

HEALTHY EATING - ONE BITE AT A TIME



These nutrition bites were written by Interior Health's Public Health Dietitians. Schools can use them in newsletters, on their websites, or in other communications with parents.

ENERGY BARS

You know them as "energy bars", "power bars" and "sports bars", but are they necessary for optimal sport performance? These bars are a concentrated source of calories, sugar, and protein. Some are fortified with vitamins and minerals. They are convenient but they won't help deliver better sports performance. For a similar easy snack that falls into the four food groups, grab a cheese string and apple.

THEM BONES

Milk and milk products like yogurt, cottage cheese and cheese are your child's best source of calcium and vitamin D. Non-dairy sources of calcium and vitamin D include fortified milk alternatives. Salmon with bones, almonds, baked beans, tofu made with calcium, nuts and seeds also contain calcium. Include a good source of calcium in your child's lunch every day.



LUNCH TIME

Is there a parent out there who doesn't feel "lunch bag" anxiety? The daily task of packing a nutritious lunch that your child will eat can be daunting. Here are some quick tips:

- Ask your child what healthy choices they love to eat for lunch, what they like to eat, and what they prefer not to eat.
- Kids are more likely to eat what they pack. Set a time aside after school or dinner so you and your child can select tomorrow's choices from items you have handy in the fridge.
- Cook dinner with lunches in mind. For example: Extra roast beef for sandwiches, extra pasta, soup, or chili (chill overnight, reheat in the morning, and pack into a wide-mouth thermos).

CUT THEM UP, EAT THEM UP!

When fruit and veggies are on hand, washed and cut into bite size pieces, they tend to get eaten up faster. Keep veggie sticks cut up and ready to go for an easy after school snack. A bean dip like hummus helps fill kids up and keep them satisfied until dinner.



FAMILY MEALS

Family meals nourish the soul and body. They create close bonds, lifetime memories, encourage communication and improve nutrition. Studies show that children who eat with their families at least once a day:

- Eat more vegetables, fruit and calcium-rich foods
- Have better vocabulary and communication skills
- Perform better at school both academically and socially
- Are more likely to try new foods and enjoy a greater variety of foods
- Are less likely to engage in risky behaviour like smoking, drinking, or drugging

EAT A RAINBOW

The darker the colour, the better the nutritional value. Choose Romaine lettuce over iceberg, yam over white potato, red pepper over green, red grapes over green, etc.

SPORTS DRINK?

Sports drinks have become very popular in recent years mainly due to huge advertising/marketing campaigns. In reality, electrolytes do not need to be replaced unless your child is exercising intensively or for a long period of time. For most recreational sports, they are not necessary. Stick to water and fresh fruit like orange slices before, during and after an event.

KEEP YOUR LUNCHES HEALTHY – PLAN MEALS TO INCLUDE THE FOUR FOOD GROUPS

- Grains - whole wheat breads and cereals
- Vegetables and fruits
- Meat, fish, chicken, eggs, bean dips & spreads
- Milk, cheese, and yogurt



WHAT'S TO DRINK?

Did you know that one “drink box” can have up to 6 tsp. of added sugar and may not contain any real juice? Watch out for punches, cocktails, or fruit flavoured drinks that are high in sugar and low in nutrition. 100% real juice is a better choice but is also high in sugar, even though it is natural sugar. Invest in a cool water bottle and send water to drink. Milk is the best choice at lunch. If your child doesn't like milk in their lunch, send another calcium source like yogurt or cheese for healthy bones.

GREEN MONSTER SMOOTHIE – A FUN WAY TO EAT YOUR GREENS

In a blender, combine: 1 banana, 1 cup milk or milk alternate like soy, rice or almond milk, ½ cup frozen berries, 2 cups baby spinach. Blend well. Add more milk if you like a thinner consistency. Serves 2.

PARTY TIME

In a classroom setting, birthdays and seasonal holidays can be a weekly occurrence. Brainstorm with your child about alternative ways to celebrate in the classroom. Fruit kabobs or chocolate dipped strawberries are a fun and special snack. Mini homemade muffins, or banana bread are healthier options than cake. Celebrations don't need to be based around food. Talk to your child's teacher about sharing a favorite game, reading a special book, or having extra time outdoors to celebrate.



STICKY FOOD

Foods like raisins, dried apricots, and unsweetened fruit leathers, are nutritious and part of a healthy diet, but because they are sticky and promote tooth decay, they are best eaten during mealtimes. For this reason, they are not a great snack for on the road or at recess where a toothbrush is seldom handy. To tell you the 'tooth', fresh fruit and raw vegetables are healthy snacks, and they don't stick to teeth. So when you are at school and don't have a toothbrush, try munching on some cucumber, celery and carrot sticks. These snacks are good for your body and your teeth!

POWER UP YOUR CHILD'S LUNCH

Help – my kid is acting like a monster after school! He may be really hungry. In some cases kids are too excited or distracted to eat enough at lunch. If this is the case with your youngster, try packing higher energy foods. If your child usually eats his snacks, try full fat yogurt, cheese strings, homemade trail mix, or energy balls. If he likes sandwiches, load them up with avocado, cheese, or extra meat.

DO YOU FOLLOW THE GOLDEN RULE?

