

Back to School Nutrition and Safety Tips

With school ready to begin, not only does returning to school affect our students, it also affect many parents as they prepare to stay within their budget. Participating in free or reduced meals through the school is one way many families who qualify can help stretch food dollars. Even if your family income doesn't qualify for reduced price meals, the cost for a lunch is still a bargain when you consider the nutrition and what the child gets. For children who would rather take their lunch, here are some tips for packing a nutritious lunch for kids that fits within your budget:

- 1. Prepare lunches at home instead of buying pre-packaged meals. If you buy pre-packaged meals, be sure to read the nutrition facts labels on food products before buying. Select items that are lower in fat, sodium and sugar.**
- 2. Include at least one serving of fruit in any packed lunch.**
- 3. Choose lean meats such as chicken, turkey or tuna packed in water.**
- 4. Use 100% whole wheat bread instead of white bread. For more picky eaters who refuse to eat wheat bread, try one of the softer breads that are a mixture of white and wheat flour and gradually make the change to whole wheat.**
- 5. Use vegetables creatively, such as using spinach instead of iceberg lettuce on sandwiches.**
- 6. Limit candy, potato chips and other snack foods that are high in sugar and saturated fats. Unbuttered popcorn, whole grain crackers and pretzels are tasty alternatives.**
- 7. Avoid sodas and juice drinks. Instead choose 100% juice or blends of 100% juice.**
- 8. Involve your child in preparing his/her lunch. It is a good time to have fun while teaching basic nutrition concepts to your children.**

Some other safety tips in making sure your child gets to school safely:

- Many children ride bicycles to and from school. Be sure that bike riders use a properly fitting helmet. Bikers should also wear bright, light-colored, or reflective clothing.**
- Teach your child how to cross the street and tell them to follow the directions of crossing guards.**
- If children walk to school, make sure they walk with friends and stay on the main sidewalks where available. Children should be instructed not to talk to strangers and have a whistle to blow if in danger.**