

Nutrition Nuggets

Food and Fitness for a Healthy Child

February 2018

BEST BITES

Find the right milk

Milk alternatives, such as soy, almond, rice, and coconut milk, are widely available today. That's good news for youngsters who can't have dairy. When choosing non-dairy milk, look for unsweetened varieties that are fortified with calcium and vitamin D.

DID YOU KNOW?

Jumping rope builds bone density, improves heart health, boosts balance and motor coordination, and burns calories. Help your child find a book of jump rope rhymes or games at the library or online. Then, try some together, or encourage her to teach them to her friends.



Thrifty kitchen supplies

Kitchen tools and appliances can be expensive. Consider taking your youngster with you to thrift shops and garage sales to stock up on cooking gadgets. This shows him the value of budget-friendly shopping. Good bets for used items include loaf pans, measuring cups, pots, and blenders.

Just for fun

Q: What did one pretzel say to the other pretzel?

A: "Let's twist!"



Connecting over family meals

Gathering for a meal is about more than just eating—it's also about connecting as a family. Research shows that families who share meals tend to eat healthier foods. Here are ways to encourage together time around the kitchen table.

Eat by candlelight

Eating slowly gives your child's brain time to tell her stomach it's full, reducing her chance of overeating. Try lighting candles to create a relaxed atmosphere—this can encourage everyone to slow down and savor the meal. Plus, your child will feel excited that dinnertime seems "fancy."

Create a conversation box

Everyone will look forward to meals with this idea. Together, think of questions like "If you could travel through time, what decade would you visit?" or "What would happen if kids and parents could trade places for a day?" Let your youngster write the conversation starters on slips



of paper and put them in an empty box. During a meal, she can pull out a question to spark an interesting discussion.

Be flexible

Meals can be at different times of day or in different places. The key is to work with your family's schedule—and even add a touch of fun. One evening, you might eat on a picnic blanket on the living room floor. If everyone can't be home for dinner, have a family breakfast. On warmer days, eat on your patio or at a picnic table at the park. ♥

Bento box lunches

A *bento box* is a container with different foods in individual compartments. Many Japanese children use them for school lunch. Try the bento box approach for a weekend lunch tradition:

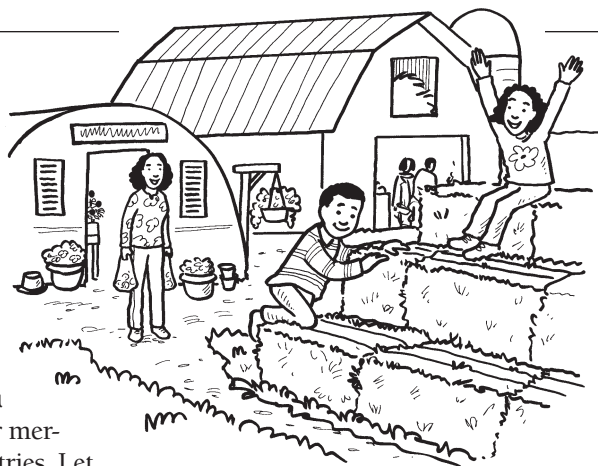
- What youngster wouldn't love cheese "stars," lean turkey "hearts," or melon "basketballs"? Use cookie cutters or other kitchen tools to cut food into fun shapes. Then, place the shapes in ramekins or small food-storage containers arranged on a plate.
- Turn a small ice cube tray into a bento box by putting bite-sized foods into its sections. Your child might fill them with chopped hard-boiled egg, pineapple chunks, and green beans. Or he may like leftover grilled chicken cubes, whole-wheat crackers, grapes, and edamame. ♥



Take a healthy field trip

Nothing beats hands-on learning to spark your youngster's interest in nutritious foods and physical activity. A great way to do this? Plan healthy adventures like these.

Explore food stores. Check out new-to-you health food shops, locally owned markets, or merchants specializing in foods from other countries. Let your child pick out something your regular store doesn't carry, like a loaf of freshly baked bread or an unfamiliar spice blend.

