

Back to School Nutrition Tips

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DENVER — Parents should use the new school year as an opportunity to rethink and reenergize their child's nutrition. Good nutrition and learning go hand in hand. A healthy breakfast and lunch will provide your child with the fuel he/she needs to stay focused throughout the day. National Jewish Health Clinical Dietician, Emily McCloud, MS, RD, offers the following nutrition tips for school age children.

Start the day off right. Multiple studies demonstrate children who eat breakfast regularly are able to concentrate better, solve problems more easily and perform better on tests than kids who don't eat breakfast.

Don't dismiss school lunch programs. Your child's lunch contributes significantly to their overall nutrient and energy needs, so make the most out of it. Most school lunch programs provide options and allow kids to select three to five items from the menu. Become familiar with the school lunch menu and talk to your child about making good choices. When the main meal is less nutritious like a hamburger, pizza, or taco, encourage your child to also select fruits, vegetables and yogurt or milk.

Involve your children in making lunches. If you are packing lunches, let them help plan and prepare the meal. When kids are involved in selecting the foods that go in their lunches they are more likely to eat their carrot sticks instead of trading them for cookies.

Get creative. There's nothing wrong with traditional healthy breakfasts and lunches, but going off the grid can also keep these important meals fresh. For breakfast try lean ham or turkey on an toasted whole-wheat English muffin, or cheese and fruit slices with whole grain crackers or graham crackers. Instead of the traditional lunch sandwich try mini bagels, tortillas, pita pockets and crackers.

Think food groups. We have all seen the food pyramid and while you may not remember the exact number of servings recommended it is a great guide of items that your child should be eating every day. So each day try to include a whole grain, fruit or vegetable, meat/meat alternative, and dairy.

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Media Contacts

Our team is available to arrange interviews, discuss events and story ideas.

William Allstetter
303.398.1002
allstetterw@njhealth.org

Adam Dormuth
303.398.1082
dormutha@njhealth.org