



All in the Family

Family Meals Associated with Better Health



Whether it is Sunday brunch, a sit down dinner, or a quick weekday breakfast, the act of eating with others may be good for your health. A recent study followed a diverse group of about 2,000 teens for 10 years, discovering frequency of family meals during adolescence significantly correlated with reduced odds of becoming overweight or obese in young adulthood compared with never eating family meals growing up. This is not the first study of its kind.

Researchers from Cornell University have looked beyond the foods on the table to other mealtime factors that might influence BMI. In a small study, they found eating at a kitchen or dining room table and remaining at the table until everyone has finished are behaviors related to lower BMIs in both parents and children. Conversely, eating with the TV on and away from the table were rituals related to higher BMIs. For parents, BMI was lower for those who had meaningful talks with their children about their days. Other research has indicated associations between positive interpersonal and food dynamics at family meals and reduced risk of childhood overweight and obesity. Habits included positive reinforcement and communication regarding both personal life and the food on the table. A review last year concluded that communal meals, whether they are amongst family, friends, youth or adults, are associated with better dietary intake throughout life.

All findings point to the significance of frequent family meals: families that eat together, stay healthy together...and they also stay happy together! Over ten years ago we reported that family meal time is linked to lower risk of depression in children. Use the holiday season to reconnect and get back on track if family meal time has erased itself from your agenda. Though schedules may be hectic, try designating at least two days a week to family meal time at a table with the TV off. If weeknights are packed, try a family breakfast or a weekend lunch.

Interestingly, research indicates that most children and adults do not meet

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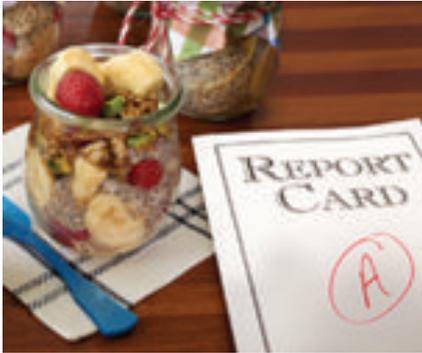


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recommended intakes of healthful foods, such as fruits and vegetables, regardless of how often they share meals. Once you establish mealtime rituals, kick your habits up a notch by incorporating more fruits and vegetables into your meals.

Breakfast for Better Grades

Eating Breakfast May Help Improve Test Scores



While doing homework and studying hard can never be undervalued, there may be another strategy for helping your kids reach the top of the class: providing a healthy breakfast.

In a study published in *Public Health Nutrition*, researchers from the UK questioned about 4,500 students in Wales ages 9 to 11 years about the foods they ate in one day and whether or not they ate breakfast. Researchers then linked children's dietary information to their standardized test scores. Eating breakfast was associated with higher test scores, and the best academic performance came after eating healthy foods like fresh fruit. This could have to do with glycemic index, the rate at which sugar is released from the blood. Breakfast

foods with a lower glycemic index have more fiber (think a sweet bowl of berries instead of a donut) and release energy more steadily throughout the morning, which could have a positive effect on cognitive functioning.

An empty stomach is no way to start the school day, and eating breakfast can bring more than just good grades. A 2014 study in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* found eating a nutritious breakfast can play a role in maintaining a healthy BMI as well as help with meeting daily nutrient requirements and achieving overall health.

Anything is better than nothing on the breakfast table, but starting the day with nutritious food can be convenient for parents and fun for kids with these simple tricks:

- Do the work the night before and have a portable breakfast waiting in the morning. In a jar, combine $\frac{1}{2}$ cup rolled oats with 1 cup almond milk and place in the refrigerator overnight. Add cinnamon, fresh fruit, chopped nuts or honey to taste, or try our recipe for [Wake Up Oats](#).
- Pre-portion cut fruit into plastic baggies and keep in the freezer to make for speedy smoothie assembly. Try one banana, one cup of berries, and one cup of pineapple per pack and blend with one cup of liquid (like almond milk, yogurt or water) when you're ready for breakfast.
- Prepare large batches of breakfast bars or whole wheat muffins on the weekend to have on hand all week long. Our [Banana Bran Breakfast Muffins](#) are great for busy weekday mornings.
- Keep on-the-go options on hand. Stock the fruit bowl full with bananas, apples, oranges, and other portable fruits, and have a supply of single-serve nuts and yogurts for those last-minute breakfast mornings.

