

PACKING A HEALTHY LUNCH BOX

IS A HEALTHY LUNCH BOX IMPORTANT?

All parents want their children to do well at school, yet very often children's concentration span at school are diminished because of the food they eat.

- Healthy food choices are essential to help children grow, develop, feel good and do well academically.
- Today, children are consuming more and more added sugars, fast foods and sodas and their diets are often low in nutrient-dense foods such as fruits, vegetables, lean meats and grains.
- Bad eating habits lead to low energy levels, inactivity and obesity.
- Parents have the power to guide children and help them to develop healthy lifestyles, have sustainable energy and reduce the risks of developing certain chronic diseases.

OBESITY IN CHILDREN - FAST FACTS

- Childhood obesity cuts across all communities and all categories of race, ethnicity and family income
- Research indicates that almost 10% of children aged 2 to 5 are obese. The obesity rate for children 6 to 11 years old are around 18% (four times higher than 40 years ago) and 21% of adolescents aged 12 to 19 are obese.
- A staggering 33,3% of the children born in 2000 will develop diabetes during their lifetime
- Since 1980, the obesity prevalence among children and adolescents has almost tripled
- Obese children are already demonstrating cardiovascular risk factors typically not seen until adulthood
- Children and adolescents with obesity have a greater risk of social and psychological problems, such as discrimination and poor self-esteem, which can continue into adulthood
- Children with weight issues are more likely to miss school and repeat a grade than children who are at a healthy weight
- Children with obesity have three times more healthcare expenditure than children at healthy weights.

WHAT IS A BALANCED DIET FOR KIDS?

A balanced diet for children is the same as for adults, however the quantities are different and during a child's development their nutritional needs changes.

To ensure adequate nutrition, children's meals and snacks should include a variety of foods from each of the five food groups in portions appropriate to the child's appetite and needs:

- Grains e.g. bread
- Vegetables e.g. tomato, carrots
- Fruits e.g. oranges, apples
- Proteins e.g. meat, eggs
- Dairy products e.g. milk, cheese.
- Apart from the food options, children must also drink lots of water.

WHY EAT FROM SPECIFIC FOOD GROUPS?

Proteins

Proteins are the building blocks needed for cell growth, provide energy, fight infection, formation of hormones and several other important functions in the body.

Good sources of protein for children can be derived from meat, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts and beans and dairy.

Grains and carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are the body's most important source of energy. Together with fat and protein, they help to build and repair tissue.

Carbohydrates come in several different forms and children should eat complex carbohydrates (like potatoes and brown rice) and stay away from simple carbohydrates like chips and sweets.

Good carbohydrate sources mainly come from grains like brown rice, oats, whole grain pasta, whole wheat bread and potatoes.

Fats

Children need to consume fat as it is essential in the formation of the membranes around the cells in the body. Fat is also a good source of energy, especially in the absence of simple carbohydrates like sugar.

There are however good fats and bad fats and it is important to provide kids with the unsaturated fats, which are good fats. Good fats can be found in vegetable oils e.g. olive oil, fish, avocado, nuts and free-range chicken.

Fruit and vegetables

The first place to start when trying to improve a child's nutrition is to add more fruit and vegetables to their diet. These two groups should make up the majority of what a child consumes on a daily basis.

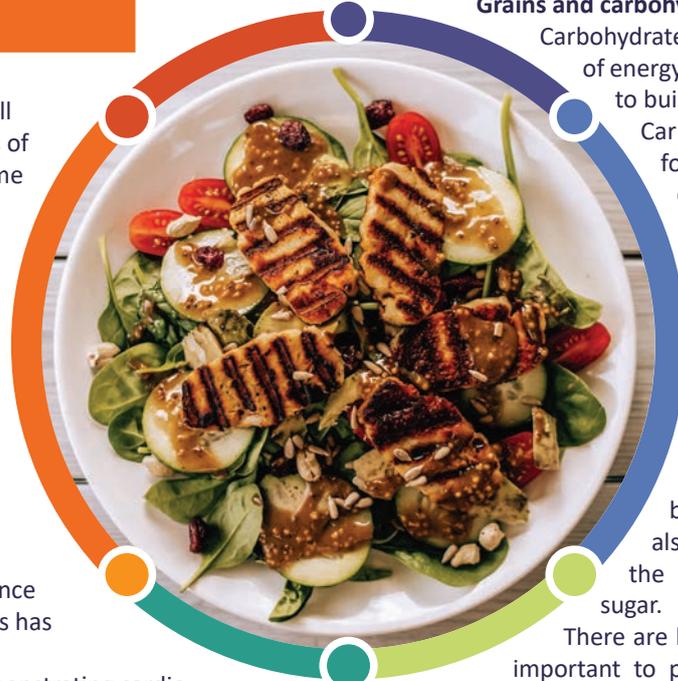
Fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of many nutrients. They contain the necessary vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, starch and fibres.

