

# Nutrition Nuggets

Food and Fitness for a Healthy Child

January 2011

Evangeline Parish Child Nutrition Program

Karen Soileau, Director



## BEST BITES

### Learn from pets

If you have a pet, consider putting your youngster in charge of feeding it. Show her that a dog, cat, or hamster needs healthy food in just-right portions and water all day long—just like she does. And when she walks the dog or watches a hamster run on a wheel, point out that pets need exercise—again, just like she does!

### Vegetable couscous



Combine a healthy grain with vegetables for this quick side dish. Dice 2

carrots, 1 onion, 1 bell pepper, and 1 zucchini, and sauté in a little olive oil for 5 minutes. Season with garlic salt and lemon-pepper seasoning. Stir in 1 cup couscous and 1½ cups chicken (or vegetable) broth. Remove from heat, let stand 5 minutes, fluff with a fork—and serve!

### DID YOU KNOW?

Ice skating builds endurance, tones muscles, and provides an aerobic workout. Plus, it's fun! Take your family ice skating at an indoor or outdoor rink or on a safely frozen pond. Consider low-cost lessons at a community rink to build your child's skills and self-confidence.

### Just for fun

**Q:** What can you serve but never eat?

**A:** A tennis ball.



## The breakfast habit

Making time for breakfast on busy mornings can be a challenge. But eating a healthy breakfast will give your child the energy he needs after sleeping—and fasting—all night. After all, breakfast literally means to *break the fast*!

Here are easy ways to build a daily breakfast routine.

### Get started the night before.

Have your child set out plates, bowls, silverware, glasses—and even cereal boxes. Also, he can choose his clothes and pack his backpack. Meanwhile, you can get a jump on breakfast by hard-boiling eggs or mixing up (and refrigerating) pancake batter. These steps will save minutes in the morning when you're trying to get to school and work.

**Create family time.** Sit down together for breakfast, even if it's only for a short while. Keep the conversation light and friendly, perhaps talking about the day ahead. If your child is too sleepy to talk, you could just let each person read a section of the newspaper. The important thing is to be together and eating breakfast.



**Vary the options.** Whole-grain cereal with fat-free milk is healthy and quick—try bumping up the nutritional value by sprinkling on wheat germ, dried cranberries, or chopped nuts. Keep breakfast interesting with other kid-friendly foods, too. *Examples:* mini bagels with peanut butter, leftover pizza, and yogurt layered with granola and fruit.

*Note:* School breakfast is another good choice, especially if you have to be at work early or if your child goes to before-school care or would enjoy eating with friends. ♥

### Active, all by myself!

Does your child tend to be more active when she has a friend over? Encourage her to get exercise when she's alone, too, with suggestions like these:

1. Draw a hopscotch board on the sidewalk, and practice.
2. Time yourself in short races.
3. Hop on one foot across a room and back.
4. See how long you can keep a hula hoop going.
5. Move a different way through each room of the house (skip, jump, roll).
6. Learn to twirl a baton, and twirl while marching to music. ♥



# Dealing with food allergies

Having a child with food allergies can be worrisome. Teach your youngster to take charge of her allergy, and you'll both feel safer when she's away from home. Consider these ideas:

- Make sure she knows exactly what she's allergic to. Teach her "code words" to watch for on food labels. For example, if she has a peanut allergy, she'll have to watch for peanuts, peanut oil, ground nuts, mixed nuts, peanut flour, or the words "may contain nuts." Also, point out how peanuts can show up in obvious foods (peanut butter) but also sometimes in other items



(cookies, chili, spaghetti sauce, and Thai or Vietnamese foods).

- Help her handle school meals by reading the cafeteria menu with her and discussing foods to avoid. *Idea:* Talk with the cafeteria manager about menu items or ingredients to watch for. Also, remind your youngster never to share food with classmates. And identify school staff (teacher, school nurse, cafeteria aide) who can help her in an emergency.

- Encourage your child to ask questions when she is at friends' houses or restaurants. She should explain the situation and ask about ingredients. ("I'm allergic to wheat. Is this food made with any wheat products?") If her host isn't sure, your child can just say, "No, thanks." ●

## Q & A Buy organic?

**Q:** I've read that organic fruits and vegetables are healthier—but they're expensive! Is it really necessary to buy organic?

**A:** Some people prefer buying organic to cut down on the chemicals they eat. You can make choices that will make the most difference for your money. For example, pesticides aren't as likely to get through produce that has thick or removable coverings. So you could continue buying regular bananas, avocados, onions, corn, pineapples, mangos, melons, grapefruit, and oranges, for instance.

On the other hand, more pesticides get through fruits and vegetables with edible or thin skin. So you might choose organic for celery, apples, strawberries, bell peppers, greens (lettuce, spinach, kale, collard greens), or cherries.

