

# FitFuture

strategies for better living.

Series on Fitness & Nutrition for Families

## HOW YOUR SCHOOL'S MEAL PROGRAM CAN HELP



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## New Foods, New Year: Parenting Strategies for Good Nutrition in 2008

By Jennifer Kerr, MS, RD

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When parents present healthy meals and snacks in a pleasant and unassuming manner, children will learn to enjoy and appreciate a wide variety of food. This can seem more easily said than done, but here is some help!

Here are some DOs and DON'Ts when it comes to providing new foods to your children:

DO ✓	DON'T ✗
Eat healthfully yourself. Children are influenced by parents, particularly the parent of the same gender.	Coax or beg children to eat.
Introduce new foods along with well-liked familiar foods.	Offer rewards or punishment for eating or not eating.
Allow children to decide how much to eat. Children require several smaller meals/snacks per day.	Rush children to finish a meal and refuse to offer snacks between meals.
Use mealtime to strengthen family connectedness while helping children develop good eating habits.	Let children eat alone. Allow distractions such as television.

Mealtime responsibilities are divided between you and your children. You are in charge of deciding what to eat, when to eat and where to eat. Adults can set the stage for good family nutrition by:

- **Choosing and preparing healthy foods**
- **Providing meals and snacks at routine times**
- **Creating a pleasant family dining atmosphere**
- **Role modeling the mealtime behaviors that children must learn**

A difficult part of a parent's job can be to trust that children CAN decide how much and whether to eat. When allowed to do so, children will:

- **Eat** (we all have an innate desire to avoid starvation!)
- **Eat the amount they need** (they will listen to their internal cues for hunger and satiety)
- **Learn to eat what their parents eat**
- **Learn to behave well at mealtime**

Parents would surely agree that time spent planning meals, modeling good habits and encouraging healthful choices is time well spent!

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### Child's Play Offers More Than Fun

By Jennifer Kerr, MS, RD

Every child's job is to PLAY! Children love to run and jump, climb and crawl, tumble and stretch. Although children don't know it, active play is more than just fun. Active play fosters sharing, curiosity and independence. During play, children learn to cooperate with others. Playing gives them the freedom to explore the world around them and make decisions about how to control their actions.

Active play is also important for the development of body skills. Children develop strength, flexibility, body awareness and endurance while they play. Play allows children to release extra energy (as adults, we exercise to release stress!).

Since *moving more* and *sitting less* is an essential part of maintaining a healthy weight, children who engage in active play and have adults who restrict their sedentary activities, are less likely to be overweight. Helping your children develop an active lifestyle at a young age can help protect them from chronic diseases associated with being inactive and overweight later on in life.

Adults who are active have children who are active, so be a good role model and look for ways to be active as a family. Here are more tips from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- Make physical activity part of your family's daily routine such as designating time for family walks or playing active games together.
- Provide opportunities for children to be active by playing with them. Give them active toys and equipment, and take them to places where they can be active.
- Offer positive reinforcement for the physical activities in which your child participates and encourage them as they express interest in new activities.
- Make physical activity fun. Fun activities can be anything the child enjoys, either structured or non-structured. They may range from team sports, individual sports, and/or recreational activities such as walking, running, skating, bicycling, swimming, playground activities, and free-time play.
- Limit the time your children watch television or play video games to no more than two hours per day. Instead, encourage your children to find fun activities to do with family members or on their own that simply involve more activity (walking, playing chase, dancing).

Recommended Daily Activity Levels

Age	Minutes of structured physical activity (adult-led)	Minutes of unstructured physical activity (free play)	Minutes of general physical activity	Hours of inactivity, other than sleep
2-3	At least 30	At least 60		1 or less
4-5	At least 60	At least 60		2 or less
6-12			At least 60	2 or less
13-18			At least 60	2 or less

National Association of Sports and Physical Activity and the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans





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### The Whole Story: How to Make Half Your Grains Whole

By Jennifer Kerr, MS, RD

Whole grains are the healthy choice, but deciphering a whole grain from a multi-grain or a refined grain can be mind-boggling. Read more about what whole grain really means, and how to incorporate more of them into your family's diet.

#### What is a Whole Grain?

Whole grains and foods made from whole grains contain three essential parts and all of the naturally-occurring nutrients in these parts. A whole grain seed includes the bran, endosperm and germ. When a grain is cracked, crushed, rolled or cooked it must provide the same balance of nutrients found in the original grain seed in order to retain the "whole grain" title.