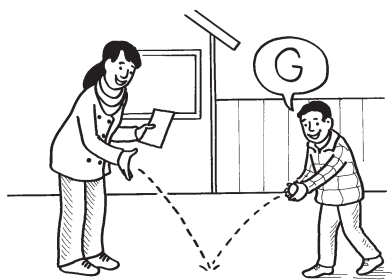


Try a gym. Many community centers, YMCAs, gyms, and rec centers offer free day passes or trial classes. Call around to find one. You and your youngster could swim, play tennis, or perhaps attend a parent-child class like yoga or karate.

Visit a farm. Search online for nearby farms and farmers' markets that are open in winter. Your child can choose fresh local vegetables to sample or to add to a dinnertime salad. A farm tour might also allow him to get exercise by climbing hay bales or rope ladders. ●

ACTIVITY CORNER Bounce and spell

Put an active twist on your child's next spelling test study session. Get his word list and a tennis ball, then find a space indoors or go outside to play a few rounds of Spelling Bee Bounce.



Stand about 6–12 feet from your youngster, say a word from his list, and bounce the ball to him. As he says each letter, he bounces the ball to you and then you bounce it back to him. If he gets a letter wrong, say, "Oops, try again!" and he starts the word over.

Get creative in this game. He could spin around before bouncing the ball, or he could pretend to shoot it to you like a basketball free-throw.

Before you know it, he'll have mastered his entire spelling list—and gotten exercise along the way! ●

Q&A Bedtime snacks

Q: My daughter always wants a snack before she goes to bed. What should I give her?

A: A bedtime snack can help stave off hunger until morning, especially if your family eats dinner on the early side.

The recommendations for bedtime snacks are the same as those for snacks your child eats any time of day: Stick to small portions, limit sugar, and choose proteins and whole grains.

Good options include oatmeal, whole-wheat toast topped with a sliced banana, or whole-grain pita pockets stuffed with hummus and shredded carrots. On the other hand, you'll want your youngster to stay away from less healthy items like cookies, cupcakes, and chips.

Tip: Avoid giving your child a snack in the hour before bedtime, since digesting food can make it harder for her to fall asleep. ●



IN THE KITCHEN Kid favorites: Baked, not fried

Chicken nuggets and french fries are popular with children—and they can be nutritious if they're not actually fried. Rethink these favorites with the following healthy twists.

Chicken nuggets

Cut $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. boneless, skinless chicken breasts into bite-sized pieces, and brush lightly with olive oil. In a bowl, mix $\frac{1}{2}$ cup whole-wheat bread crumbs, 2 tbsp. grated Parmesan cheese, and 1 tsp. Italian seasoning. Roll chicken in mixture to coat. Cook on a lightly



greased baking sheet at 425° for 12–15 minutes, flipping halfway through, until chicken is fully cooked.

French fries

Cut 3 medium russet potatoes into strips. Lightly coat two baking sheets with cooking spray. In a bowl, combine potatoes with 2 tbsp. olive oil, 1 tsp. chili powder (optional), $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. salt, and $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. pepper. Arrange on baking sheets, and place in a 400° oven for 30 minutes (turning over after 15 minutes) or until crispy. Spread fries on a paper towel-lined plate to soak up excess oil. ●

OUR PURPOSE

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BEST BITES

Sandwiches for dinner

Here's a no-cook idea for busy weeknights. Have your child help you set out whole-grain bread plus healthy fixings, and let each person make her own sandwich. You might offer lean sliced turkey and ham, cheese, lettuce, and tomato. Or put out leftover chicken and canned tuna, light mayonnaise, chopped celery, and halved grapes so family members can whip up chicken or tuna salad.

Let's fly kites!

Spend a windy March afternoon flying kites together. You can get everyone's heart rate up by running across a field, taking turns holding the kite string. If you have two kites, race, and see who can keep his kite in the air the longest.



DID YOU KNOW?

Some foods “brush” your youngster's teeth! Chewing carrots, celery, leafy greens (spinach, kale), and apples with the skin on can help to clear away plaque and food particles. Plus, the acid in apples kills germs that cause cavities. *Tip:* Suggest that your child eat one of these natural “toothbrushes” at the end of a meal if she isn't able to brush right away.

Just for fun

Q: What kind of chair is good at yoga?

A: A folding chair!



