

Pointers For Parents

What's In Your Child's Lunchbox—Preparing Healthy Lunches

(NAPSA)—As kids head to school, now is the perfect time to pay close attention to what they are having for lunch. Over 16 percent of children nationwide are overweight and that percentage is on the rise. So you want nutrient-rich choices that support growth and development, but are not excessive in “empty” calories. Preparing healthy school lunches and snacks is a challenge for many parents but Mary Anne Burkman, Registered Dietitian with the Dairy Council of California, has helpful hints on how to prepare lunches that will score an A+ with your children.

Q: What basic information should parents know about nutrition?

A: The recently revised 2005 Dietary Guidelines emphasize the importance of underconsumed foods such as low-fat and nonfat dairy products, fruits, vegetables and whole grains. We all should be eating more of these foods. It is also important that children are taught the concept of moderation. All foods can fit as part of a healthy diet when eaten in moderation. There is no such thing as a good or bad food.

Q: What should you pack?

A: Children's input should be the first ingredient. Children who help select and prepare their meals tend to eat better.

Q: What are some healthy snack ideas for school?

A: Kids love things that are easy to open and quick to eat, because less time spent eating equals more time playing at recess. Some great nutritious snacks include string cheese and fruit, pretzels, whole-wheat crack-



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ers with cheese or peanut butter, air-popped popcorn, or yogurt with fresh fruit or granola.

Q: How can parents be a healthy eating role model?

A: Parents are the most important influence in children's lives. Children watch and imitate adults, and look to them to learn proper behavior. As role models, parents need to monitor their own behavior so that their children acquire healthy attitudes toward eating. Here are a few good habits to model for your children:

- Never skip meals—especially breakfast
- Take moderate portions
- Try new foods
- Drink milk and water instead of soda
- Limit foods that are high in added fats or sugars
- Include low-fat dairy products, vegetables, fruits and whole

grains with every meal.

Q: What are some tips for safe food handling for lunches and snacks?

A: It is especially important to take extra precautions and practice safe food handling when packing a school lunch. If lunches are not refrigerated, they provide the perfect environment for bacteria in food to multiply rapidly and cause foodborne illness. Follow the suggestions below to reduce risk of foodborne illness this school year:

- Encourage children to wash their hands before eating
- Use a chilled Thermos® to keep milk, water or other perishables cold
- Use an insulated lunch bag with a commercial ice pack
- Teach your children to keep their lunch bags out of the sun
- Add a box of 100 percent fruit juice or cup of yogurt that has been frozen overnight. By lunchtime, they will be defrosted and will help keep the other foods cool.

For more healthy lunch and snack ideas visit Meals Matter at www.mealsmatter.org. Meals Matter is a free Web site developed and supported by the Dairy Council of California that can help take the guesswork out of what to prepare for lunch. The site features advice for parents including healthy lunch and snack ideas, and nutrition information and recipes. The Web site also features quick and easy recipe ideas, informative articles about nutrition and fitness, interactive tools such as a calcium calculator and a food-match game for children.