

# KEEPING YOUR KIDS HEALTHY: NUTRITION AND FITNESS TIPS FOR KIDS

## NUTRITION BASICS FOR PARENTS

Of course you want good nutrition for your child, which means making sure they're eating a balanced, healthy diet. But when you get nutrition advice from other parents, your pediatrician, and the media, it can be tough to decide which direction to follow.

A good place to begin sorting out the nutrition puzzle is to learn about the basics. Below are five essential nutrients that a growing body needs every day. Ensuring your children are receiving adequate nutrition will result in strong bones and teeth, a well-regulated digestive system, oxygen-rich blood, and healthy nutritional habits they can carry throughout life.



### Calcium

Calcium helps make strong bones and teeth, and this nutrient is most important during the years when bones are growing. Foods that are the highest in calcium come from the cow – low-fat milk, cheeses and yogurt. Some leafy green vegetables and fortified juices are also good sources of calcium. Here are some ways to give your child the calcium they need:

- Start their day with a bowl of cold or hot whole-grain cereal topped with skim or low-fat milk and sliced fresh fruit.
- Serve low-fat yogurt, smoothies, or cheese after school and between meals for a nourishing calcium-rich snack.
- Calcium-fortified juices and cereals are fine non-dairy alternatives to help meet your child's daily requirement.

### Fiber

Everyone needs plenty of fiber each day to keep the digestive system working well. Here's how to get your kids used to the taste of fiber-rich foods.

- A bowl of high-fiber cereal is a great start to meeting your child's daily needs. Read food labels to find whole-grain cereals that provide 3 grams or more of fiber per serving. Add sweetness to cereal with fresh, canned (unsweetened), or frozen fruit.
- Have cut-up whole fruits and veggies on hand to help your child meet the recommended five or more daily servings of fiber. Keep fruit juice to a minimum. Whole fruits and vegetables contain much more fiber and less sugar than most juices.
- Beans are loaded with fiber and protein. Drain and rinse canned beans and toss into soups, stews, salads, scrambled eggs and omelets, and salsas.



### Protein

Every cell in the body is made of protein, which makes this major nutrient essential for healthy growth and development. Protein is found in animal products such as dairy, eggs, seafood and meats. In somewhat lesser amounts, it is also in beans, nuts, vegetables, and grains. Boost your child's nutritional intake with these protein-rich food ideas.

- Even finicky kids love eggs. French toast, scrambled eggs, pancakes and omelets are kid-pleasing dishes that contain plenty of protein, iron, and other important nutrients.
- Branch out from fish sticks and try salmon dishes that kids will enjoy. Top salmon or other fish fillets with salsa or teriyaki sauce to give your child lean protein along with heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids.
- Add nuts to cereals, yogurts, or vegetables for added protein, fiber and healthy unsaturated fats.

## Antioxidant Superfoods

Antioxidants help defend the body against harmful substances that can damage the body's cells. Power up your child's diet with foods rich in antioxidants, such as almonds, berries, citrus, carrots, spinach, tomatoes and bell peppers.

- Bring orange wedges, 100% citrus juice, fruit or nut granola bars to the next sports practice for a refreshing and energizing treat.
- Pack school lunches with baby carrots, grape tomatoes, or red bell pepper slices for a fiber- and antioxidant-rich lunch or snack.
- Add plenty of antioxidant-rich tomatoes or tomato sauce to pizza, spaghetti, meatloaf, soups and stews.

## Iron

Children's diets are often lacking in iron, a mineral that carries oxygen in the blood and helps keep kids energized. Boost the iron in your kids' diet with lean meats, eggs, fish, dark leafy greens, beans, dried fruits, and iron-fortified grains.

- Vitamin C increases the absorption of iron, so pair eggs with oranges or orange juice.
- Serve spinach salads topped with strawberries, dried cranberries, and/or slivered almonds and a light raspberry vinaigrette dressing. The fruit will help the body absorb the iron in the spinach, and kids will love the taste.
- When kids refuse a meal, offer iron-fortified cereal topped with low-fat milk or yogurt and fruit as a healthy meal substitute.

## INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN CHILDREN

Exercise is important for your family – it can increase life expectancy, lower heart risks, help control weight, and improve school performance – but it can also decrease the risk that your child will be inactive as an adult. Making family activities and fitness a part of your child's life at an early age can go a long way toward helping them form healthy habits for life. When exercise feels like play, the whole family will enjoy it more and be more likely to stick with it.



### 1. Make time to play.

Set aside 30 minutes three times a week to do fun exercises with your kids. Make it a part of your after-school or after-dinner routine. Young kids might enjoy hopscotch or hide-and-seek. Older children may enjoy kicking a soccer ball around or throwing a baseball.

### 2. Walk or bike everywhere you can.

Walk or bike to the grocery store, library or school or sports events. Go for a 30-minute family walk after dinner. Track steps or mileage with a pedometer and try to increase your distance each week. Use a family exercise log or colorful stickers to track progress.

### 3. Plan active family gatherings.

Serve up fitness at parties by planning active games such as tag or relay races. At family or holiday gatherings, turn off the TV and take a walk around the neighborhood or go for a hike at a local park.

### 4. Sing and dance while you clean.

Do household chores as a family. Play music as you clean and take turns choosing favorite songs. Younger children can pick up toys or sweep floors while dancing with the broom, while older kids can dust, vacuum and help make beds.

### 5. Make yard work less of a chore for more family exercise.

Enjoy seasonal yard work together. Plant a garden in the spring, rake leaves into a pile and then jump in. Make snow shoveling fun for all by building a snow fort or creating a snow family.