

Nutrition Tips for School Age Children

Your children at any age need healthy foods and nutritious snacks. They have a consistent but slow rate of growth between 5 and 12 and usually eat 4 to 5 times a day including snacks. Many food habits, likes and dislikes are set during this time. Family, friends and the media all influence food choices and eating habits. School-age children are often willing to eat a wider variety of foods than younger children. Eating healthy after school snacks is also important as these snacks can contribute up to one-fourth of the total calorie intake for the day. School age children have developed more advanced feeding skills are able to help with meal preparation. Here are some helpful mealtime tips.

Breakfast – Children always need breakfast. Even if it on the go. Some ideas for a healthy breakfast include fruit, milk, yogurt, whole wheat toast with nut butter, eggs, hot or cold cereal.

Snacks – Take advantage of big appetites after school by serving healthy snacks such as fruit, vegetable sticks with hummus, yogurt, nut butter and crackers, turkey and cheese roll ups or string cheese.

Nutrition – Select foods with these nutrients possible: calcium, magnesium, potassium and fiber. Select foods with these nutrients when possible. Also make sure to provide children with recommended serving sizes for children.

Planning – Try to plan where and when food is eaten. Plan so that there is a variety of healthy food available for children to choose. This is important especially for if you are busy and you are on the go and need something quick. Planning meals and snacks ahead of time can save money, avoid impulse buying and excessive unhealthy eating.

Exercise – Parents and caregivers are important role models for healthy eating behaviors and regular physical activity. Exercise helps children achieve and maintain a healthy body weight while building strong bones and muscles. Encourage your children to have regular physical activity and also include the whole family. Children need at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity.

Where to Eat – Always serve meals at the table whenever possible. Turn off the television and other electronics. Research shows that eating meals at the table with family improves mental and physical health.

Schedule – Create a healthy routine of having structured meal times. This helps the family as a time to interact and for parents to demonstrate healthy eating behaviors.

Healthy – Involve children in planning and preparing meals and snacks. This allows them to express their preferences and the opportunity for you to teach them about healthy food choices.

Drinks – To prevent dehydration encourage children to drink water regularly during physical activity and in hot weather. Water is the best choice for staying hydrated before, during and after exercise.

Screen Time – Limit children's screen time to less than 2 hours daily. Instead, encourage activities that include more movement and exercise.

To find more information about the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and to determine the appropriate dietary recommendations for your children visit ChooseMyPlate.gov.