

Nutrition Nuggets

Food and Fitness for a Healthy Child

December 2010

Greater Johnstown School District



BEST BITES

Crawl space

Your child probably hasn't crawled since he was a baby. But crawling is a great way to strengthen arm and leg muscles—and keep him moving. Have crawling races in your house. Or set up an obstacle course that requires crawling (under a table, through a large cardboard box, behind a sofa).

Healthier hot chocolate



'Tis the season for hot cocoa. Make it healthier by making your own instead of using sugary mixes. Simply heat 1 cup fat-free milk and stir in 1 tsp. cocoa powder and 1 tsp. sugar. *Tip:* For minty hot cocoa, add a drop of peppermint extract, or make Mexican hot chocolate by mixing in ¼ tsp. cinnamon.

DID YOU KNOW?

Oregano is one of the most antioxidant-rich herbs. It can boost the body's immune system and help fight disease. You can add oregano—either fresh or dried—to all kinds of foods, including pasta dishes, grilled meats, fish, and salads. And your child will probably like the flavor because it will remind her of pizza!

Just for fun

Q: What's the best thing to put in meatloaf?

A: A fork!



Solutions for picky eaters

Emma will only eat foods that are white. Bryan doesn't like anything that's mushy. Maddie wants peanut butter and jelly at every meal.

Do you have an eater like this in your family? Here are five strategies you can try:

1. Serve meals at about the same time every day so your child gets used to eating then. And make sure she's hungry at mealtime by not letting her have snacks or drinks for at least an hour beforehand.
2. Give your youngster the same meal everyone else is having. Once she gets used to a no-substitutions policy, she's unlikely to go hungry for long. *Note:* If she doesn't eat dinner, offer her a small, healthy snack later—but not a whole meal. That way, she won't get in the habit of refusing dinner and having the food of her choice anyway.
3. Keep the mood light at meals. Have pleasant conversations about your days, rather than focusing on what your child is or isn't eating. Praise her when she



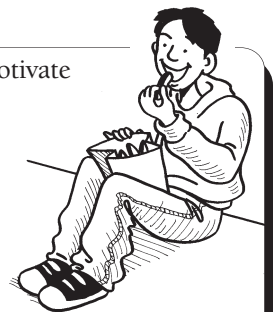
tries new foods, but don't make a fuss if she doesn't. Treating food issues lightly will help you avoid power struggles.

4. Invite friends or cousins who eat a variety of foods. Your youngster may become interested in trying new things when other kids her age are happily eating them.
5. Using dessert as a reward for eating a meal can backfire. In fact, making dessert the prize gives your child the idea that healthy food is a chore to get through rather than something to enjoy. Instead, you might serve dessert once or twice a week as an ordinary end to a meal. ♥

Food that's fun to eat

Presenting healthy food in new and different ways can motivate your youngster to eat it. Try clever ideas like these:

- Dish up bite-sized foods. Heat frozen meatballs, or make your own with lean ground beef, turkey, or pork, and then stick a toothpick in each one. Or prepare tiny pizzas: Top mini-bagels with tomato sauce and skim mozzarella cheese, and bake until bubbly.
- Make a meal-in-a-bag with this healthy twist on fish and chips. Cut a sweet potato into slices lengthwise, place on a cookie sheet, and sprinkle with a little cinnamon sugar. Bake at 350° for 30 minutes. For the fish, dip tilapia or mahimahi filets in beaten eggs and then in crushed cornflakes. Sauté until cooked through and crisp. Wrap the fish and chips in foil, put in a brown paper bag, and let your child eat with his hands. ♥



Active winter breaks

School's out, and the weather is cold. How can you keep your children from spending winter break in front of the TV? Use these suggestions.

Community programs

School breaks are challenging when both parents—or a single parent—work. Solve the problem and keep your youngsters active by enrolling them in a sports or activity-based program. Check for low-cost or free options at schools, after-school programs, community centers, parks and recreation departments, or gymnastics centers.



