

Back-to-School Meal Tips

It's that time of year again! Rushing from home to school to practice can be a lot! Sometimes it seems like there is not enough time in the day. As you drop your kid off, you realize you forgot to feed him breakfast!

Making sure your kids start the day off right with a healthy breakfast and lunch are essential. Grandma was right when she said breakfast was the most important meal of the day. Our brains function on 90% glucose. When we sleep, we burn calories and carbohydrates. We need fuel when we wake up so we can conquer our day!

Several studies suggest that eating breakfast may help children perform better in school by improving memory, alertness, concentration, problem-solving ability, test scores, school attendance, and mood. Adults can also benefit from better memory, concentration, performance at work, and mood by adding in a healthy breakfast (1). By skipping breakfast, we narrow our opportunity to take in vital nutrients. For instance, those who eat breakfast tend to have diets rich in fiber, calcium, zinc, iron, and vitamins A and C (1).

Kids and teens that eat breakfast are less likely to be overweight. These habits can transfer into adulthood and lead to more severe weight issues and health risks. According to findings from the National Weight Control Registry, almost eight in 10 adults who maintain a 30-plus pound weight loss for at least a year eat breakfast every day. Furthermore, Research indicates there is a link between healthier body weights and eating foods such as hot and ready-to-eat cereal and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products (1).

Breakfast also contributes to scores of other benefits. Those that eat breakfast tend to have healthier cholesterol levels, stronger bones, better digestion, and improved metabolism (1). The key to a healthy breakfast and all meals is to pair a high-fiber carbohydrate such as oatmeal or whole-grain bread with high-protein items such as milk/yogurt or eggs.

Halfway through the day, you and your kids need more fuel! The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) offers students fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and fat free or low fat milk with every school lunch. Federal nutrition standards are updated every several years to ensure these meals are within age-appropriate calorie levels and to limit unhealthy fats and sodium (2). According to the Food Research and Action Center, "Children participating in school meals are less likely to have nutrient inadequacies and are more likely to consume fruit, vegetables, and milk at breakfast and lunch." Additionally, "Low-income students who eat both school breakfast and lunch have significantly better overall diet quality than low-income students who do not eat school meals" (3). School lunch research has indicated that the National School Lunch Program requirements have improved student food selection and consumption, especially

for fruits and vegetables (3). If your child plans on buying lunches or breakfasts, talk with him or her about healthy choices and encourage them to eat the fruits and vegetables on his or her plate, while also consuming plenty of protein.

Packed lunches are supposed to be healthy, right? We are finding out this may not be the case since these new school lunch standards have been implemented. Research showed that lunches brought from home by pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students had more calories, fat, saturated fat, and sugar than school lunches, and less protein, fiber, vitamin A, and calcium. Additionally, few packed lunches and snacks brought from home met National School Lunch Program standards (3).

Packed lunches do not have to be unhealthy. Using the same principles as the National School Lunch Program when packing your children's lunches will ensure your child has the energy and brain power to get through the rest of the day. What about keeping foods hot or cold? Add an ice pack, or consider purchasing a thermos. See the link below for tips on proper thermos handling (4).

Be sure to also encourage water consumption, especially over sodas and juices. Limit sweets and try to choose healthy options at least 80% of the time. Ensure your child is eating healthy foods packed before adding any treats, or consider saving treats until after school. Not sure how to put it all together? See the healthy plate visual and hassle-free meal plan suggestions below. Packing lunches can be healthy and fun!



Healthy Meal Combinations

Protein

- Tuna
- Frozen chicken
- Low-sodium deli meat
- Beef
- Ground Meat
- Eggs
- Soy
- Tempeh
- Miso
- Edamame
- Turkey bacon
- Turkey/chicken sausage

Dairy

- Cheese
- Cottage Cheese
- Greek Yogurt
- Milk

Vegetables

- Baby carrots
- Cucumber Slices
- Celery sticks
- Salads
- Spinach on Sandwiches
- Tomatoes on sandwiches or grape tomatoes
- Zucchini noodles/slices
- Frozen mixed vegetables
- Cauliflower rice
- Frozen vegetable stir fry