Just-right portions

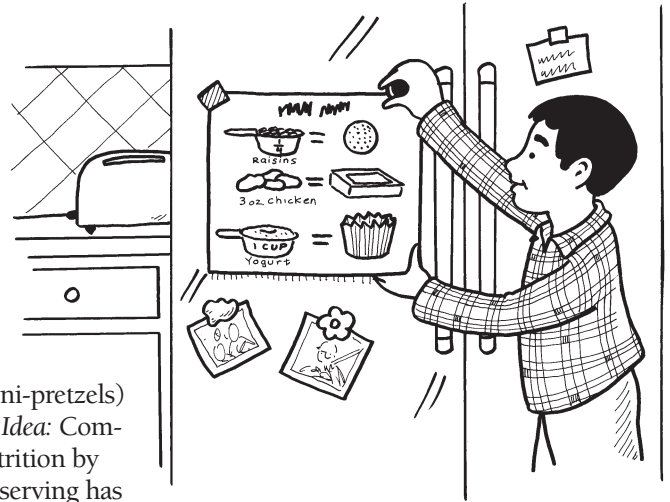
A healthy lifestyle includes eating the right kinds of food—and the right amounts. To ensure your youngster doesn't develop a case of “portion distortion,” try these tips.

Measure it out

Look at nutrition labels together at snack time. Ask your child to read the serving size (perhaps 20 mini-pretzels) and count out the amount. *Idea:* Combine math practice with nutrition by posing questions like, “If 1 serving has 110 mg of sodium, how much sodium is in 2 servings?” (Answer: $110 + 110 = 220$ mg.) You can point out that sticking to 1 serving will help limit his salt intake.

Visualize sizes

Making a picture chart can teach your youngster to “eyeball” servings. First, he should list his favorite foods. Then, help him look up the serving sizes on food packages or online. Beside each food on his list, he could draw an object that's about the same size as 1 serving. *Examples:* a golf ball for $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of raisins, a deck



of cards for 3 oz. of chicken, a cupcake wrapper for 1 cup of yogurt.

Divide it up

Restaurant portions are often much bigger than standard servings. Your child might eat $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of pasta at home, but a restaurant may dish up 2 cups. To control portions while dining out, you and your youngster could share an entree. Or package up half in a to-go box when your food arrives—you'll both eat less, and you'll have food for tomorrow! ♥

Dribble and kick

Your youngster and her friends can improve their speed and coordination—and soccer skills—with these games.

Relay race. Have two teams line up at one end of a field or yard, and place two upside-down trash cans about 20 feet away. On “Go,” the first person on each team dribbles a soccer ball down to and around the can. Then, she kicks it all the way back to the next team member, who does the same thing, until everyone has had a turn. The first team to finish wins.

Keep-away. Draw a giant circle with sidewalk chalk. Everyone stands inside, and one person dribbles a soccer ball. The other players try to steal it and kick it outside the circle. Whoever steals the ball is the next dribbler. ♥



Busting food myths

Just because a grocery item contains the word *fruit*, *grain*, or *vegetable* doesn't make the food healthy. Share these common food misconceptions with your child.

Myth: Fruit juice is a good source of nutrients.

Fact: While fruit juice does contain vitamins, it lacks fiber and is usually full of sugar.

Best bet: Encourage your youngster to eat whole fruits, such as bananas and oranges, which give her more fiber ounce for ounce than juice.



Myth: Cereal is always a nutritious breakfast.

Fact: Many cereals, especially those marketed to children, pack in lots of sugar. Look out for “sneaky” sugars in the list of ingredients, such as cane juice or molasses.

Best bet: Opt for 100% whole-grain cereals that are high in fiber (5 grams or more per serving) and low in sugar (less than 8 grams per serving). Send your youngster on a “treasure hunt” in the cereal aisle to find varieties that meet those standards.

Myth: Vegetable chips make a healthy snack.

Fact: Packaged veggie chips can have as many calories as potato chips, and they may be high in sodium, too. Plus, nutrients are lost when the vegetables are processed.

Best bet: For the crunch without the calories, get your child in the habit of snacking on raw vegetables like carrots and snap peas. ♥

PARENT TO PARENT If your child is bullied

Recently, my son Kevin told me that kids at school had been making fun of him because of his weight. I was glad he confided in me, and I tried to comfort him. But we were both upset and unsure of what to do next.

