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Contact:

Megan D. Smith
Director of Communications
msmith@ohioafp.org

Importance of a Healthy, Nutritious Back-to-School Diet

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)— As children head back to school, parents may have concerns about what their children eat. Parents can take a few moments to learn some valuable steps to take when it comes to creating a healthy, nutritious diet.

“Good nutrition not only helps with a child’s memory and grades it also helps to boost a child’s immune system and in addition helps to combat the epidemic known as childhood obesity. Getting kids involved in making healthy food choices now will definitely help them down the road as they grow into adulthood,” said Mike Sevilla, M.D., a family physician from Salem, Ohio.

The first step to a nutritious back-to-school diet is breakfast. Breakfast is the fuel that gets you moving in the morning. Skipping breakfast should not be an option. In fact, children who skip breakfast do not do as well during the school day.

“Breakfast is the most skipped meal of the day,” said Sevilla. “With everyone’s busy schedule, students are rushing out the door to catch the bus or to catch their ride to school. But, there are many studies that state that having breakfast helps students with memory, with learning and with taking tests.”

So, what types of foods should children eat? Avoiding items that are high in sugar and fat like pastries and doughnuts is best. Instead, try yogurt, oatmeal or eggs.

“Research has said that oatmeal can boost a student’s memory. A study comparing kids eating oatmeal, cereal or no breakfast at all, showed that children eating oatmeal did better on memory related tasks,” said Sevilla.

The next step for a healthy diet is lunch. Lunch is the one meal of the day that gives children more control over what they eat. They can choose to eat an apple instead of an ice cream sandwich or brownie instead of green beans because no one is there to tell them otherwise. There are plenty of messages promoting poor food choices, parents should make sure to take an active role in helping kids make healthy choices.

“If you are going to pack a lunch, maybe make it as part of a routine the night before – like following a homework session. In this way, you can talk about making healthy choices for meals like lunch,” said Sevilla.

Tricks to packing a healthier lunch are available through American Dairy Association Mideast at <http://www.drink-milk.com/Dynamic/ShowPage.aspx?id=321>.

The last major step in creating a nutritious back-to-school diet is the after-school snack. Snacks are good for children. They need snacks to refuel their bodies. Children have stomachs that are smaller than adults which mean they need to eat more often. In order to counter hunger throughout the day, adding an after-school snack, especially when the child is active, is important. The tendency though is that children reach for high sugar and high fat snacks like potato chips instead of nutritious ones. But, by talking to children about good nutritious choices like carrot sticks or an apple will help steer them in the right direction.

Creating a healthy, nutritious back-to-school diet for children starts with talking to them about choices. Once those good choices are made, they are on their way to living a long and healthy life.

Ohio Academy of Family Physicians is a statewide professional association with more than 4,200 members, including practicing physicians, family medicine residents and medical students. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, both sexes and every disease entity. Family physicians provide comprehensive, continuing care to all members of the family.



FACT SHEET

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General

- Talk to children about making the right food choices throughout the day.
- Generally if you cannot pronounce all of the ingredients in something, then it is probably not something that should be a regular part of your diet.
- Parents need to lead by example. If you expect children to make good choices in their diet and lifestyle, they need to see parents making good choices.
- The first step to having children make healthy food choices, is making sure that healthy foods are readily available in your home.

Breakfast

- Do not skip breakfast.
- Just like with other meals, try to eat a variety of foods including grains, protein, fruits and vegetables, and milk and cheese.
- Children who do not eat breakfast are less able to learn at school, get less iron in their diets and are more likely to have a higher body mass index.

Lunch

- Set up a routine with your children.
- Look over the cafeteria menu together. Recommend items that are healthier, but be willing to allow them to buy favorite lunch items occasionally.
- Tricks to packing a healthier lunch are available through American Dairy Association Mideast at <http://www.drink-milk.com/Dynamic/ShowPage.aspx?id=321>.

After-School Snack

- Kids need to refuel their bodies more than three times a day, especially when they are active.
- Avoid high sugar, high fat treats that will not keep children satisfied very long.

Sources: www.familydoctor.org
American Dairy Association Mideast