Parents are responsible for what foods are purchased, what times meals and snacks are served, and for getting the family to sit together for meals. Kids are responsible for sitting at the table through the meal and for choosing how much and what to eat of the foods offered. Parents often find it tough to let their children control how much they will eat. However, by following the golden rule of responsibility children are provided with a safe environment in which they can try new foods without the pressure and battles that plague so many dinner tables.

POPCORN CAULIFLOWER

“Popcorn” Cauliflower is the perfect accompaniment to a winter meal - One head of cauliflower, cut into bite sized pieces, tossed with 1 Tbsp. of oil and sprinkled with salt. Spread in a single layer on cookie sheet. Bake 30-40 minutes at 375 degrees. Flip pieces every 15 minutes.

TIGHTEN YOUR BELT – EATING ON A BUDGET

It’s no surprise, eating out and eating pre-packaged foods hits you where it hurts – the bank account! Not only that, they are not always the healthiest choices. Here are a few low cost “good for you” tips:

- Plan your meals before you shop – look at sales and what fruits and vegetables are in season
- Buy frozen vegetables when on sale – they are fast and easy and there is no waste
- Buy macaroni or spaghetti when on sale. These can be substituted for fancy pasta in all recipes at a fraction of the cost
- Use proteins such as beans and lentils or canned fish instead of meat, or choose tougher pieces of meat such as a chuck roast and use in roasts or stews



DISGUIISING VEGGIES

Disguising vegetables by pureeing them and putting them into foods is a good way to get the nutrients into kids, but may not be helpful in the long term. It doesn’t teach kids to enjoy a variety of tastes and textures. Make sure you continue to serve vegetables at meals and snacks. With time and consistent exposure, kids’ natural curiosity will take over and one day they’ll surprise you.

BEGGING FOR ENERGY

Are your kids asking for Energy Drinks? These pricey drinks are high in sugar and contain caffeine. They offer little in the way of nutrition and most contain added amino acids and herbal stimulants. Health Canada does not recommend energy drinks for children.

GET GOING

Do you have a hectic schedule because of your kids’ sports and afterschool activities? Try these strategies to avoid the temptation to refuel at a fast food pit stop.

- Plan your meals around games and practices – be flexible
- Pack a picnic for family members not playing
- Refuel the athlete enroute or before leaving
- Consider having a large afternoon snack and light supper on return
- Make use of your crock pot, a planned meal in the morning can be easily accessed by all family members when needed

Single servings of yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese and canned fruit, are all quick and easy

SUMMER FOOD SAFETY

Did you know the incidences of food poisoning increase dramatically in the summer? To reduce your risk, follow these simple food safety tips and use a cooler. Use ice packs to keep cold food cold, pack cold foods right out of the fridge, keep cooler in air-conditioned interior of vehicle, and keep perishables in the cooler until you are ready to eat them.

PEELING FRUITS AND VEGGIES

Most vegetables and fruits don't need to be peeled, just washed. By leaving the peel on you are increasing the vitamins and fibre you are eating, and saving time. The more unpeeled vegetables and fruits offered to kids, the more used to them they get.

FRUIT KABOBS

Start with fruit that's fresh but firm, for example pineapple chunks, bananas, large seedless grapes, strawberries, and melon chunks. Be creative and colourful and try fruits in season. Wash and cut into bite sized chunks. A little lemon juice will prevent browning. Thread fruit onto bamboo skewers.

TIPS TO HELP YOUR CHILD MANAGE HIS HALLOWEEN CANDY

- Let your child eat as much of his stash as he wants for a few days.
- After a few days, Halloween is over. Help your child to manage his candy intake by asking him to put it away, out of sight.
- Set some ground rules; a few pieces at snack time and for dessert. If he can follow your rules, let him manage his own candy. If he can't, manage it for him, using the same ground rules, until he learns to manage it himself.

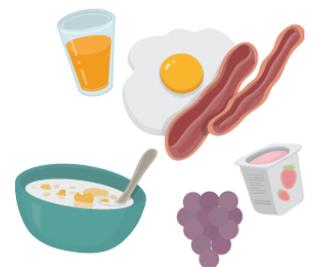


CREATE A FOOD EXPLORER!

Take the kids to the farmer's market and let them pick out a new fruit or vegetable you haven't tried before like radish, turnip, Asian pear, or a different coloured cauliflower, tomato or carrot. A new fruit or veggie is a fun and interesting way to perk up your meals and a great conversation starter. Try using it in a dish that the whole family participated in choosing and preparing.

BREAKFAST—KEEP IT COMING OVER THE HOLIDAYS

Even though your schedule may change over the holidays, breakfast is just as important as during the rest of the year. Include foods from at least three food groups for a good start to the day. Here are a few examples: 1) Fruit, yogurt, muffin 2) Egg, toast, tomato juice 3) Cereal topped with fruit (fresh or dried) and milk 4) Banana smoothie with toast 5) Cheese, grapes, almonds.



SWEET POTATOES AND YAMS

Try them baked with a touch of brown sugar and butter, or cut them into fries, toss with a little oil, and bake until crispy. Most kids will love these and they are truly one of nature's "Nutrition Powerhouses".