*Note:* Whether you buy organic or conventional produce, wash all items (even melons) thoroughly before eating. ●



## ACTIVITY CORNER

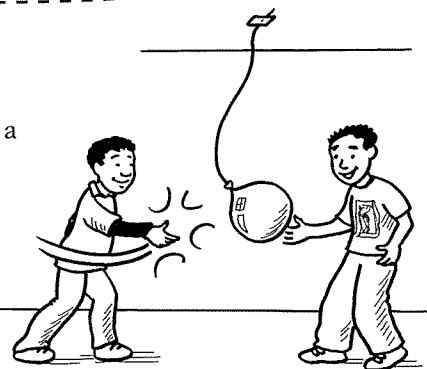
### Balloon games

To help your child blow off a little steam inside the house on a cold winter day, just blow up a few balloons. Then, try games like these.

- Hit a balloon back and forth to each other. Reach, run, and dive to keep the balloon in the air. *Variation:* Catch the balloon and throw it back.

- Have each person bat his own balloon in the air. Count how many times you hit it before it touches the ground. Who can keep his balloon afloat the longest?

- Tie a 4-foot string to a balloon, and tape the end of the string to the ceiling. Play tetherball by hitting the balloon in a circular motion toward the other player. That player then hits it back to you in the opposite direction. ●



## IN THE KITCHEN

### One-dish meals

Having a whole meal in one dish is an easy way to put dinner on the table, especially with these two do-ahead casseroles.

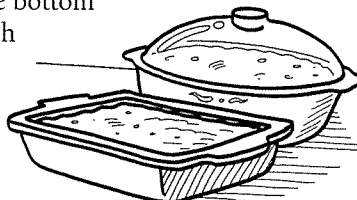
**Tortilla bake.** Sauté 1 diced onion about 5 minutes, and stir in 1 grated zucchini, 1 can black beans (drained and rinsed), 1 can drained diced tomatoes, and 1 cup frozen corn (thawed).

Cook until hot. Cover the bottom of a 9x13 inch baking dish with corn tortillas, and top with half the vegetable mixture, ½ can low-sodium enchilada sauce, and ½ cup low-fat

shredded cheddar. Repeat the layering. Bake at 400° about 25 minutes, until the cheese melts.

**Chicken and broccoli.** Spread 1 cup cooked brown rice in a casserole dish. Add fresh broccoli pieces and shredded rotisserie chicken. Mix 1 can cream of mushroom and 1 can cream of chicken soup (both low-sodium varieties), and

spoon half the mixture on top. Repeat the layering (rice, broccoli, chicken, soup mixture). Bake at 375° for 45 minutes. ●



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

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

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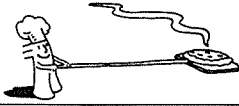
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## BEST BITES



### Name that food

Would your child rather eat “egg canoes” than hard-boiled eggs? Or “upside-down umbrellas” instead of mushrooms? Giving playful names to nutritious foods can encourage him to try them. Let your youngster join in the fun, too. List five healthy foods, and have him invent a new name for each one.

### An activity a week

Plan one physical activity as a family each week. You might set aside Saturday mornings or Sunday afternoons as your “family fit time.” Rotate activities, taking everyone’s favorites into account and also introducing new ideas. *Examples:* hiking, indoor climbing, backyard volleyball.



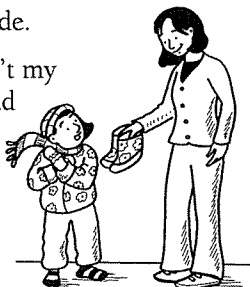
### DID YOU KNOW?

Children as young as seven years old can be at risk for heart disease if they have high cholesterol. Celebrate American Heart Month this month by visiting your family doctor to check everyone’s cholesterol levels. Then, take steps (eat a healthier diet, exercise more) to bring down levels or keep them in a healthy range.

### Just for fun

**Mom:** Here are your boots for playing outside.

**Lexi:** Those aren’t my boots—mine had snow on them!



## Turning off the TV

Too much time in front of a TV is a triple whammy for children: they’re not active, they tend to snack, and they’re bombarded with ads for sugary foods. Here are ways to tame the television habit in your house.

### Find alternatives

Kids often watch TV because they can’t think of anything else to do. Together, brainstorm active alternatives (practice cartwheels, throw a Frisbee around). Write each suggestion on a slip of paper, and put the slips in a jar. Place the jar by the television, and have your youngster reach for an idea instead of the remote!

### Make a schedule

Each Sunday, decide on the shows your family will watch in the coming week, and post the schedule. Then, turn the set on when the show starts, and turn it off when it’s over. That can help break a habit of surfing channels to find the next thing to watch. *Idea:* Cut down on screen time—and on commercials



watched—by taping shows and fast-forwarding through commercials.