#### Whole Grain Nutrients and Health Benefits

People who eat whole grains regularly have a lower risk of obesity and have lower cholesterol levels. Due to the combinations of nutrients (B-vitamins, trace minerals, antioxidants, phytochemicals and fiber) found in whole grains, those who eat at least three servings a day have reduced risk for developing heart disease, stroke, type II diabetes, and certain types of cancer.

#### U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans Encourage Whole Grains

All Americans are advised to eat half or more of their grains as whole grains. For Americans age 9 and older, this means eating at least 3 servings of whole grains daily.

#### What is Equal to an "oz." of Whole Grain?

A serving is defined as any of the following amounts for products in which all grain ingredients are whole grains:

**1/2** cup of rice, pasta, or cooked grain

**1** slice of bread

**1** small muffin (1 oz.)

**1** cup ready-to-eat dry cereal

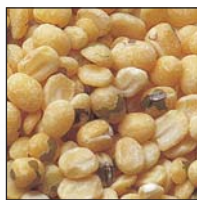
#### Examples of Whole Grains



BARLEY



QUINOA



CORN



WHEAT BERRIES



BROWN RICE



OATS

Foods made from wheat, rice, oats, cornmeal, barley or other grains are considered grain products. Examples include bread, pasta, cereal, tortillas and grits.

#### Tips for Eating More Whole Grains

- Substitute at least half the white flour with whole wheat flour in your regular recipes for baked goods.
- Add half a cup of cooked wheat or rye berries, wild rice, brown rice or barley to your favorite soup.
- Add three-quarters of a cup of oats for each pound of ground beef or turkey when you make meatballs, burgers or meatloaf.
- Make rice-like dishes with barley, brown rice, bulgur, millet, quinoa or other whole grains.

Learn More:

MyPyramid: <http://www.mypyramid.gov/pyramid/grains.html>  
The Whole Grains Council: <http://www.wholegrainscouncil.org>

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### 4 Tips for Keeping Your Food Safe and Your Family Healthy

By Jennifer Kerr, MS, RD

Bacteria (germs) are all around us. Some germs can make you and your children ill. Colds and flu spread from person to person through unwashed hands and surfaces. Food can be easily contaminated by germs on hands and surfaces, causing various food-borne illnesses. Follow these tips to make sure your family members are using good hand washing and food safety practices.

# 1

**Hand washing and cleaning.** *Frequently clean hands, surfaces and utensils.*

- Wash hands in warm soapy water for 30 seconds. Encourage children to sing the ABC's while washing.
- Wash hands before handling food or eating a meal or snack, and after handling food, using the restroom, touching a pet, coughing, sneezing, etc.
- Wash kitchen tools and surfaces in hot soapy water after every use.
- Make hand washing easy for kids! Post a reminder in the restroom and placing a stepping stool near the sink for little ones.

# 2

**Separate raw and cooked food.** *Prevent bacteria from spreading from food to food.*

- Keep raw meat, fish and poultry sealed in containers or food storage bags so their juices will not leak out.
- Wash hands, utensils and surfaces after contact with raw meat, fish or poultry.
- Do not place cooked food on the same plate or cutting board as raw food.

# 3

**Chill food fast.** *Cold temperatures help keep bacteria from growing.*

- Make sure your refrigerator is maintained at 40°F or less and your freezer is maintained at 0°F. Do not rely on your temperature dial; an appliance thermometer can be left inside each to monitor the temperature. For more information visit the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service at [http://www.fsis.usda.gov/News\\_&\\_Events/NR\\_051905\\_01/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/NR_051905_01/index.asp)
- Chill perishable and cooked foods within 2 hours of cooking to avoid temperatures of 40°F-140°F.
- Store leftover cooked foods in small shallow containers so that they cool faster.

# 4

**Cook foods to a safe temperature.** *Kill bacteria by cooking foods properly.*

- Use a clean meat thermometer. For a guide to proper cooking temperatures visit: <http://www.fightbac.org/content/view/93/2/>
- Cook eggs until yolk and whites are firm
- Cook fish until it flakes with a fork and is no longer shiny
- Reheat leftovers to 165°

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## SCHOOL BREAKFAST MAKES THE GRADE



The USDA's School Breakfast Program requires that breakfast meet applicable recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and provide one-third of the Recommended Dietary Allowances of protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, iron, calcium and calories.



