease in the number of children who eat breakfast. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that 90 percent of 1 to 5-year-old children eat breakfast.¹ However, the percentage of children that consume breakfast dramatically decreases to only 14 percent for teenagers.²

Why don't we eat breakfast?

There are many factors that determine whether we eat breakfast and, if we do eat it, what we eat. The following have been shown to affect consumption of breakfast by children:^{3,4}

- Lack of time
- Not wanting to make breakfast
- Limited availability of ready-to-eat foods
- Lack of someone to share the meal with
- Not being hungry
- Influence of friends and classmates
- Long commutes
- Dieting
- Not feeling well
- Not liking the food served
- Not having food available
- Lack of funds for their family to purchase enough food

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How does eating breakfast affect my child?

Breakfast plays a crucial and beneficial role in our children's health. Children who eat breakfast have a higher intake of vitamins and calcium and therefore are more likely to meet the government's recommendations for nutrients than children who skip breakfast.⁵ Research has shown that regardless of income, children who eat breakfast eat a better variety of foods in general, as well as more grains, fruit products, and milk, and they consume less saturated fat.⁶

Will eating breakfast help my child perform better in school?

Studies have shown that omitting breakfast may interfere with learning. Breakfast consumption does improve school attendance and has a positive effect on the overall nutritional quality of a child's diet.⁷ Research has also shown that students that eat breakfast have higher reading and math scores, and improved memory on cognition tests.^{8,9,10} We can't guarantee that eating breakfast will make your child do better in school, but since it definitely can't hurt, why not give it a try?

Will skipping breakfast help a child lose weight?

Despite what you might think, studies have found that children who skip breakfast are at greater risk for being

Encourage your child to eat School Breakfast!

The School Breakfast Program was started in 1966 as a pilot program in areas where children had long bus rides and a large percentage of mothers were in the workforce. Now schools in all areas can participate. School Breakfast provides students with at least one-fourth of the recommended levels for key nutrients. Currently 8.7 million children in 78,000 schools nationwide participate in this program.¹²

Children who participate in the School Breakfast Program have better nutritional intake than those who do not. In addition, participation in School Breakfast has been shown to

- *Improve standardized test scores*
- *Improve attendance*
- *Decrease tardiness*
- *Improve participation in class¹³*

Any child can eat these meals, and it's easy to find out from your principal's office whether you qualify for a discount. Some schools even offer School Breakfast for free to everyone. In other schools, the maximum price is usually under \$1.50!

overweight.¹¹ This may be because they get so hungry later that they end up overeating. It is better for kids to eat three small or moderately sized meals a day and snacks between. Eating this way helps a child's body process food more efficiently than if the child were to eat one or two large meals a day.

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