I talked with my neighbor, who's a school nurse, and she said if this is going on repeatedly, Kevin is being bullied. Unfortunately, she said, bullies tend to target overweight kids. She recommended that I tell Kevin's teacher, and she gave me advice for talking to my son at home.



I stressed to Kevin that it wasn't his fault. I reminded him of healthy changes our family has made lately, such as eating more fruits and vegetables, and playing basketball rather than video games.

I told him that if we keep it up, we'll feel better and be healthier—and that matters more than what others think. ♥

ACTIVITY CORNER

Step up your steps

Keeping track of steps can be a fun challenge for the whole family. Use these ideas to help your child take more steps each day.

Count. Let her use an inexpensive pedometer, and she'll enjoy watching the number get higher and higher. Have her write down her daily steps for a week, and help her tally the total. Each week, challenge her to beat her previous score.

Mix it up. Suggest that your youngster think of different ways to fit in extra steps. She might recommend walking to the store rather than driving, doing laps around the living room, or running in place while watching TV. ♥



IN THE KITCHEN

Breakfast surprises

These fun twists on breakfast will help your youngster start off his day with a smile.

Ice pops. Add $\frac{2}{3}$ cup nonfat Greek vanilla yogurt to a small paper cup. Mix in thin slices of your child's favorite fruits, such as frozen peaches or raspberries. Add a craft stick to the center, and freeze overnight. In the morning, peel off the cup, and enjoy breakfast-on-a-stick!



“Cloud” eggs. Separate 4 eggs, putting the whites in one bowl and each yolk into an individual small bowl. Add $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. salt to whites, and beat with a mixer until stiff peaks form. Gently fold in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup shredded cheddar cheese. Drop 4 mounds of the mixture onto a baking sheet lined with parchment paper, and use the back of a spoon to indent centers. Bake at 450° for 3 minutes. Carefully add 1 yolk to each “cloud,” and bake 3 more minutes. ♥

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Better sports snacks

Whether it's your turn to provide team snacks or your child is picking out his own post-practice snack, help him choose something nutritious. Browse the produce aisle for fresh fruit like oranges or grapes. Or look for a winning combination of protein and complex carbohydrates, such as string cheese with whole-wheat crackers.

Dance away

Hip-hop, tap, ballet... dancing strengthens muscles, improves flexibility, and gives your youngster's heart and lungs a workout. Put on music, and invite her to dance with you or with friends. Is there a style she especially enjoys? Consider signing her up for low-cost classes through your parks and recreation department.



DID YOU KNOW?

Asparagus is in season, which means it's at its height of flavor and low point in price. To cook, break off the tough ends, and toss with olive oil, salt, and pepper. Roast on a baking sheet at 400° for 10 minutes, top with Parmesan cheese, and cook 5 minutes more.

Just for fun

Mom: Eat your spinach. It'll put color in your cheeks.

Jack: But I don't want green cheeks!



Earth Day food and fun

Every April 22, we celebrate Earth Day—a time to focus on the planet's health. Get your youngster involved, and encourage her to focus on her own health, too, with these eco-friendly activities.

Enjoy a waste-free meal

Can your family eat an entire meal without wasting any food? One idea is to cut food into smaller pieces before family members serve themselves. For example, set out platters of grilled chicken strips, baked potato halves, and apple slices. Encourage everyone to take only what they think they will eat.

Throw a leftovers "party"

With your youngster, look through your refrigerator, and make a list of leftovers or other items that need to be eaten soon. Then, she could use her list to create a menu for a meal of leftovers. For instance, she might suggest a casserole with leftover rice and veggies or banana



pudding made with overripe bananas for dessert.

Join a cleanup

Participate in a neighborhood or park cleanup, and enjoy a picnic afterward. Get trash bags and gloves for picking up litter. Let your child help you pack nutritious foods, such as turkey wraps and fruit salad, in reusable containers. After you've worked up a sweat cleaning up the trash, wash your hands, and eat together. ♥

Easy-on-your-wallet protein

Protein is the building block of your child's bones and muscles. By choosing meatless protein more often, you'll save money and keep the choices healthy. Consider these ideas.

● **Eggs, cheese, and milk.** Combine these three protein-rich ingredients for a simple meatless dinner. You could make scrambled egg burritos, omelets, or even a quiche in a store-bought crust. *Note:* Try to use nonfat milk and low-fat cheese.