Outdoor fun

Build physical activity into family time. If it snows, go sledding or build snowmen, snow sculptures, or snow forts. Rent cross-country skis (or find them at a yard sale), and trek through town or the woods. Hiking is fun on grass or in snow—dress in layers, and head for a nearby park, mountain, or lake shore. Or go ice-skating on a safely frozen pond.

Travel tips

If you're taking a road trip, stop and stretch every hour or so along the way. Take along a football, baseball and mitts, or bubble solution and wands, and play at rest stops. Also, look for playgrounds on your route where your children can get out and run around (search at <http://playspacefinder.kaboom.org>). ♥

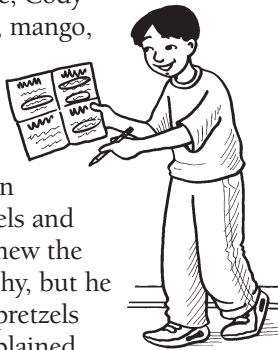
PARENT TO PARENT

Healthy food game

A neighbor recently told me about a game her family plays. I thought it would be a good way for my son Cody to practice making healthy food choices.

Here's how it works. We each fold a sheet of paper in half horizontally and then again vertically. When we unfold the paper, we label the four sections "Breakfast," "Lunch," "Dinner," and "Snacks." Then, we write four foods in each section. We switch papers, and another player circles the healthiest items.

For example, Cody listed pretzels, mango, donuts, and cookies in the snack section. He was surprised when I circled pretzels and mango—he knew the fruit was healthy, but he didn't realize pretzels could be. I explained that some pretzels are unsalted or made with whole wheat. We're having fun playing our game, and it gets us thinking about healthy choices. ♥

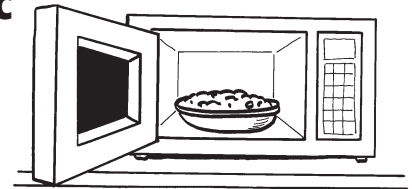


IN THE KITCHEN

Microwave magic

When you're a busy parent, the microwave can be your best friend! Using a microwave is not only quick, it can be healthy, too. Dishes usually aren't greased, and vegetables are cooked without liquid, so vitamins and minerals aren't lost. Try these ideas.

Easy nachos. Cover a plate with baked tortilla chips. Add drained canned black beans or low-fat refried beans, and top with leftover chicken or beef, shredded cheddar cheese, and chopped tomatoes. Heat just until the cheese melts.



Creole succotash. In a microwave-safe bowl, combine 2 cups frozen corn and 2 cups frozen shelled edamame. Microwave until hot. Add Creole seasoning to taste.

Ham and cheese wrap. Lay a slice of ham and a piece of string cheese on a whole-wheat tortilla. Roll up the tortilla, and microwave for 30 seconds. ♥

ACTIVITY CORNER

Lights, camera, action!

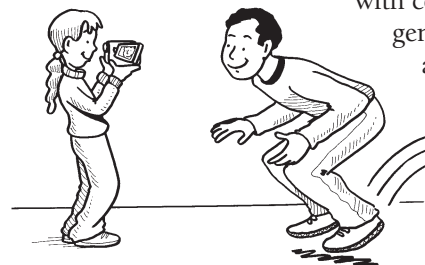
Turn your family into stars and encourage physical activity by filming your own exercise video.

Start by brainstorming activities to include. Then, use a video camera to film each person leading different exercises. *Tip:* Take turns filming so everyone gets in the video.

You might do stretches like reaching for the sky, touching your toes, or circling your shoulders up and around. Move on to

more active exercises, such as "leap frogs" (crouch down and jump forward like a frog; repeat across a room and back) or "opposites" (standing, lift your right foot, touch your left hand to it, and hop; alternate sides and repeat). Finish

with cool-down activities like gentle stretches of legs and arms. *Idea:* Lie on the floor and pretend you're just getting up in the morning, stretching each limb to help you wake up. ♥



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