



“Growing” Healthy Kids



Fast Food ‘Nutrition’

Fast food is nothing new – the concept dates back at least to ancient Rome. And fast-food meals can be a part of virtually any balanced diet. Especially for children’s diets, emphasis is on the word “balanced.” A study published recently in the journal *Pediatrics* supports previous research showing lower nutritional dietary quality and increased calorie intake among children on days when they consume fast food.

The researchers found that children who ate fast foods on two consecutive days, compared with children who did not eat fast food meals on either day, consumed more calories, more total and saturated fat, more total carbohydrates, more added sugars and more sweetened beverages. And they consumed less milk, fiber, fruit and non-starchy vegetables.

As the national problem of childhood obesity only gets worse, studies like these reinforce the importance of helping children learn to make balanced food choices, especially when it comes to eating more fruits and vegetables.

So How Do You Feel?

The number of overweight children between the ages of 6 and 11 has more than doubled since the late 1970s. More than 70 percent of parents believe that physical education should be a part of the school curriculum; that PE helps children perform better in the classroom; and that nutrition education should be included in the curriculum.

Similar number of parents believe parents and schools should work together to plan school meal – that “the school and community have a shared responsibility to provide all students with access to high-quality foods and nutrition services as an integral part of the total education program. Local school policy, developed through a collaborative process that responds to community needs and priorities, should include the integration of the school nutrition program with education.”

Healthy Snacking

Be sure to encourage and offer your children healthy snack foods, which should include some carbohydrates and a little protein. For the greatest variety of nutrients, try to incorporate whole grains, fruits, vegetables or beans into your kids’ snack-eating plan.

- Some ideas include:
 - A cheese quesadilla with salsa and lettuce
 - A yogurt and fruit smoothie with graham crackers
 - A bowl of whole-grain cereal topped with sliced fruit and milk
 - Fruit, cheese and whole-grain crackers

Kids in the Kitchen

Including your children in planning and preparing meals helps kids feel good about themselves and learn about important nutrients and foods at the same time.

- Educate your children about nutrients in foods at the grocery store, encourage them to suggest meal ideas and include them in mealtime preparations.
- Start with stirring, pouring, tearing lettuce and breaking eggs. Children’s kitchen involvement can increase as they get older.
- Teach children to wash their hands before, during and after meal preparation and to be sure counters and utensils are cleaned after each use.
- Teaching your children healthy eating habits and kitchen techniques will serve them well as adults – and they’ll pass on the advice to your grandchildren.

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