● **Beans and legumes.** Plant proteins like these are low in fat and cholesterol. Stretch your protein budget by mixing 1 can black beans (drained, rinsed) with 1 lb. lean ground beef or turkey for burgers or meatloaf. Or toss whole-grain noodles with peas or white beans instead of sausage. ♥



Join the (fit) club!

Starting a neighborhood fitness club can motivate your youngster to stay active with friends. Here's how.

Organize. Let your child invite friends over for a planning meeting. Encourage them to start by coming up with a fun name for their club like "Kids on the Move" or "The Fit Crew."

Brainstorm. They could think up fun activities, such as playing softball or kickball in their backyards, hosting activity "classes" in their homes, or meeting at the neighborhood pool.



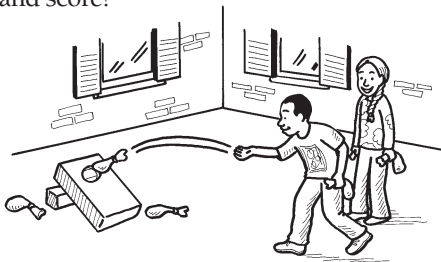
Plan. Suggest that they write a schedule that includes the time and place for each meeting, as well as who will lead the event. For instance, a member who has a badminton net might host a game. Or one who knows tai chi may teach a class in the basement.

Tip: Point out that they'll need parents' approval to host a meeting at home or for an activity that requires adult supervision, such as riding bikes or going to a playground. ♥

ACTIVITY CORNER

Beanbag toss

Here's a backyard game that's almost as much fun to make as it is to play. Together, follow these simple steps to create your own beanbag-toss set, then aim, throw, and score!



Make it. Turn a large, shallow cardboard box upside down. Give your child a small round paper plate, and have him trace a circle about six inches from one edge of the box. Cut out the circle. Then, prop up the target end of the box on a phone book or a block of wood. Make six beanbags by filling old socks with dry beans and closing them securely with rubber bands.

Play it. Give each person three beanbags. Take turns tossing one beanbag at the board. A player earns three points if his bag goes through the hole and one point if it lands (and stays) on the board. The first to reach 21 points wins. ♥



Q&A Making takeout more nutritious

Q: On busy days, buying takeout often seems like our only choice for dinner. How can I make it healthier?

A: Together, collect or print out menus from places that offer nutritious items. Then, help your child circle or highlight the healthiest choices. On a pizza menu, she might circle *thin crust* and toppings like *spinach* and *pineapple*. For a sub shop, she could highlight *whole-wheat bread*, *lean turkey*, and *lettuce*. That way, she'll see at a glance what to order when you're in a rush.



Better yet, plan ahead when possible so you won't need takeout. Have easy-to-cook items on hand like frozen vegetables, instant brown rice, or turkey meatballs. Or make a double batch of soup or a casserole on the weekend, and freeze half to defrost on a busy weeknight. ♥

IN THE KITCHEN

Healthy homemade condiments

Store-bought condiments often come loaded with sugar and sodium. Try making these healthier versions with your child. (*Note:* Refrigerate each condiment in a jar for at least 2 hours before serving, and keep for up to 2 weeks.)

Duck sauce

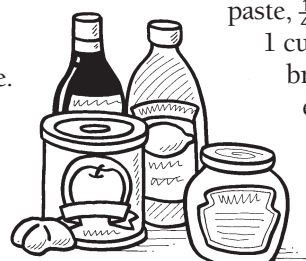
Combine $\frac{3}{4}$ cup each no-sugar-added preserves (apricot or peach) and applesauce. Stir in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup rice vinegar, 2 minced garlic cloves, 1 tsp. low-sodium soy sauce, 2 tsp. minced ginger, and 1 tsp. chili powder. Serve with chicken or fish.

Honey mustard

In a small bowl, whisk together $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Dijon mustard, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup honey, and 1 tsp. lemon juice. Your youngster can dip in whole-wheat pretzel sticks or spread on a ham sandwich.

Ketchup

In a blender, combine 8 oz. tomato paste, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup apple cider vinegar, 1 cup water, and 2 tbsp. brown sugar. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. each garlic powder, onion powder, salt, and all-spice. Blend on high 2–3 minutes. Use on turkey burgers or with sweet potato fries. ♥



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