

7 Healthy Back-To-School Tips

By Dr. Lisa Young, *HuffPost*



As a nutritionist, I regularly counsel parents and their children on healthy eating. The beginning of the school year is a perfect time to set the stage for the upcoming year and to create new healthy habits for the entire family.

Below are simple tips to get you going on the right foot.

1. Start the day off right.

Eating breakfast as a family is a perfect time to bond and spend quality time together while also preparing a healthy breakfast for the kids. Eggs with whole grain toast, fruit and yogurt, or whole grain unsweetened cereal with milk and berries are several great choices. I suggest that kids begin their day with a meal consisting of protein and fiber, a winning combination of nutrients that will help them feel satisfied until lunch.

2. Nix the added sugar.

I was pleased to see the American Heart Association's announcement this week suggesting that children and teens ages 2-18 limit added sugar to no more than 6 teaspoons (25 grams) per day. These new guidelines aim to help improve children's overall diet. Kids who eat foods high in added sugars tend to eat fewer healthy foods that are good for their heart. Added sugar provides no nutritional benefits and is found in a wide range of food from cookies, ketchup, salad dressings, sugar sweetened cereals (even some whole grain ones!), smoothies, to sweetened yogurts. The major culprit of added sugar, however, is soda and sugary drinks including iced tea and fruit punch so I suggest limiting them from your kids' diets. The guidelines also suggest that children and teens consume no more than 8 ounces of sugary drinks a week. Sugary drinks, often

called “liquid calories,” provide no health benefits.

3. Swap juice for whole fruit.

I am an advocate for feeding your kids whole fruit instead of juice. The fruit is rich in fiber and its high water content helps to keep the calories low. On the other hand, it is so easy to guzzle down too many calories from juice without even realizing it. A pint of orange juice, for example, contains around 225 calories. This is the equivalent to 2-3 cups of mixed berries, which would certainly make you feel much more satisfied. Most of us wouldn't think twice about drinking the pint of juice but few of us would eat 3 cups of berries in one sitting.

4. Pack a healthy snack.

If you are packing snacks for your kids, here is a perfect opportunity to include at least one fruit and veggie. Smart snacks include fresh fruit (apple, pear, and bananas), Greek yogurt, baby carrots with hummus, roasted edamame, and of course a bottle of water. Nuts or nut butter squeeze packs are also great choices if a school allows nuts; if not, they are a great go-to snack when kids get home.

5. Keep portions healthy (no measuring cup required!)

Regardless of what you feed your kids, I am advocate for serving healthy portion sizes. I love using the plate method with kids (as long as the plate isn't oversized!): at dinner, for example, fill half the plate with veggies and a quarter with protein (think fish, chicken) and the other quarter with a healthy starch (brown rice, sweet potato). To avoid overeating, limit eating in front of the TV and pre-portion snacks into 100 calorie portions. I offer more portion control tricks and tips here.

6. Skip the white food (unless it's cauliflower or white beans).

White bread including bagels, white rice, and white pasta are refined grains and are easy to overeat. Because they contain virtually no fiber, we don't feel satisfied after eating them. While many kids choose them by default, I've learned from my counseling practice that introducing kids to healthier alternatives including quinoa, whole grain pasta, and brown rice helps them get into the habit of enjoying these grains. No need for kids to cut out starch entirely. Choosing the healthier ones is a far better alternative.

7. Get moving!

Incorporating sports and exercise into your children's daily routine is a great way to keep them healthy while also keeping their weight in check. If possible, enroll kids in after school activities where possible, enjoy a walk or bike ride with your kids whenever possible, and encourage them to move. I've noticed that if parents engage in physical activity, their kids will follow along. Hope your school year gets off to a great start!

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