



Prepare and Eat More Meals at Home

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By Rebecca Morley, MA

Eating smart and moving more helps school age children feel better and have more energy.

These positive health benefits can translate into school success. Good nutrition nourishes the mind and body. Well nourished students are more attentive in class, better focused, and probably earning better grades with fewer absences. Families can share in the responsibility of promoting a good nutrition foundation by preparing more meals at home and dining-out less.

Since the year 2000, Americans have spent about 50 cents of each food dollar eating out, according to the USDA Economic Research Center. That's up from 34 cents in 1970. Also, the total number of calories consumed daily per person has climbed in the same period by more than 500 calories. Often, meals eaten away from home are higher in calories, fat and saturated fat, and lower in calcium, fiber and iron than meals prepared at home. Families who eat home-prepared meals together eat more fruits and vegetables, drink more milk, and eat less fat and calories than those who eat out.

Using whole-foods and cooking simple home-cooked meals from “scratch” offers increased nutrition and protection against added sugars, sodium, and unhealthy amounts and varieties of fat found in many processed foods.

Here are some tips that can help increase the nutrition of school aged children:

- **Plan, shop, fix and eat more meals at home.**
- **If packing breakfast, lunch, or snacks, pack healthy foods that support student success, while considering food safety. Keep hot foods hot and cold food cold with insulated lunch boxes and thermoses.**
- **Fix balanced meals that include lean meats, fish or meat substitutes like nuts, whole grains, fruits, vegetables and low-fat or non-fat dairy.**
- **Serve skim or 1% milk with most meals. Encourage your child to buy unflavored skim or 1% milk if buying beverages at school.**
- **Take healthy foods and beverages to school to support school functions. Great choices for hungry students that need an energy boost are vegetable platters with low-fat dips; sliced apples or other fresh fruit with low-fat yogurt dip; whole grain pretzels or crackers with string cheese.**
- **The nutrition quality of school meals are required to be consistent with USDA standards. Sample school meals in the cafeteria with your kids. Use the opportunity to coach kids and teens on healthful selections. Share your input regarding the quality and types of foods you've sampled with your child's school officials. It will be valuable in their assessment.**