Pack an A+ Lunch Box

Tips for Packing Nutritious and Tasty School Lunches



About 41% of elementary students bring lunch to school on any given day, but research from Tufts University and The University of Texas at Austin has found most packed lunches are of low dietary quality, containing processed snack foods, sugary drinks and empty calories while lacking in vegetables and whole grains. Studies show that eating more fruits and vegetables may be linked to better performance in the classroom. Here are our tips for packing a safe, nutritious and delicious school lunch box.

Keep it Cool: When it comes to packed lunches, food safety is first. Nix old-fashioned brown paper bags and invest in an insulated lunch tote—some come with a built-in cooling compartment. Keep perishable foods like yogurt, turkey and hummus cold by adding an ice pack or better yet, a frozen water bottle—by lunchtime it will be thawed and ready to drink. If you are packing a hot lunch such as **Chili** or **Vegetable Lasagna**, first pour boiling water into a thermos and let sit for ten minutes. Then pour out the water, add the hot food to the thermos and close the lid tightly to seal in the heat.

Think Outside the Sandwich: PB&J again? Prevent lunch boredom before it begins. Our **Hoot Owl** recipe kicks lunch up a notch with a creative design of healthful ingredients that will entice your child to dig in. Lunches don't have to come in sandwich form. Prepare larger batches at dinner of your child's favorite meals so there will be leftovers to pack the next day. Grain salads made with whole-wheat pasta or quinoa tossed with veggies like cherry tomatoes or chopped spinach are also kid-friendly options. Another way to switch things up is to skip the entrée concept all together and provide a sampling of healthy foods for your child to mix and match. Whole grain crackers, bean dip, peanut butter, veggie sticks and apple slices makes a balanced and fun combination for kids.

Jazz Up the Veggies: It's no surprise that some kids don't love eating vegetables, but a few simple tricks can help make veggies more appealing and fun. Choose colorful vegetables like red bell peppers, carrots and cucumbers and use small cookie cutters to create fun shapes. Don't let the veggies go bare—a 2013 Penn State study found kids are more likely to eat and enjoy vegetables when paired with dip. Hummus, low-fat Ranch, or yogurt-herb dip are options kids may like.

"De-junk" Dessert: Every child loves a sweet treat with lunch, but traditional packaged snacks like cupcakes and cookies can be laden with refined sugar and saturated fat. Utilize the natural sweetness of fruit to create healthful happy endings for lunch. Pack bite-sized cubes of pineapple, mango or cantaloupe along with vanilla yogurt dip for a nutrient-packed dessert that's fun to eat. Chocolate-dipped strawberries or bananas are also sure to please a child's sweet tooth while offering the nutritional benefits of fruit.

Snack Attack

Healthy Snack Ideas for Kids to Eat at Home or On-the-Go



You can't get away from them – snacks are everywhere! Today, snacks provide as much as 42% of daily calories for kids. Unfortunately, as the nibbling trend keeps growing, so do kids' waistlines. In the past 30 years, childhood obesity has more than doubled, and one third of children are now considered overweight or obese. This could be in part due to “un-smart” snacking.

Snacks can be part of a healthy diet for both kids and adults, but choosing the right foods in the right amounts will make or break your snack time. Popular snacks like cookies and chips are typically high in sugar, saturated fat, and salt and lack important nutrients like vitamin D, iron, and fiber that kids really need.

A smart snack provides some carbohydrate, protein, and fiber for energy and fullness, plus a mix of vitamins and minerals to promote overall health. It's also important to keep snacks below 200 calories, or else they can turn into whole extra meals. When kids decide to snack smartly, these between-meal noshes go from health-derailing to energy-boosting.

A good way to ensure your child is making a smart snack choice is to start with a fruit or vegetable, then add a small amount of protein. This simple trick will provide your child with the nutrients he or she needs and will help keep total calories in check.

