

# Nutrition Nuggets

Food and Fitness for a Healthy Child

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Palos Heights School District 128  
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## BEST BITES

### Volunteer in the cafeteria

If your schedule permits, ask about volunteering during your child's lunchtime. The school might appreciate a hand with helping children line up or making sure they throw away trash and recycle items. Plus, you'll get a window into your youngster's world—and she'll be excited to see you in the cafeteria.

### Ready to play

Make it easier for your child to run out and play by keeping sports equipment handy. Place a basket by the front door, in the coat closet, or in the garage, and ask him to help you fill it with "active stuff." For instance, he could add roller skates, balls, a jump rope, and a hockey stick.

### Foot power

Here's an easy way for your family to get more exercise—skip the escalator. Instead, take the stairs at the dentist's office, the subway station, a department store, or a hotel. Or at an airport, walk on the moving walkway rather than just riding on it. You'll show your youngster ways to let her feet do the walking!

### Just for fun

**Q:** Why do you go to bed every night?

**A:** Because the bed won't come to you!



## A change for the better

Good news: Healthy changes to your youngster's routine can be habit-forming! As the new year begins, try ideas like these that can have a lifelong positive effect.

### Eat at home

Did you know that restaurant and fast-food meals typically have more fat, sodium, sugar, and calories—and fewer vegetables—than home-cooked food? Plus, when you eat out, you don't always know exactly what's in your dishes. Set a goal to eat at home one to two times more a week than you do now. And once you meet that target, add another meal a week—until eventually you're eating mostly at your own kitchen table. *Bonus:* You'll save money, too.

### Choose healthy snacks

Snack time is often when kids load up on added sugar and saturated fat. Get your youngster involved in changing that outcome by putting him in charge of "Mission Junk Food." His job is to root out the junk food at home and help replace it with healthier choices. He could separate the items with empty calories and saturated



fat (candy, soda, chips, cookies) and put them away for occasional eating. Then, when you food shop, have him pick out better choices like fruits, vegetables, nuts, and plain popcorn.

### Turn off the screen

When your child is glued to a television, video game, or computer, he's likely not getting exercise. Set "device-free" hours for each day, and devote the time to active play. Encourage your youngster to make fun signs for the devices, such as "Keep off. Active children at play!" *Note:* Your child will take his cue from you. Try to limit your own screen time and be active, too. 🍎

### Let's play grocery store!

In a pretend grocery store, your child can learn about food groups, as well as practice reading, math, and sorting skills.

For a week or two, let her save empty food boxes and rinse cans and milk jugs. Then, she could set up her market in a corner of your family room or in her bedroom. Suggest that she label bins or shelves for "Fruits," "Vegetables," "Dairy," "Grains," and "Protein" and stock them with the food containers.

Encourage her to read the nutrition labels, and point out where it's good to have higher numbers (vitamins) and lower ones (sodium, calories). Finally, have her put prices on each item. Now you can go shopping—she'll be the cashier who rings up your "purchases." 🍎



# Which cereal?

Cereal is often a child's favorite breakfast. Make it a healthy one, too, with these tips:

- A 100% whole grain (whole wheat, whole oats) should be the first ingredient listed.
- Look for at least 3 grams of fiber per serving to help with digestion, feeling full, and keeping cholesterol low.
- Try for 5 grams or more of protein per serving to give your youngster energy for learning and playing.
- Find varieties that have vitamins and minerals equaling at least 25 percent of daily recommended values.



- Keep sugar to single digits (9 grams or less). *Idea:* Let your youngster add fresh fruit for sweetness—and extra nutrients.
- Sodium should be 220 mg or less per serving.
- Check the serving size. Rather than pouring the cereal directly into the bowl, your child could use a measuring cup so she gets the correct amount.

*Note:* Store brands can be just as healthy as name brands—and they will be less expensive. ●



## O&A Watch for the "health halo"

**Q:** I heard the tail end of a radio report about "health halo" foods—foods that sound healthy, but aren't really. Can you give me examples of these?

**A:** It's true that some foods seem like they would be healthy, but in fact they're less healthy than you might expect.

Take smoothies, for example. If you blend fresh fruit, ice cubes, and 1 cup yogurt, that's a perfectly healthy meal or snack for your child. However, if she gets a giant smoothie made with ice cream, frozen yogurt, and added sugar—that's not too healthy.

Another example is items labeled "low fat," "sugar free," or "reduced sodium." A food—say, jelly beans—may have no fat, but it's hardly healthy. So it's important to read the rest of the label and see what's *in* the food, not just what's *not* in it. ●



## ACTIVITY CORNER

### Stretch like your favorite animal

Stretching is fun—and a good way to prepare for more vigorous physical activity. Before he stretches, have your youngster warm up his muscles by marching in place or dancing around. Then, suggest these moves from the animal kingdom.

**Butterfly.** Sit with your knees bent and the soles of your feet together. Hold your feet with your hands, and flap your legs up and down like butterfly wings. Then, stop flapping and, keeping your spine straight, stretch your belly button toward your feet.



- Hold each stretch for 10–30 seconds.
- Repeat 5–10 times.
- Remember to breathe while you stretch.
- Stretch at least 3 times a week.

**Giraffe.** Stand tall with your feet together. Keeping your back straight, reach your arms straight up and high overhead. (Don't lock your elbows.)

**Cow-cat.** Get on your hands and knees, with your back "flat like a table." Inhale, drop your tummy down, and slowly lift your neck and head up (like a cow). Exhale, look down, and lift up your tummy and spine so your back arches up (like a cat). ●

## IN THE KITCHEN

### Hearty winter stews

Greet the chill of January with a comforting stew—your family will be glad you did! Here are easy versions of two classics.

**Beef stew.** Heat 1 tbsp. olive oil in a heavy pot, and brown 2 lbs. boneless beef chuck (cut into cubes). Remove the beef, and in the same pot, sauté 1 chopped onion until soft. Add 3 oz. tomato paste and 10 oz. tomato sauce, and stir 3–4 minutes. Mix in 4 cups water, 4 cubed potatoes, and 2 sliced carrots. Return the beef to the

pot, and cook on low for 1–2 hours. Makes 8 servings. Freezes well.

**Shrimp gumbo.** In a large skillet, sauté 1 crushed garlic clove and 1 chopped onion in 2 tbsp. olive oil. When soft, add 1 chopped bell pepper, 1 stalk chopped celery, and 8 oz. sliced okra (fresh or frozen), and cook 5 minutes. Stir in a 14.5-oz. can chopped tomatoes, 1 quart water or stock, and ½ tsp. cayenne pepper. Cook 30 minutes until thick. Add 1 lb. large shrimp, and stir 2–4 minutes until cooked through. Serves 4. ●



## OUR PURPOSE

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

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