Nutrition Nuggets™

Food and Fitness for a Healthy Child

December 2015

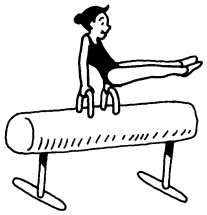
Public School 214 Q
Donna Pelle, Parent Coordinator

BEST BITES

Naming rights

Giving fun names to food can provide just the right incentive for your child to try it. Get him thinking about fitness, too, by tying the names to physical activity. *Examples:* "soccer-ball Brussels sprouts," "table tennis tofu." Ask your youngster to write and illustrate your dinner menus using these names.

DID YOU KNOW? Structured sports and physical activity programs for children continue all winter. With your child, browse through a catalog from your parks and recreation department or look at websites of local sports leagues. Would she be interested in joining a karate class, taking gymnastics, or playing on an indoor flag football team?



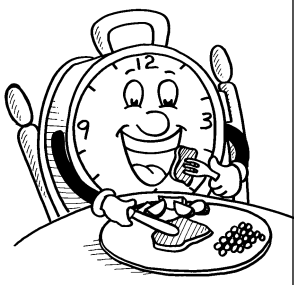
Cookie secret

'Tis the season for cookie baking! To keep from going overboard with cookie eating, try this idea: Bake only a few at a time. Scoop the rest of the dough into spoonfuls on waxed paper, and freeze for a few hours. Then, put the frozen "scoops" into a freezer bag, and bake a couple from time to time.

Just for fun

Q: How can you tell that clocks are always hungry?

A: They have seconds.



Real meals from fictitious books

Cuddle up with your youngster and a book, and then make a healthy meal together based on the story. Children of any age will enjoy the read-aloud—as well as the follow-up of cooking and eating a fanciful meal.

Encourage your child to come up with healthy menus to fit her favorite books or fairy tales. Here are two ideas to get her started.

Alice's tea party

Read: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* (Lewis Carroll)

- Hard-boil eggs, and let your youngster paint their shells to look like Humpty Dumpty.
- Make tea sandwiches with whole-wheat bread and a thin layer of jam. Your child can use heart-shaped cookie cutters to turn them into "Queen of Hearts sandwiches."
- Serve caffeine-free hot or iced tea. Leave it unsweetened to help your youngster get used to the taste of tea without sugar (sweet tea has lots of added sugar).

Magical pasta pot

Read: *Strega Nona* (Tomie dePaola)

- Boil a pot of "magical" whole-grain pasta. You could combine fun shapes like shells, bowties, and rotini. About 4 minutes before it's done, add frozen mixed vegetables—like the vegetables Big Anthony tended in Strega Nona's garden.
- Make a simple tomato sauce from the garden, too. In a skillet, saute 2 cloves of minced garlic in 1 tsp. hot olive oil for 1 minute. Add a 28-oz. can of diced tomatoes and 1 tsp. oregano. Bring to a boil over medium heat, lower the heat, and simmer for 30 minutes.

Create spice blends

Here's a fun way to let your child loose in the kitchen: Encourage him to make his own custom spice blends.

Start by having him look through your spices. He could smell them and think about what would go well together. Using measuring spoons and small bowls, he can mix $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. of this, a $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. of that, and 1 tsp. of something else.

Suggest that he name each blend, put it into an empty jar, and label it. He might add instructions like "Delicious in salads or sprinkled on burgers." Then, place the jars on the kitchen table so everyone can sample his creativity.

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No bullying allowed

Sadly, children who are overweight are more likely than other children to be bullied. In fact, some experts say weight is the most common reason for bullying. Help keep your child from being a target or from participating in bullying with this advice.

Victims. If your youngster is teased for being "fat," tell him that is wrong no matter what. Comfort him and say you'll work on the bullying problem together. Then, contact his teacher or school counselor to make a plan. *Note:* Your child may now say he wants to lose weight. If so, this is a good time to discuss healthy eating and exercise—rather than focusing on how much he weighs or how much to lose.

Bullies. If your youngster is bullying others for any reason, including their weight, get professional help. Talk to the school nurse, counselor, or psychologist about what to do—they will recommend next steps.

Bystanders. If your child witnesses a classmate being bullied, he should get an adult to help. Also, suggest that he be kind to victims. He could invite them to join in games at recess or to sit with him at lunch or on the bus.

PARENT TO PARENT — Learning a new (old) game

When we visited relatives recently, I wanted to get our kids away from their screens and involved—actively—with their aunts and uncles. I suggested they ask their relatives to teach them games they played "in the old days."

Great Uncle Joe showed them how to play stickball. He cut down a broomstick, got a rubber ball, and had the kids pick out a fire hydrant and trees as the bases. Then, a pitcher lobs the ball, and the hitter tries to hit it on one bounce. With fewer people, they play "fungo style." The batter holds the bat with one hand, tosses the ball with the other, and lets the ball bounce so he can grab the bat with both hands and hit the ball.

Our kids were excited to come home and teach their friends their "new" game. When I see them playing stickball, I have to smile at how this old game has become new again.

ACTIVITY CORNER — Balloon fun

Blow up a few balloons for active fun inside or outside with these three games.

1. Hang a piece of yarn or ribbon between two chairs or trees to create a "net." Bat a balloon back and forth over the net. If it drops to the ground, the team on the other side scores a point. The first team reaching 11 wins. *Variation:* Play with two (or more) balloons at once.

2. Mark a start line and finish line. Each player holds a balloon between her knees and races toward the finish line. If you drop it, go back to the start line to begin over. *Variation:* Put the balloon between your ankles, and jump to the finish line.

3. Place balloons of different colors on the floor. Randomly spread out slips of matching construction paper, one per balloon. Turn on music, and everyone dances. When the music stops, each player has to grab a balloon and matching paper and hold them up. The last person to find a match is out. Keep playing until there's a winner.

IN THE KITCHEN — Take a dip

Pair these dips with lots of vegetables for dipping—the combination is a great way to get your youngster to eat her veggies!

Avocado feta. In a food processor, combine 2 diced ripe avocados, 4 oz. feta, juice from 1 lemon, 2 chopped scallions, and a small handful of parsley. Pulse until blended, but still chunky.

Cottage cheese taco. Stir together a 16-oz. container cottage cheese, a 4-oz. can green chilies (drained), 1 can pinto beans (drained, rinsed), 2 chopped tomatoes, and $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. hot sauce if desired.

Black bean. Puree 2 cans black beans (drained, rinsed) in a blender. Add $\frac{3}{4}$ cup salsa, 4 garlic cloves, 2 tsp. lime juice, 1 tsp. cumin, 1 tsp. water, and $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. salt. Blend until smooth.

Fun idea: Spoon an inch or two of dip into a Mason jar. Stick in long, skinny slices of vegetables like carrots, celery, or jicama for a ready-to-eat treat.

OUR PURPOSE

To provide busy parents with practical ways to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity for their children.

Resources for Educators,
a division of CCH Incorporated
128 N. Royal Avenue • Front Royal, VA 22630
540-636-4280 • rfecustomer@wolterskluwer.com
www.rfeonline.com

Nutrition Nuggets™ is reviewed by a registered dietitian. Consult a physician before beginning any major change in diet or exercise.

ISSN 1935-4630

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