

Time For A Fresh Start: Back To School Nutrition Tips

By Heather Osler, Homeopathic Doctor

After a summer of visits to the ice cream truck and bike rides to the corner store for treats, it's time to get our kid's diets back on track for the school year. It's also an opportunity for us to challenge ourselves to improve the way we handle what I call "school day nutrition".

Easy, right?...Well, not necessarily. There are obstacles that stand in the way of our children getting an ideal diet.

Obstacle #1: Time. (or lack of it)

As we run around like chickens with our heads cut off getting ourselves and our kids from A to B, within an often extremely tight schedule, it's no wonder that we look for any way possible to save time. Unfortunately, what often gets sacrificed is our children's nutrition.

Strategies:

A little organization and planning go a long way.

- Create a meal plan with the kids. This is a fun way to involve children and make them feel like they have some sense of choice.
- Pack lunch the night before, or prepare healthy snacks like whole grain muffins, dips, and cut up veggies on the weekend.
- Remember fruit like plums, apples, etc. require no time to prepare and are loaded with nutrition
- Do a practice run the week before school starts to get your family into the swings of things again and ease the transition back to a routine.

Obstacle #2: Fussiness

Many parents tell me, "My child won't eat unless I give her what she wants (which is junk)."

Strategies

- Learn to say no. Your child will not starve him/herself. I am not saying to make your child sit at the table for 3 hours until they force down a pile of spinach. But, be firm, be consistent and while there may be resistance, attitude, tantrums or tears, your child will eventually give in and probably find that the healthy food tastes just as good. (Remember. Dr. Seuss' "Green Eggs and Ham"?)
- Educate your kids and make it fun. Play the food game... at dinner, we ask our older kids questions like, "What in your plate has protein?" Or, "What is the difference between brown rice and white rice?" Educating your children about the benefits of healthy food is empowering for them, and they begin to initiate healthy choices on their own.

- Be their role model... only have in the house what are acceptable choices. If you don't keep junk in the house, no one can ask for it.

Fast and Healthy Suggestions

A Note Regarding Refined Carbs. Look for 100% whole grain and avoid sugar whenever possible. White or enriched wheat flour (in bread, crackers, cookies, etc) means refined flour, which means a carbohydrate that sends your child's blood sugar way up and then way down. Sugary foods and drinks do the same.

Whole grain products, or less sweetened foods, on the other hand, provide their body and brain with a steady, stable and longer lasting flow of blood sugar as well as other nutrients to aid their attention span and moderate behaviour in class.

The Morning Rush

- Smoothies- a fast and simple way to pack a ton of nutrients into one tasty drink. Blend a scoop of Vega (a complete protein powder loaded with vitamins, essential fatty acids and fibre), with a banana, frozen berries and a base of milk or rice milk.
- Multivitamin (Nubears or Genestre) and chewable vit C (250mg per day) for immune support.
DHA oil for kids for healthy brain development and concentration
- Instant oatmeal, whole grain cereal, whole grain bagels with cream cheese, organic waffles

When you have a little more time...

- Whole grain pancakes with blueberries, eggs with whole grain toast/English muffin

The Lunch Crunch

- Dips and: whole grain pita, crackers, organic corn chips, and veggies
Dip ideas: Hummus, organic/natural ranch or Caesar dressing (Annie's is great), guacamole, black bean
- Tofu spread, egg salad, tuna, organic turkey or chicken sandwiches
- Organic cheese and crackers, fruit, fruit to go (fruit leather), yoghurt, celery boats (with cream cheese, nut butters), whole grain cookies

*Supplements available at Supplement's Plus or Peach Tree. Food suggestions available at Loblaws or health food stores.

Start this school year off right. You may invest more time and energy into establishing healthy habits but the pay off is huge...less trips to the doctor, better behaviour, improved academic performance and the foundation of a healthy relationship with food that your child will carry with them for the rest of their life.

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