

BACK TO SCHOOL NUTRITION TIPS



Sarah Brandt, Registered Dietitian, Tomah Health

It's that time of year again- back to school. Whether your child eats lunch at home, enjoys a school-provided meal, or packs a lunch box, the goal is a nutrient-rich meal to fuel their brains and bodies for the afternoon. Here are four tips to make eating health for back-to-school fun and easy.

According to the Journal of Nutrition and Education, establishing health eating habits in the early years impacts a person's food choices later in life.

Breakfast

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Several studies indicate that skipping breakfast can have negative impacts on your child's performance at school. Make sure your child has a nutritious breakfast meal each morning. Some quick and healthy breakfast ideas include a yogurt and fruit parfait topped with whole grain cereal; whole grain waffles with peanut butter and berries; egg bites with whole-grain toast topped with nut butter.

Work Together

Preparing your child's lunch can be frustrating if they don't like your choices. When children are able to help plan their lunches, they are more likely to eat them. Have them participate in putting their lunches together, even involve them in shopping for healthy choices at the grocery store. This is a great way to teach your child about healthy and nutritious foods. If your child is eating meals provided by their school, review the menu with them and find the meals that appeal to them. This way you can plan ahead for lunches and if the meal doesn't appeal to your child you can plan a packed lunch from home on the given date.

Planning Ahead

Make lists of foods in each category (dairy, protein, fruit, vegetable, grain) that your child will eat. Make an agreement with your child that they select a protein choice, a grain, at least one fruit, one vegetable, and a calcium-rich choice such as milk for each lunch meal. Make a system that works for both you and your child when preparing for the week ahead. Prep lunches the night before if you know mornings are chaotic for your family. Make sure your child has an insulated lunch bag for the school year to take their lunch in. Food safety is important too!

After School

If your child is involved in after-school activities, don't forget to pack a nutritious snack to hold them over until they are home for supper. This can help your child avoid visiting a vending machine that may have unhealthy snack options such as cookies, chips, or candy bars. Some examples of nutritious snacks include whole grain crackers with nut butter, trail mixes, or whole fruit.