Research shows that participation in a school breakfast program enhanced daily nutrient intake and improvements in nutrient intake were associated with significant improvements in student academic performance, psychosocial functioning and decreases in hunger.<sup>1</sup>

## Breakfast Remains the Most Important Meal of the Day

By Jennifer Kerr, MS, RD

Studies show that children who eat breakfast do better in school. Adults perform better on the job when they make time for breakfast. Now we're finding breakfast plays a very important role in overall health and maintaining a healthy body weight. Unfortunately, breakfast continues to be the meal most neglected by both children and adults.

Children's growing bodies and developing brains require food (energy) at regular intervals. When children skip breakfast, they go far too long without food. This period of semi-starvation leads to hunger pains and an upset stomach, decreased cognitive ability and irritability. It is very difficult for children to meet nutrient requirements for growth and development when a meal is missed.

What we eat is as important as if we eat. Avoid foods like pastries and sugary cereals. These foods offer calories without many essential nutrients. High sugar foods and drinks may also cause your energy to rise briefly before it falls to a low level. Your child may feel more fatigued and hungry if they eat these foods for breakfast.

Make good choices! Choose whole grain breads and cereals, fruits and even foods that are not common breakfast items. Dinner leftovers, a peanut butter sandwich, vegetable soup or hummus on whole wheat toast are all great choices. Choosing high fiber and high protein combinations of foods will give your child longer-lasting energy.

Combine 3 food groups to create a complete breakfast (example: whole grain pita, hummus and an apple).

Keep foods like these on hand and you'll always have the makings of a healthy breakfast:

- Whole grain bread
- Nuts, Peanut butter
- Fruit (fresh/dried/canned)
- Whole grain cereal
- Yogurt
- Hummus
- Cottage Cheese
- Hard boiled eggs

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### KIDS IN THE KITCHEN



Children love to help. Let them:

- Clear and clean the table
- Help set the table
- Turn off the TV
- Take beverage orders
- Help with certain food tasks

### GET INVOLVED



Wellness is a community effort and needs the support of the entire school community. Parents are encouraged to visit their child's school cafeteria, eat lunch or breakfast with their children and talk to a school food service professional about the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.

## Family Meals Provide More than Good Nutrition By Jennifer Kerr, MS, RD

Children from families that dine together are more likely to eat a balanced and healthy diet. They eat more fruits, vegetables, and dairy and less snack foods than those who eat separately from their families. Children are also less likely to participate in unhealthy weight control practices when they regularly share meals with family.

Research shows that the importance of family mealtime also goes beyond nutrition. Family meals help solidify the family unit and provide your child with a dependable way to access YOU. These regular and routine occasions provide a sense of stability and support for each other. Mealtime reinforces safety, security and belonging—and after all, that's what makes a family a family.

Studies show that when adolescents participate in regular and frequent family meals, they are less likely to smoke, drink or use drugs<sup>1</sup>. These teens also report being content with their life and future possibilities. Academically, these adolescents achieve better grades than their counterparts.

The evidence is clear—family meals not only strengthen the parent-child bond, but they may lead to good physical and mental well-being for children. Take some time and sit down with your children today; here is some advice:

### 3 Tips That Make Family Meals Work



#### Make it a priority

Put it on your schedule just as you would with an appointment, soccer game or parent-teacher night. It's true that the modern family has many commitments, so if the dinner hour is not convenient, meet up for breakfast each morning. It's eating together that's important, not the time and place.

#### Make it simple

On weekends, shop and cook together. Make meals to freeze and reheat during the hectic week ahead. Quick meals can be healthy meals—try baked potatoes or yams topped with veggies, tomato sauce, beans and cheese. Make individual pizzas made with whole grain English muffins, veggies, tomato sauce and cheese. Stop off at your local supermarket and pick up a roasted chicken, salad and fruit for dessert.

#### Make it pleasant

Mealtime should be a time to eat and have pleasant conversation. Don't allow distractions like the television or take phone calls during this time. Discuss your day, the meal itself or plans for an upcoming event. Although it is a good time to teach proper dining behaviors and family dining rules, keep discipline to a minimum. Use this time to enjoy each other's company and a healthy meal.

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<sup>1</sup>Tami M. Videon and Carolyn K. Manning, "Influences on Adolescent Eating Patterns: The Importance of Family Meals," in *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 32:365-373 (2003)

"Teens and their parents in the 21st century: an examination of trends in teen behavior and the role of parental involvement," in *U.S. Council of Economic Advisors*, (2000)

National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, "The Importance of Family Dinners," (2003)

Marla E. Eisenberg, Dianne Neumark-Sztainer and Linda H. Bearinger, "Correlations Between Family Meals and Psychological Well-being Among Adolescents," (2004)

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