

Nutrition Nuggets

Food and Fitness for a Healthy Child

March 2021

Montgomery County Schools

BEST BITES

Celebrate nutrition

It's National Nutrition Month! This year's theme, "Personalize Your Plate," recognizes there's no one-size-fits-all approach to eating right. Let each family member draw favorite healthy foods on a paper plate, making sure to include something from each food group. Compare your plates—they'll likely all be different, but all nutritious.

Animal walks

The morning after it rains or snows, go for a brisk stroll with your youngster to look for animal tracks. Encourage her to walk in the tracks, mimicking how she thinks the animal who made them might move. For instance, maybe she'll hop like a bird or leap like a deer.



DID YOU KNOW? Not all high-sodium foods taste salty. Ask your child to name salty foods, and he'll probably think of pretzels and chips. But salt lurks in surprising places, like processed cheeses and dinner rolls. The bottom line? Read labels, even if you don't expect a food to be high in sodium. *Tip:* A low-sodium food has less than 140 mg sodium per serving.

Just for fun

Q: What's round and red and moves up and down?

A: A tomato in an elevator.



Comfortable in the kitchen

It's never too early to teach your child about choosing and cooking healthy foods. Invite her into the kitchen and enjoy making meals together. Here's how.

Plan the menu

Baked potatoes topped with meatballs and peas? Why not! Let your youngster plan the menu sometimes. Try to go with what she wants as closely as possible, even if it's not your first choice, and mention ways to make the meals healthier. ("I'm going to buy chicken meatballs instead of beef.") Then explain why so she learns about nutrition. ("Chicken has less fat, so it's better for our hearts.")

Learn skills

Teach your child basic cooking skills to help her get comfortable in the kitchen. For example, show her how to read abbreviations like tbsp. (tablespoon) and tsp. (teaspoon), and ask her to measure ingredients. Also, demonstrate how to



use kitchen tools (garlic press, salad spinner, potato masher), and put her in charge when it's time to use them!

Create a recipe file

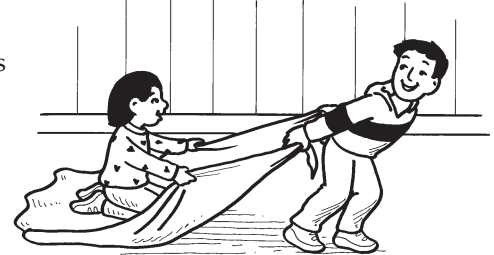
Your youngster can take photos of finished dishes you make together. Have her draw or write a recipe for each one, making sure to mention any changes she made. For example, what size meatballs did she put on her baked potatoes? Did she use canned or frozen peas? *Tip:* Have her keep the photos and recipes in a binder to make again. ♥

Let's pretend!

Combine make-believe with physical activity. Here are fun roles for your youngster to step into.

Sled dog. Take turns pulling each other around on an old bedsheet—like sled dogs pull the musher. One person sits on the sheet. The "sled dog" faces away from the sheet, grasps one corner in each hand, and pulls it behind him across the living room or basement.

Race car driver. Let your child use a kitchen pot lid as a pretend steering wheel and "drive" through the house. He could pick up speed as he zooms down a straight hallway or slow down as he maneuvers around furniture. ♥



Fun with ice cubes

If you and your youngster thought ice cube trays were just for freezing water, think again! Keep healthy, fresh ingredients on hand with these ideas:

- Encourage your child to drink more water by making fruity ice cubes. He could place a blackberry or raspberry into each section of a tray and cover with water. Freeze. Then, he can use the cubes to add flavor—and fun—to water or seltzer.



- Prepare smoothie ingredients. Puree ripe fruit in a blender. Put the puree into some sections of a tray, and spoon Greek yogurt into other sections. Your youngster can combine the frozen cubes in a blender for smoothies. *Idea:* For “green smoothies,” puree and freeze cooked collard greens to blend in with the fruit cubes.

- Pour low-sodium chicken, beef, or vegetable broth into a tray. When the cubes freeze, your

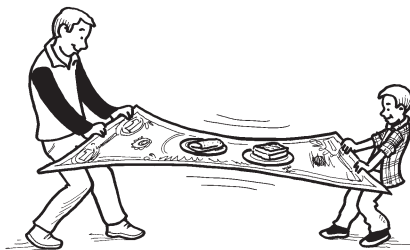
child gets to pop them out and store in a freezer bag. Use when only a small amount of broth is needed, such as for stir-frying vegetables. ●

PARENT TO PARENT

Tasty leftovers

After many months of limiting grocery store trips because of the pandemic, my son Marcus and I have gotten pretty creative with leftovers.

First, we discovered you can put just about anything in burritos and paninis. We’ve had breakfast burritos with scrambled eggs plus the jarred salsa and black beans from taco night. And we’ve made paninis by combining leftover baked chicken and roasted vegetables.



We’ve also found that leftover rice, pasta, or potatoes will make soups and stews heartier. I had a can of broccoli and cheese soup in the pantry, and I let Marcus stir in the previous day’s roasted potatoes. We heated it up and enjoyed a satisfying lunch.

Now we actually look forward to leftovers—and Marcus is learning about saving money and wasting less food. ●

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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ACTIVITY CORNER

Circus-themed fitness

Bring the fun of a three-ring circus to your living room or yard. These activities will improve your youngster’s balance, coordination, and flexibility.

Ring 1: Tightrope walking. Have your child cut a long piece of yarn and lay it on the ground. “Performers” can walk heel-to-toe along the tightrope. *Idea:* Suggest that your youngster hold a yardstick in outstretched arms—does that make it easier to balance?

Ring 2: Baton twirling. Encourage your youngster to march to music while twirling a baton (or an empty cardboard tube). She could toss it in the air and try to catch it. Can she spin while it’s in the air and catch it again?

Ring 3: Acrobatics. Let your child practice her tumbling skills. On a towel or a yoga mat, she might try forward rolls, backward rolls, cartwheels, and handstands. ●



IN THE KITCHEN

One-pot meals

Cooking an entire meal in just one pot means less cleanup. Try these nutritious options.

Pasta Florentine

Boil 16 oz. linguine according to package directions. Drain, reserving $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water. In the same pot, heat $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil over medium heat. Mix in 1 tbsp. minced garlic until soft, and lower heat. Add pasta, 1 14-oz. can diced tomatoes (drained), reserved water, and 2 cups fresh spinach. Stir until spinach wilts.

Enchilada bowls

In a large pot over medium heat, brown 1 lb. lean ground turkey and reduce heat to low. Add 2 cups cooked brown rice, $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups frozen corn, 1 14-oz. can pinto beans (drained, rinsed), and 1 tbsp. chili powder. Simmer until heated through, about 15 minutes. Spoon into bowls, and top with enchilada sauce and low-fat shredded cheddar. ●

