

# Nutrition Nuggets

Food and Fitness for a Healthy Child

October 2014



## BEST BITES

### Take a farm tour

It's a great time of year for showing your youngster where her food comes from. At pick-your-own orchards and farms, she could pluck apples and pears from trees or pumpkins from vines. Or take a farm tour to watch cows being milked and learn about crops and other farm animals. Look online or in community newspapers for details.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Sweet potatoes are a rich source of potassium, fiber, and beta-carotene. Bake sweet potatoes (about an hour at 375°) for a side dish that's so naturally sweet your child won't need to add butter. Or slice potatoes thickly, drizzle with a little olive oil, and roast at 400° for 30–45 minutes. *Tip:* Heat the pan first for crispier fries.

### Healthier parties

Birthday parties are a highlight for most children—especially if it's theirs! But when parties add up, so do the cupcakes and ice cream. Consider making your youngster's party a healthier one with a physical activity like gymnastics or relay races and a fun fruit treat (apple slices to dunk in honey, strawberries to dip in melted dark chocolate).

### Just for fun

**Q:** What smells the best at dinner?

**A:** Your nose!



Suffolk Public Schools  
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## Skip the empty calories

It seems unbelievable, but research shows that almost 40 percent of the calories children consume are “empty” ones. Try limiting these empty calories, and you'll go a long way toward helping your child maintain a healthy weight and feel his best.

### What are they?

Empty calories come from added sugar or solid fat and have no nutrients.

### What's the problem?

They fill your youngster up without providing the vitamins and minerals he needs.

### Where are they?

The most likely culprits are soda, fruit drinks, candy, cake, cookies, and doughnuts. But you also have to watch for empty calories in foods that do have important nutrients. Whole milk, pizza, fried chicken, and cheese all have solid fats; and jelly, sports drinks, and sweetened yogurt and cereals have added sugars.



### What now?

Together, brainstorm a list of replacements for empty-calorie foods. For instance, your child might choose fruit over candy, flavored seltzer water rather than soda or sports drinks, fat-free milk in place of whole milk, and frozen 100 percent fruit bars instead of ice cream.

### Try this

Help him make a poster with road signs for “stop” or “go” foods. (“Stop eating candy.” “Go for grapes!”) Or he could put each empty-calorie food in a circle and draw a slash through it (like a Do Not Enter sign). Hang his chart in the kitchen for reference. ♡

## Build snack baskets

Make it easy for your youngster to choose a healthy snack by putting together snack baskets like these.

**On the kitchen table.** Fill a clean bucket with mini raisin boxes, small bags of almonds or sunflower seeds, fresh fruit, and colorful sports bottles of tap water. Add a card that says, “Take water, and choose two snacks!”

**In the fridge.** Stock a colorful plastic bin with cold water bottles, individual cups of unsweetened applesauce, containers of ready-to-eat raw vegetables (green beans, cauliflower florets, carrots), and a small tub of hummus or lowfat ranch dressing. Then, put it on a shelf at your child's eye level so it's the first thing she sees when she opens the refrigerator. ♡



# Fit as a family

Want your child to be more active? Get in on the action together! Try ideas like these, and find the one—or ones—just right for your family:

- Take regular bike rides on neighborhood paths or local bike trails. On weekends, load bikes in the car and drive to new places to ride. *Note:* Be sure to wear helmets.
- Try stand-up paddling. You could paddle together on one board or take out your own, depending on your child's age and experience. Check with your parks and recreation department or local outfitters for lessons at nearby lakes or rivers.



- Have a weekly tennis round-robin. Go to public courts, and take turns playing against each other. *Tip:* Ask relatives for racquets their kids have outgrown, or find used ones at garage sales or secondhand shops.
- Sign up for yoga classes at the community center or YMCA. Then, continue your practice at home with a nightly “yoga break.”

- Take a walk every day before or after dinner—whichever works best in your family's schedule. When it gets cold, bundle up, and keep on walking.

*Bonus:* Fitness is a fun way to spend time together and strengthen bonds. Build it into your family life now, and the habit may continue into the teenage years when your children aren't as excited about hanging out with you. ♥

## PARENT TO PARENT **Homemade kids' meals**

Week after week my daughter begged to get fast food on the way home from after-school care. I wasn't happy about having her eat fast food, and I soon realized that what she really liked best anyway was the cute packaging and the toy.



That gave me an idea. Why not create our own kids' meals at home? I had Allie decorate brown paper lunch bags. Then every Friday we make them into “Friday Fun Meals” for dinner. I just put whatever I've made for dinner into plastic containers and place them in a decorated bag for each person. Allie adds a napkin, a plastic fork, and a cup for water. For the final touch, I drop in a surprise—a small toy from the dollar store.

Allie loves our homemade kids' meals, and I'm happy we're having healthier “fast food.” ♥

## ACTIVITY CORNER **Game changers**

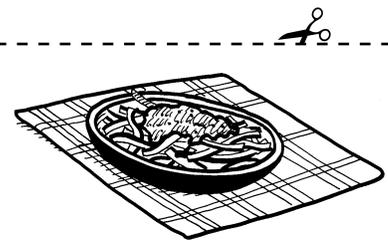
When your youngster has friends over, encourage them to be active with these two twists on classic games.



1. Try a life-size version of tic-tac-toe. Using yarn or jump ropes, the kids can make a giant tic-tac-toe board on the grass. Two players stand on the opposite side of the yard, each holding six Xs or Os (written on slips of paper). Take turns running to the grid, dropping in an X or O, and running back. First to get three in a row is the winner.
2. Play Simon Says, but each direction has to involve moving around. *Examples:* “Simon says jump up and down seven times.” “Simon says twirl around twice.” “Touch your toes.” Oops, if you touched your toes, you're out! ♥

## IN THE KITCHEN **Pasta swap**

Turn vegetables into “noodles,” and your family will get a delicious pasta experience without the carb overload. Pair any of these options with your favorite marinara sauce, meatballs, or sauteed vegetables. *Note:* Vegetable noodles are a great option for gluten-free kids.



- Use a vegetable peeler to scrape zucchini or peeled carrots into noodle-like strands. Or get a “spiral” tool—popular in stores or online—to make noodles out of almost any vegetable (yellow squash, cucumbers, beets, jicama). Use the strands raw, or pour boiling water over them to soften.

- Bake a spaghetti squash (350° for 1 hour), cut in half lengthwise, and scoop out the seeds. With a fork, scrape the flesh into strands.
- Peel an eggplant, and slice into ¼-inch strips. Salt, and let drain for a half-hour. Rinse with cold water, and pat dry with paper towels. Now slice the strips thinly.

*Tip:* Combine any of these for a “rainbow pasta.” ♥

### 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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