Fruits

- Apple
- Banana
- Pear
- Orange
- Cutie

- Mango
- Grapes
- Melon
- Berries
- Cherries
- 2 TBS dried fruit

****Limit fruit juice!**

Whole Grains/Starchy Vegetables

- Whole wheat bread
- Whole grain pita bread
- Whole grain tortillas
- Corn tortillas/corn tortilla chips
- Whole grain noodles
- Lentil/chickpea noodles
- Quinoa/brown rice noodles
- Quinoa
- Brown rice
- Wild rice
- Chickpeas
- Hummus
- Beans
- Frozen Peas
- Legumes
- Potatoes
- Sweet Potatoes
- Corn
- Oats
- Whole grain cereal/granola (look for 10 grams sugar/added sugar or less)
- Whole grain crackers such as Wheat Thins/Triscuits

Healthy Fats

- Olive Oil
- Avocado Oil
- Sesame
- Avocado/Guacamole
- Nuts
- Seeds
- Nut butter
- Seed butter

- Mayonnaise with avocado
- Mayonnaise with olive oil

Breakfast/Snack Idea

No Bake Protein Bars

Ingredients

- 2 cups oat flour
- ½ cup coconut flour can sub for almond or more oat flour
- ½ cup protein powder
- ½ cup almond butter can sub for any nut or seed butter
- ½ cup maple syrup can sub for agave nectar or brown rice syrup
- 1/4 cup milk of choice ** See notes
- 1 cup dark chocolate chips

Instructions

1. Line an 8 x 8-inch baking dish with parchment paper and set aside.
2. In a large mixing bowl, combine the flour, protein powder, and set aside.
3. Add the almond butter and syrup, and mix well, until a crumbly batter remains.
4. Using a spoon, add the milk of choice one spoonful at a time until a thick, firm batter is formed.
5. Transfer to a lined baking dish and press firmly.
6. Melt chocolate in a bowl in 30 second intervals. Stir until smooth.
7. Pour dark chocolate onto batter.
8. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.



(Walmart; Price: \$16.97; 22 servings)



(Walmart, Kroger, GNC; Price: \$31.88; 20 servings)

Breakfast

Microwave Scrambled Eggs:

Ingredients

- 2-3 eggs
- ¼ cup water or milk
- Dash of salt and pepper

Instructions

1. Crack eggs in a microwave-safe bowl and stir/.
2. Place eggs in the microwave until fluffy, usually around 2 minutes.

****Cook chicken sausage/turkey bacon in air fryer or George Foreman grill**



(Aldi; Price: \$3.29)



(Kroger; Price: \$3.99)



(Aldi; Price: \$3.29)

Breakfast/Snack Ideas

Low Sugar Protein Drinks:



(Kroger, Walmart; Price: \$8.99; 4 ct.)



(Kroger, Walmart; Price: \$9.99; 6 bottles)



(Kroger, Walmart; Price: \$7.99; 10 ct.)

Lunch

Whole Grain Chicken Wraps:

Ingredients

- 1 whole grain or two corn tortillas
- 4 oz. microwave grilled chicken strips
- Vegetables of choice (spinach, lettuce, tomato, onions, etc)
- 1 TBS avocado or olive oil mayonnaise
- Optional Addition: 2 TBS sugar-free BBQ sauce

Instructions

1. Spread out tortilla on a flat surface and spread on condiments with a butter knife.
2. Add vegetable addition to tortilla.
3. Warm chicken according to package directions and let cool.
4. Add chicken to the tortilla, roll up, and enjoy.

*Place wraps in a thermos to keep warm or chill and eat cold or reheat in the microwave.

Chicken Recommendations:



(Aldi; Price: \$6.29)



(Kroger; Price: \$5.99)



(Kroger/Walmart; Price: \$6.99)



(Kroger; Price: \$4.99)

Tortilla Wrap Recommendations:



(Aldi; Price: \$3.49)



(Walmart, Target, Meijer; Price: \$2.99)

Condiment Suggestions:



(Walmart, Kroger; Price: \$3.26)



30
OZ

(Kroger; Price: \$3.96)



(Walmart; Price: \$1.94)



(Kroger; Price: \$4.90)

Resources

1. <http://www.foodinsight.org/For-Consumers/Breakfast-Resources.aspx>
2. https://schoolnutrition.org/uploadedFiles/About_School_Meals/What_We_Do/Lunch-Benefits.pdf
3. <https://frac.org/programs/national-school-lunch-program/benefits-school-lunch>
4. <https://www.momables.com/how-long-is-it-safe-to-keep-food-hot-in-a-thermos/>