



For Release: July-September 2004

Nourishing the Brain You Send to School Every Day

Your mother wasn't kidding: breakfast probably is the most important meal of the day. *Did you know that kids who eat breakfast do better on tests, are absent from school less, and have fewer behavior problems?* But breakfast isn't the only meal that's important for kids. What your child brings to school for lunch or chooses at school, and what he or she eats after school is important as well. Read on for more information on how you can help and encourage your child to make healthy food choices throughout the school day.

Try these suggestions:

- ◆ **Make breakfast a priority.** Busy kids and parents sometimes forget to eat breakfast or choose less healthy foods for breakfast. Try these quick-to-fix breakfast ideas for families on the go:
 - A bagel with a slice of low-fat cheese and apple juice;
 - A banana, a piece of string cheese, and a mini-muffin;
 - A tortilla wrap with slices of low-fat ham and cheese;
 - An English muffin with peanut butter and some milk;
 - A carton of yogurt, or yogurt in a tube, a low-fat granola bar, and juice;
 - An apple, a low-fat granola bar, and a hard-boiled egg;
 - A peanut butter and jelly sandwich with milk;
 - A fruit shake or smoothie made with yogurt, fresh or frozen fruit, and milk and a few graham crackers;
 - A piece of leftover pizza and orange juice;
 - A bag of trail mix or a box of raisins and a carton of milk.

FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES

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Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) program staff at MSU Extension can answer questions or help you learn more about money management, parent, food, nutrition and health issues. MSU Extension educators integrate university and community resources to provide tools that help families succeed. For more information on FCS programs in Michigan, call your county MSU Extension office. Check the government pages of your phone book for contact information.

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- ◆ **Power-pack lunches.** Do the following things to make lunches healthier:
 - Include a fruit. Grab and go fruits that pack well without becoming too bruised or mushy include: apples, pears, bananas, oranges, nectarines, grapes or cherries in a plastic bag, and raisins or other dried fruit. (Be sure to wash fresh fruit before packing it in your child's lunch box.)
 - Use whole grain bread. Breads made with whole wheat, oats, or other whole grains are high in fiber and contain lots of vitamins and minerals. Use whole grain bread and/or tortillas if possible for sandwiches and roll ups. Add vegetables to sandwiches such as fresh spinach, lettuce, tomato, carrots, cucumber, and peppers.
 - Include milk or another dairy food. Encourage your child to skip the soda pop in school vending machines and buy milk at school, or pack one of the new low-fat flavored milks such as banana, vanilla, strawberry or root beer. Yogurt, pudding made with milk, a chunk of cheese, or a cheese stick count as a dairy serving too.

- ◆ **Refuel after school.** After a long day at school most children come home hungry! And, that's just about the time kids start reaching for less healthy snack foods such as chips, soda, and candy. Be sure to keep on hand plenty of nutritious snack foods. Healthy snack ideas include:
 - Low-fat yogurt and fruit and/or dry cereal;
 - Chocolate milk and a granola or energy bar;
 - A peanut butter sandwich with sliced banana or grapes;
 - A cheese stick and an orange;
 - A can of vegetable soup and crackers;
 - Apples slices with peanut butter or yogurt for dipping;
 - A micro-waved baked potato topped with cottage cheese and broccoli.

Your child's brain and body are growing every day. Being physically active and eating healthy foods for breakfast, lunch, and snacks can help nourish your child's body and his/her brain. What your child eats before, during and after school is important. School meals are another great way for your child to get the nutrition he or she needs. They are healthy and low in cost. If you would like to know if your child is eligible to receive free or reduced-price school meals, contact the school foodservice director or your school principal.

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For more information on this topic and other food, nutrition, health, or money management issues contact the MSU Extension office. MSU Extension Family and Consumer Science educators are located in all 83 Michigan counties to integrate university and community resources to help families succeed.

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Sources:

The Nutrition Explorations Web site: <http://www.nutritionexplorations.org/sfs/expanding-studyresults.asp>. Accessed 6-12-04.

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