Here are a few healthy and fun snack ideas that you and your child can enjoy at home or pack up to go.

Snacks at Home (serves one child):

- **Microwave Apple Crisp** – Wash one apple, chop into even chunks, and place in a microwave-safe bowl. Add a sprinkle of cinnamon, pinch of brown sugar, and tablespoon of oats. Mix together and microwave about 2 minutes. Top with a dollop of vanilla Greek yogurt.
- **Portobello Pizza** – Preheat the oven to 375°F. Place a washed Portobello mushroom smooth side down on a baking sheet. Add chopped tomatoes, 2 tablespoons part skim mozzarella cheese, and fresh basil. Bake about 20 minutes until the mushroom is tender.
- **Sweet Potato “Fries”** – Preheat the oven to 400°F. Scrub one sweet potato and slice into long, thin strips. Toss with 1 teaspoon olive oil, paprika, black pepper, and a pinch of salt. Spread sweet potatoes on a baking sheet and bake about 20 minutes until sweet potatoes are crisp. While “fries” are baking, combine Greek yogurt, lemon juice, and dill for a cool and fresh dipping sauce.

Snacks to Pack:

- **Ants on a Log** – Pack washed celery sticks, 2 tablespoons peanut or almond butter, and ¼ cup raisins in separate containers. At snack time kids can assemble and eat. A classic!
- **Pears with Cinnamon Yogurt** – Slice a pear (hint: a sprinkle of lemon juice can prevent browning) and pack to go. Add a sprinkle of cinnamon to ½ cup vanilla Greek yogurt and pack in a separate container. Kids can dunk away!
- **Veggie Sticks and Dip** – Slice an assortment of colorful veggies such as carrots, bell peppers, cucumber, and jicama and pack with hummus.

Taste-Great Produce for Kids: Part 1

Children Choose and Eat More Produce When it Tastes Better



How do you get kids to eat more fruits and vegetables? Make them taste better! It seems simple, but researchers from Harvard School of Public Health have shown great taste and a little patience may be all it takes. Students in grades three through eight from four schools in Massachusetts were served innovative and delicious school meals prepared by a professional chef, while students in ten other schools continued to receive standard school lunches. After seven months of eating chef-prepared food, a child's odds of selecting fruit increased threefold, and children ate almost 21% more of the fruit on their plates. Odds of selecting vegetables went up as much as seven times in schools with a chef, while consumption of vegetables more than doubled. Recipes that students enjoyed included vegetarian chili, sautéed kale with ginger, sweet potato salad, and turkey pineapple stir-fry.

According to CDC, more than 36% of American children eat fruits and vegetables less than once a day, while the USDA recommends children eat between three and four cups of produce every day. Though you may not have the power to bring a chef into your child's cafeteria, there are some techniques you can adopt at home to encourage your whole family to eat more fruits and vegetables.

Pack on the Flavor: Many kids (and adults) simply don't enjoy the tastes of some vegetables. Until a child learns to appreciate the bitter taste of Brussels sprouts or the spicy kick of a radish (yes, it can happen!) there is nothing wrong with adding flavors you know your child likes. A sprinkle of Parmesan cheese on broccoli, soy sauce on asparagus or fresh ginger on steamed greens may be all it takes to turn your child into a veggie-lover.

Cook Like You Mean It: Cooking methods can alter the taste and texture of fruits and vegetables—often for the better to a child. “Some kids just don't like the texture of certain vegetables” explains Chef Mark Allison, Director of Culinary Nutrition at the Dole Nutrition Institute. “Try roasting vegetables to make them crisp, and add a drizzle of olive oil or a shake of Parmesan cheese. This was the only way I could get my boys to eat Brussels sprouts and parsnips!” Roasting cruciferous vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower or Brussels sprouts tames their strong bitter flavors, while grilling fruit like bananas and pineapples evokes an extra sweetness that kids will love.

Focus on “DO”: Emphasize what your child should eat, not what to avoid. A study from Cornell University found that people respond better to positive rather than negative messages on health. Instead of telling your child he can't have ice cream because it's unhealthy, reinforce that a dessert like our [Frozen Banana Pops](#) offers both sweetness and nourishment.

