

Nutrition Nuggets

Food and Fitness for a Healthy Child

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Stonington Public Schools Nutrition Services

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BEST BITES

Clean cuts

Here's a way to teach your child about food safety when she helps out in the kitchen. Explain that bacteria from raw meat can live on cutting boards, so you use a separate board just for fruits and vegetables. Show her which board is which, and let her use a butter knife to cut a peeled avocado or canned peach half on the one for produce.



Active all day

Experts recommend at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day for children and adults. No need to think of it as formal exercise! Turn on upbeat music and dance with your youngster. Put out active toys, and hula hoop or jump rope together. Or tape a family hopscotch grid on the floor, and challenge him to a game.

DID YOU KNOW?

Children ages 4–8 need 25 mg of vitamin C daily and kids ages 9–13 need 45 mg. Luckily, it's pretty easy to find kid-friendly sources of this essential nutrient. In fact, just one orange contains 70 mg. More ways for your child to get vitamin C: Let her snack on raw red bell pepper spears. Toss strawberries into a spinach salad at lunch. Serve oven-roasted broccoli for dinner.

Just for fun

Q: What do you take before a meal?

A: A seat.



Alternatives to fast food

After a long day of school and work, you may be tempted to hit the drive-thru for your family's dinner. How can you resist the tug of fast food and keep things healthier? Use these strategies to stock up on quick and easy dinner options.

Deli "fixins"

Ask your child to create a "deli menu" for make-your-own-sandwich nights. He could invent sandwich combinations, then draw pictures and write descriptions of them. ("The Sweet Pickler: Toasted whole-wheat bread, lean turkey, lettuce, extra pickles, honey mustard.") At dinnertime, everyone can make a sandwich from his menu—or design their own.

Breakfast for dinner

Many breakfast foods can be prepared in a jiffy, making them ideal for busy evenings. For microwave scrambled eggs, whisk 2 eggs in a microwave-safe bowl and heat for 2 minutes, stirring once halfway through. Or just open a



box of whole-grain cereal, and let each person add nonfat milk and their favorite fruit.

Slow-cooker day

It's nice to sit down to a hot meal that's already cooked, so consider keeping slow-cooker staples on hand. *Examples:* chicken breasts, low-sodium broth, canned beans and tomatoes, frozen vegetables. Then, let your youngster help you find recipes. In the morning, add ingredients to the slow cooker together. If your family works and learns at home, you'll enjoy the aroma all day! ♥

Active story time

Everyone knows reading is good for the mind. With this fun activity, it's good for the body, too.

Read a book to your youngster that has lots of action words, such as dance, hop, run, and jump. Then, read it again slowly, and have her act out the story as you go. For instance, read *Hop on Pop* (Dr. Seuss). She could jump up when you read, "Up, pup," or crouch down small when you say, "Mouse on house."

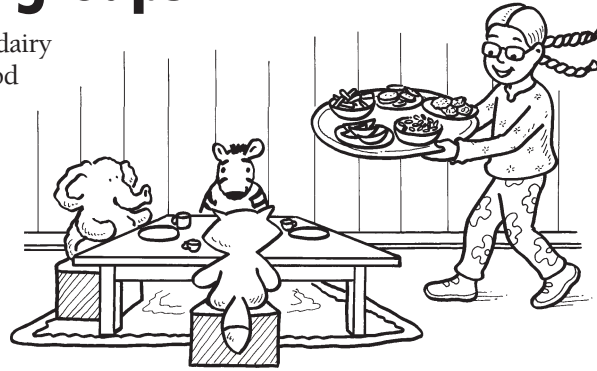
Suggest that your child use props, too. For instance, read *Jack and the Beanstalk*. She can climb on a chair when Jack climbs the beanstalk, and then jump down and run away when Jack does. ♥



Explore the food groups

Fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, dairy ... a balanced diet includes all five food groups! These ideas will help your child learn about them.

Twenty questions. Ask your youngster to pick a food group (say, fruit). Secretly think of a food from that group (banana), and let her pose up to 20 yes-or-no



questions to guess it. (“Does it grow on a tree?” “Is it green?” “Do monkeys eat it?”) Now name a food group and have her choose a food for you to guess. Let your child jot down the foods used in the game and pick one from each group to add to your grocery list.

Small plates. Many cultures eat meals made up of small plates to share—known as *tapas* in Spain, *mezze* in the Middle East, and *anti-pasto* in Italy. With your youngster,

choose a food from each group, and make a small-plates meal together. Maybe she’ll suggest shrimp skewers (protein), sliced carrots (vegetable), couscous (grain), a diced pear (fruit), and cheese cubes (dairy). As she enjoys the meal, she’ll learn to eat from each group. ♥

ACTIVITY CORNER

Outdoor winter fun

Playing outside in winter brings its own sense of joy. Try these games that will help your youngster stay active regardless of the weather.

● **Snowball contest.** Set a timer for 5 minutes, and race to create the largest snowball. Then, combine your snowballs into one giant ball.

● **Penguin waddle.** Have each family member place a small ball on his feet (like a father penguin carries an egg). Race across the yard. If you drop your “egg,” return to the starting point. The first player to reach the other side wins.



● **Ice globes.** Blow up balloons, and before tying them, let your child fill them $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way with water and add a few drops of food coloring. Freeze 3–4 hours. Use scissors to cut off the balloons, and he’ll have beautiful ice globes to roll and kick around. ♥

Q&A Food allergies at holiday time

Q: My daughter has a peanut allergy. How can I help her stay safe during the holidays—and beyond?

A: Allergies and holidays can be tricky! If you will have meals with relatives or friends this season, be sure to tell them about your child’s peanut allergy.

Explain that if you visit for a meal, or if they bring food or send food gifts to your home, they should make sure not to use peanuts or peanut products. They’ll also need to read food labels carefully and thoroughly clean surfaces that may have been in contact with peanuts. And point out that almond butter or sunflower seed butter can be used in place of peanut butter in recipes.

Finally, before visiting with anyone, remind your daughter about her allergy. Let her know you’ll help her choose safe foods and ask about any she’s unsure of—habits that will need to become automatic for her as she gets older. ♥



IN THE KITCHEN

Creative cracker toppings

For a quick snack or a festive party platter, encourage your child to think beyond the usual cheese and crackers. Let him help you put together these fresh, healthy combos on whole-wheat crackers.

Cheesy fruit

Top crackers with part-skim ricotta cheese. Add a kiwi slice and a drizzle of honey.

Pesto

Spoon pesto sauce onto a cracker. Top with diced tomato.

Garden veggie

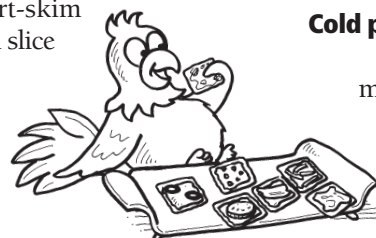
Start with a layer of hummus. Over it, arrange a slice of cucumber and radish.

Seafood snack

Put chunks of canned salmon on a cracker, and sprinkle with pepper and thinly sliced chives.

Cold pizza

Cover a cracker with marinara sauce. Add shredded low-fat mozzarella cheese and diced green pepper. ♥



OUR PURPOSE

To provide busy parents with practical ways to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity for their children.

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