

# Nutrition Nuggets

Food and Fitness for a Healthy Child

December 2007

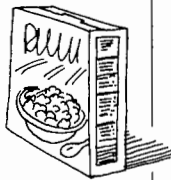
Stonington Public School's Nutrition Services  
Tim Paquette, Director of School Nutrition

## BEST BITES



### Cereal check

Cereal can be a healthy meal or snack for your youngster. Just check the nutrition labels first. Try to buy varieties with fewer than 5 grams of sugar and more than 5 grams of fiber. Good choices are likely to be labeled "whole grain" on the front.



### After-school activity

When looking at after-school programs for your child, consider whether they include physical activity. An art class is great for one day, but balance it off with karate or gymnastics another day. If your youngster is in after-school care, make sure the program includes active playtime daily.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Fruits and vegetables come in more than 350 varieties. Yet most people eat only six: apples, oranges, bananas, potatoes, tomatoes, and onions. Encourage your youngster to try new ones by bringing them home from the store. You can make it a goal to buy a new vegetable or fruit on each shopping trip.



### Just for fun

**Q:** Why did Tommy ask for alphabet soup for lunch?

**A:** So he could read while he was eating!



## Family meals

It may be hard to find time to eat together—but the payoff is worth it. Children tend to eat healthier food and even get better grades when they dine with their families.

Try these ideas to make family meals part of your home life.

### Be flexible

Set meals around schedules. For example, eat after basketball practice or before Girl Scout meetings. Explain to your kids that it's more important to eat together than to eat at a certain time.

### Welcome guests

Children often don't want to stop playing to eat. Let your youngster ask a friend to stay for dinner. *Tip:* You can usually stretch your dinner by boiling more pasta, cutting chicken into strips, making a bigger salad, or taking extra meat out of the freezer.

### Talk it up

Make dinner enjoyable by telling highlights of the day or discussing fun topics such as movies, sporting events, or vacation plans. *Idea:* Keep a jar of "conversation starters" on the table ("What do dogs dream about?" "If you could invite anyone in history to dinner, who would it be and why?").

### Involve everyone

Let your youngster help plan menus, shop for food, and cook meals. She'll be more willing to sit pleasantly for dinner if she has had a hand in preparing it. *Note:* Remember to praise her efforts!



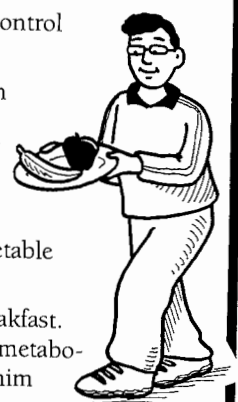
### Make it special

Every now and then, do the unexpected. Eat by candlelight. Have show-and-tell night (everyone brings something to share). Celebrate a teddy bear's birthday with his "favorite food" (apples dipped in honey). If family meals are fun, your child will look forward to them. ●

## Cutting down

Has the doctor suggested that your youngster lose weight? Here are six ways to get started:

1. Switch to fat-free milk.
2. Use a plate for snacks. Eating out of a jar or bag doesn't allow your child to see portions.
3. Eat at home, where you can control the ingredients.
4. When you do go out, order an appetizer as the main course. Or order two entrees for three people to share.
5. Encourage your youngster to eat at least two servings of a vegetable or fruit at each meal.
6. Make sure he doesn't skip breakfast. Eating early will get your child's metabolism going for the day and keep him from overeating at other meals. ●



## Cold-weather fun

The air may be chillier, but winter is still a great time to play outside when you're a kid. Offer these ideas, and your child will continue getting physical activity no matter the weather.

### Riding along

As long as the sidewalks are clear, your youngster can continue riding his bike, scooting on his scooter, or gliding on inline skates. You can also take him ice-skating at a local rink or solidly frozen pond. *Caution:* Skate only at ponds with signs saying they're safe.



### Building away

When the snow starts to fall, encourage your child to make a fort, an igloo, or a snowman. Challenge him to create a "healthy snowman"—using fruits and vegetables for the face (raisin eyes, carrot nose, red bell pepper mouth), arms (celery stalks), and buttons (berries).

### Running around

Playing tag, capture the flag, and Red Rover is just as much fun in the cold. You can suggest relay races, touch football, or hopscotch, too.

*Note:* Be sure your youngster dresses for the winter weather, with hat, gloves, and layers of clothing (shirt, sweatshirt, fleece). ●

## ACTIVITY CORNER

### Step by step

Raise your family's physical fitness with a daily "step challenge."

Set a goal (experts recommend 10,000 steps a day), and see who can walk the most by bedtime. Have everyone track their steps by wearing a pedometer clipped to a belt or tucked in a pocket. *Note:* You can find inexpensive ones online or at sporting goods stores.

Give your child a head start by suggesting easy ways to add extra steps, such as:

- ♪ walking to friends' houses instead of being driven (walk with your youngster, or have him walk with a friend)
- ♪ dancing to music
- ♪ getting up to change the TV channel (put away the remote!)
- ♪ taking the stairs rather than the escalator or elevator



- ♪ walking the dog (he can offer to walk a neighbor's if you don't have one)
- ♪ getting the mail
- ♪ taking out the trash
- ♪ shoveling snow ●

### OUR PURPOSE

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

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*Nutrition Nuggets* is reviewed by a registered dietitian. Consult a physician before beginning any major change in diet or exercise.  
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## IN THE KITCHEN

### Sweet treats

Eating nutritiously doesn't mean an end to desserts! Try these ideas for ending a meal on a sweet note.

**Fruit crush:** In a blender, puree 2 cups fruit (strawberries, peaches, blackberries) with 1 tsp. lemon juice and 1 tbsp. sugar so the mixture is smooth. Freeze until hard, and then puree the mixture again until it's crushed.

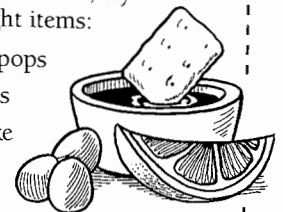
**Banana split:** Cut a banana in half lengthwise, and top with low-fat frozen yogurt. Add blueberries, nuts, and fat-free chocolate syrup.

**Chocolate dip:** Melt dark chocolate in the microwave, and stir until smooth. Dip various items (graham crackers,

dried apricots, peeled orange wedges, grapes) in the chocolate. Lay them on wax paper, and refrigerate until set.

For really fast desserts, try these store-bought items:

- fat-free fudge pops
- Italian ice cups
- angel food cake
- fat-free pudding cups
- low-fat oatmeal cookies ●



## PARENT TO PARENT

### What's in the pantry?

I was worried that my daughter was eating too much junk food, and I realized the problem started at home. If I wanted her to eat well, she needed to know the best foods to snack on.

So last Saturday I asked Jamie to help me organize our pantry for "healthy eating." Together, we assigned ratings to our snack foods: three stars for the healthiest ones (fruit cups packed in juice, rice

cakes), two stars for foods in between (baked crackers, pretzels), and one star for the least healthy items (snack cakes, toaster pastries).

Then, we put the 3-star and 2-star snacks on the shelves she can reach and the 1-star ones up high.

This project took some time, but it was worth it. Now Jamie can open the pantry and find something that's good to eat—and good for her—all by herself. ●