Be Persistent: Don't give up – it takes kids awhile to adjust to new foods. In the same study from Harvard, children needed seven months to adapt before eating more vegetables and fruits. If your child says “no” to spinach at dinner tonight, try again tomorrow. Over time, kids and adults can learn to accept new foods and to love eating fresh fruits and vegetables.

Taste-Great Produce For Kids: Part 2

Tips from Expert Chef Mark Allison



We sat down with expert Chef Mark Allison, Director of Culinary Nutrition at the Dole Nutrition Institute, to talk about how he encourages his own children to be adventurous with fruits and vegetables.

Q: What is the first step in encouraging children to enjoy eating fruits and vegetables?

A: I have three very different boys, so I know how hard it can be to get kids to eat more fruits and vegetables—and this is coming from a chef! Getting the kids involved in shopping and cooking is extremely important. We start by going to the grocery store and seeing the abundance of beautiful fruits and vegetables.

The kids choose what they want to try. Back home in the kitchen, the kids wash, peel and slice the produce they chose, and I help them cook, flavor and taste the finished dish. Making dinner as a family is a great way to spend time together and an opportunity for the kids to learn a life skill and get excited about trying new foods.

Q: What are some of your favorite family meals that include fruits and vegetables?

A: One of our family traditions is pizza night. We arrange bowls of chopped up vegetables, and the boys have fun designing their own colorful “pizza faces” using veggies. We also make sauces and soups with pureed vegetables. For our homemade tomato sauce we add carrots, red peppers and garlic.

Q: Do you have any tips for adding more produce to children’s’ regular diets?

A: I try to incorporate some produce into every meal and snack, including dessert. Try juicing fruits and vegetables or using them for smoothies, milkshakes or ice pops. We combine bananas, strawberries and a little frozen yogurt to make a creamy strawberry shake, and like to freeze carrot juice with some plain yogurt in ice pop molds for a healthful treat. You can also sneak in more produce by making banana bread, sweet potato muffins, brownies with pureed spinach, or carrot cake. The whole family loves these foods, plus they pack nutrition, so it’s a win-win situation that keeps everyone happy and healthy.

Q: What are some easy healthy snack ideas for kids?

A: We keep sliced vegetables in zip lock bags in the fridge for convenient, healthful between-meal snacking. The kids enjoy vegetables with hummus, ranch dip or low-fat yogurt. The hummus from Dole’s [Grilled Vegetable Flatbread with Sesame-Banana Hummus](#) recipe also tastes great with fresh crudités. Sliced apples or celery sticks with peanut butter is another favorite snack.

Q: Any last advice for parents?

A: It’s going to be an uphill battle if you’re trying to convince your child to eat more fruits and vegetables and you don’t eat them too! Make mealtime a family affair, but don’t force your children to eat foods they don’t want to eat. Take your time in trying new foods and remember, a little at a time is better than none at all. Have fun with your food and over time the whole family will love to eat more fruits and vegetables every day.

FEATURED RECIPE

Lunch-Box “Sushi”

Ingredients:

- 4 slices whole-wheat bread, crusts removed
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup hummus
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup crumbled feta
- $\frac{1}{8}$ cup chopped walnuts
- 1 small cucumber, julienned
- 1 DOLE® Carrot, julienned
- 1 red pepper, julienned
- $\frac{1}{2}$ bag (3 cups) DOLE Field Greens, divided
- $\frac{1}{8}$ cup toasted sesame seeds, optional

Directions:

1. **ROLL** bread flat with rolling pin, then spread with hummus. Sprinkle each slice with feta, walnuts, carrots, red pepper and 1 cup DOLE Field Greens.
2. **ROLL** each slice of bread until edges meet. Roll in toasted sesame seed, cut into three pieces and serve immediately or pack in airtight container along with Lunch-Box Salad.

Lunch-Box Salad:

Combine remaining DOLE Field Greens with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped cauliflower, 2 tablespoons shelled edamame, 6 cucumber slices and 6 mandarin orange segments. Divide between two containers.

Tip: You can also replace the hummus with tuna salad.



Makes: 2 Servings

Prep Time: 20 minutes

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