Dairy

The dairy group includes foods such as milk, cheese and yogurt that provide children with an adequate source of calcium to ensure strong bones.

During childhood bones are growing and developing, so it is critical to eat sufficient amounts of calcium-rich foods daily.

Recent evidence also suggests that children with a diet rich in calcium from low-fat dairy foods have lower body fat than children with a lower dairy intake.



FOOD PORTION SIZES

The following charts give an indication of how much children of different ages and genders need to eat per day.

	Boys and girls	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
	2-3 yrs	4-8 yrs	4-8 yrs	9-13 yrs	9-13 yrs	14-18 yrs	14-18 yrs
Calories (weight and activity dependant)	1000-1200	1200 - 1800	1200 - 2000	1400 - 2200	1600 - 2600	1800 - 2400	2000 - 3200
Proteins	56 g-112 g	84 g - 140 g	84 g - 154 g	84 g - 154 g	140 g - 182 g	140 g - 182 g	154 g - 196 g
Fruits	1- 1.5 cups	1 - 1.5 cups	1 - 2 cups	1.5 - 2 cups	1.5 - 2 cups	1.5 - 2 cups	2 - 2.5 cups
Vegetables	1-1.5 cups	1.5 - 2.5 cups	1.5 - 2.5 cups	1.5 - 3 cups	2 - 3 cups	2.5 - 3 cups	2.5 - 4 cups
Grains	84 g-140 g	112 g - 168 g	112 g - 168 g	140 g - 196 g	140 g - 252 g	168 g - 224 g	168 g - 280 g
Dairy products	2 cups	2.5 cups	2.5 cups	3 cups	3 cups	3 cups	3 cups

NUTRITION IN A NUTSHELL

In summary, a child should eat:

- Lots of fruit and vegetables for vitamins and fibre
- Carbohydrates from complex carbohydrates such as whole grains (brown rice, whole grain bread, whole grain pasta) for energy
- Lean meat and fish (especially oily fish) for proteins
- Nuts, seeds and avocados for fats
- Low-fat dairy products for calcium.

TIPS FOR A NUTRITIOUS LUNCH BOX

Play with colours

Different colours of fruits and vegetables contain different combinations of nutrients.

Think of foods in colours - green, white, yellow, orange, blue, purple, red. Get children involved and ask them to build a rainbow in their lunch box. Let them choose a food with each colour or as many as possible.

Play with shapes

Get creative in the kitchen – make food fun. Cut food into funny shapes, make faces out of the food and let the children experiment with the different flavours and textures of food.

Let children choose

Let the children choose what they want in their lunch box from the chosen group of foods. Children love to be involved in decision making.

Take them shopping

When children are involved in the shopping process, they are more likely to eat the food they selected.

Explain to them that the different food options will

- help growth
- increase concentration span
- increase energy levels
- improve brain function.

CONCLUSION

What children eat on a daily basis will have a huge impact on their health throughout adolescence and adulthood. Eating food containing important nutrients helps children grow and is essential for their mental and physical development. Parents have the responsibility to ensure that children grow up eating healthy food, to prevent chronic diseases later in life.

DISCLAIMER

TAKE NOTE

The information provided in this article is for education purposes only and does not serve as a medical diagnosis. Members should always consult their healthcare provider with serious symptoms.

Please note that Heritage Health plans do not necessarily cover the costs of the condition/s described.