### Be a participant

Try to get your child used to *doing*, rather than *watching*, activities. For instance, if she usually turns on basketball games, have her shoot hoops outside instead. If she likes nature documentaries, visit the zoo or take binoculars outdoors and look for birds. Instead of viewing a game show, play a game. Your youngster will find that it can be much more fun to do an activity herself than to watch other people do it.

*Note:* Try to limit television to an hour a day. 🍀

## Pantry secrets

Having a stocked pantry makes it easier to put together healthy meals on busy days. Consider these suggestions:

- For one week, jot down the ingredients you need for everyday meals. Take the list when you go grocery shopping, and pick up those items.
- Avoid being out of something you “always” have (flour, milk) by tacking a sticky note to the refrigerator and jotting down items when you’re getting low on them.
- Shop once a month for pantry staples. Consider these categories: canned goods (beans, vegetables, soup, seafood, fruit); nut butters and jam; baking products; spices and dried herbs; whole-grain cereal, pasta, and rice; oils (olive, canola); and vinegars (white, balsamic). 🍀



# I made it myself!

When your child is hungry, encourage him to fix a bite for himself. He'll become comfortable in the kitchen as he learns to prepare healthy snacks. Try these steps:

- Talk about nutritious ingredients like fruit, vegetables, whole grains, and dairy products. Together, write down snack ideas, such as fruit salad, a turkey sandwich, a microwave-baked potato, or grape tomatoes and cheese cubes on a skewer. You can also look online or in cookbooks for fun



snacks like “banana balls” (mash a banana, mix in ½ cup chunky peanut butter, form into balls, and roll them in crushed nuts, low-fat granola, or coconut).

- Show your youngster how to handle tools like measuring spoons, a colander, and a can opener. Explain the rules (example: he needs supervision for using the stove, microwave, or knives).  
Tip: Go over clean-up time, too.

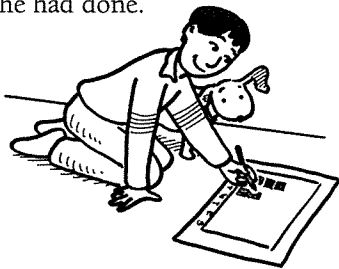
- Encourage him to be creative. Make sure he knows that cooks don't always have to follow recipes. Your child can mix and match healthy ingredients to make food that is truly his own. ♡

## PARENT TO PARENT

### Graphing nutrition goals

I was having trouble getting my son to eat enough vegetables. When he told me that his class had graphed favorite pizza toppings in math, I thought, why not have Austin graph the vegetables he eats?

I suggested a goal of three servings a day. On a small poster board, he wrote the days of the week across the bottom and the numbers 0–5 going up the left column. Each time he ate a serving of vegetables, he colored in a box for that day. At the end of the week, he could see how he had done.



The first week, Austin had one or two servings a day. I'm hoping he'll be able to color in more boxes this week. Graphing is a great way to work toward our nutrition goals—and it gives Austin a way to practice math, too. ♡

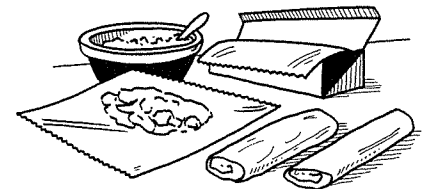
## IN THE KITCHEN

### Fold and cook

Here's a simple formula for delicious meals: Place ingredients on aluminum foil, fold and tightly seal the foil, and bake. For each portion, use a large piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil.

**Chicken.** Top foil with 1-inch chunks of boneless, skinless chicken breasts, sliced apples, and sliced pears. Drizzle on honey-mustard salad dressing, and season with garlic salt and pepper. Bake at 350° until chicken is cooked thoroughly (about 20 minutes).

**Fish.** Place 1 fish fillet (red snapper, halibut, cod) on foil. Add diced tomato



and onion, black olive halves, and a little thyme. Cook at 450° about 20–25 minutes, until fish flakes when tested with a fork.

**Beef.** Put a hamburger patty, sliced carrots, and cubed potatoes on foil. Bake at 375° for 20 minutes, or until meat is completely cooked.

Note: These packets can also be cooked on a barbecue grill. ♡

## ACTIVITY CORNER

### Bundled-up fun

Whether it's snowy or sunny (or both), your child can get healthy exercise with games like these.

#### On snowy days...

- Build and decorate a snowman, but leave off its hat. Mark a line 10 feet away, and take turns trying to toss a hat on its head.

- Make colored ice cubes (fill an ice cube tray with water, add drops of food coloring, and freeze). Hide the cubes in the snow, and run around to find them.



#### On any day...

- Move like cold-climate animals. Mark start and finish lines. Call out an animal's name, and players race to the finish line waddling like a penguin, “swimming” like a seal, or lumbering like a polar bear.

- Play a game of grass hockey with a small foam ball and child-sized hockey sticks or small brooms. Or take turns shooting goals: one person is the goalie, while the other person tries to score. ♡

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