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PACKING A HEALTHY LUNCHBOX

Back-to-school meals with kid-appeal

You've shopped for the perfect lunchbox for your child, now comes the hard part, filling it with something nutritious that your child will eat. A special report published by the American Cancer Society found that the average child in California eats 3 servings of fruits and vegetables a day. This number is a far cry from the recommended 2-4 servings of fruits and 3-5 servings of vegetables per day set forth by the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Guide Pyramid. Packing a lunchbox with nutritious foods can be a challenge at best.

Healthy lunches for healthy learning

Studies have shown that children who eat well, learn better. That is why it is a good idea to make sure your child is getting wholesome, nutritious lunches. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released a policy statement that children and adolescents are not getting enough calcium in their diets. It is important that lunches include daily servings from the USDA Food Guide Pyramid. It is recommended that lunches include 1-2 ounces of meat, fish, poultry, eggs or cheese, 2-3 servings of bread, cereal, rice or pasta, 1-2 servings of vegetables, 1 serving of fruit, and 1 serving of milk.

Think outside the box

Try a new twist when preparing sandwiches. Cut sandwiches into different shapes or decorate them with raisins, fruit, or vegetables. Instead of bread, try-using rice cakes, pita pockets, or flavored

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tortillas. Children like small portions. Do not pack a lot of one thing. Pack a variety of items like mini-bagels, fruit slices, and low-fat cheese cubes. Kids like nifty little compartments and piecing together a meal like the quick and easy lunch kits found in the grocery store. With a little creativity, you can create your own lunch kit that is more nutritious and costs a lot less too. Try purchasing several single-serving plastic containers in unique shapes and colors. Fill them with mozzarella cheese, dry salami, low-fat crackers or pretzels, baby carrots, fresh fruit slices or dried fruit.

Remember food safety

When temperatures rise above 75 degrees, unrefrigerated meats, mayonnaise, eggs, yogurt and milk can become dangerous. Freeze a single-serving box of 100% juice overnight. Put it next to perishable food items in the lunchbox. By lunchtime, the food will still be cold and the juice will be mostly defrosted. Insulated lunch pouches or bags are your best choice for keeping cold foods cold. Pack perishables close to the freezer pack or colder items. It is important to keep the lunch pouch or box out of direct sunlight and away from radiators or heaters.

School lunch packing can be a lesson in nutrition. At the same time it can also build healthy eating habits that can last a lifetime.

Sources: 1999 California Children's Eating and Exercise Practices Survey. *American Cancer Society and the Public Health Institute*. 2000:1-6.
Press Release - AAP Policy Addresses Calcium Intake in Children. *Pediatrics*. November 1, 1999, 5 p.m.
(<http://www.aap.org/advocacy/archives/novcalc.htm>)
http://www.wellweb.com/nutri/packing_a_healthy_school_lunch.htm

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