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8 Tips

for Packing LUNCHES with a PUNCH

As parents today, we must think twice about what we pack for lunch, for our children and ourselves, as there is pressure to be much more health conscious. The Bermuda 2014 STEPS Survey recently revealed that 74.6% of Bermudians are overweight, with 34.4% being obese. With the knowledge that more than 30% of children and adolescents are overweight, and our children have a lifespan five years less than ours, we want to ensure that the lunches we pack provide energy, brain power and nutrition, not extra calories, additives and fats. Creating healthy lunches is one important way we can help our children develop healthier lifestyles and encourage and develop their desire for healthier foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meats and whole grains.

We are most active during the day and therefore we must energize our bodies at noon to avoid the 2 p.m. energy crash. Home-packed lunches provide the opportunity to boost our vitamin, mineral, nutrients, healthy fat and fiber intake. Lunch should provide one-third of our daily intake of vitamins, minerals and calories. Nutritional guidelines all stress three key points:

1. Increasing the consumption of fruit and vegetables
2. Cutting out soda, sports and other sugared drinks

3. Reducing the consumption of processed foods. This requires parents to be more creative in preparing lunches to make every calorie count. Here are eight tips to help you pack lunches with more punch:

Tip #1: Encourage crunching

Help your children taste the rainbow by using small cookie cutters to make vegetables and fruits more appealing. Children are very visual, and so getting younger children to use small cookie cutters to make shapes with their food is one way to encourage eating of a variety of fruits and vegetables. Raw carrots, celery, cauliflower, cucumber and broccoli with peanut butter, humus or applesauce for dips are often a hit. Over time you can consider adding unique raw vegetables such as snap peas, edamame, and orange or yellow pepper hearts. Some fruits like apples also are more appealing with dips. Another idea is to replace chips with crunchy apple slices.

Tip #2: Incorporate two servings of whole grains or bread

Whole grains are important for increasing our fiber intake. There are a variety of choices that can move us beyond the traditional sandwich such as brown or wild rice, quinoa, whole grain bread, whole grain or rice pita, tortillas or crackers and whole wheat pasta.

Tip #3: Include a lean protein

Tuna or salmon mixed with yogurt instead of mayonnaise on whole wheat crackers, pita, wraps or bread is nutritious, delicious and satisfying. Alternatively, you can roll up or shape slices of low-fat ham, chicken or turkey with cheese for variety. A hard-boiled egg or nuts and seeds can also be added.



Tip #4: Add calcium

Calcium is critical for bone development. Cheese, cottage cheese and yogurt in cups or drinks can easily be included in lunch boxes. Topping yogurt with fresh fruit and granola adds variety. A small thermos can accommodate a fruit smoothie or a combo peanut butter and banana smoothie – particularly desirable in the Bermuda summer heat!

Tip #5: Spice up the PB&J and consider alternatives

Use whole-grain wraps or pita with low-fat peanut butter if your children are tiring of whole-grain bread. If you are looking for an alternative to peanut butter, consider the use of nutritious almond, hazelnut or soy spread. Replace the sugary grape and strawberry jellies with whole fruit preserves with low sugar content. Adding thin slices of whole fruit like banana or apple can add even more pizzazz!

Tip #6: Satisfy that sweet tooth

Fruit such as mandarin oranges, blueberries, strawberries, pineapple and mango pieces are satisfying alternatives for sweets. Also, dry cereals such as multi-grain or chocolate Cheerios can also satisfy the sweet craving, with added nourishment. Mixing corn flakes and graham crackers with peanut butter and rolling them into balls makes for an interesting and nutritious snack too. If chocolate is desired, then a small piece of dark (not milk chocolate) can be a brain booster as it is rich in flavonoids that act as antioxidants and improve circulation. You can also create your own nutritious snack mix with raw almonds or walnuts and dried cherries, apricots, raisins or cranberries, which is an energy rich dessert. Fruit bars or homemade muffins, loaf slices, cookies or squares are also good choices.

Tip #7: GO for H2O

Research shows that we are consuming far too many calories in our drinks. We can make strides by reducing or eliminating soda, sports drinks, and sugary fruit juices and replacing it with water. Adding lemon lime or other fruit to water can add a little natural flavor and variety.

Tip #8: When pressed, choose fast yet nutritious foods


If you are pressed for time, you can choose pre-packaged cups of applesauce or fruit in light syrup, yogurt, dried fruit packs, whole grain snack bars and string cheese sticks.

New containers and thermal lunch boxes make it easier for us to move beyond the traditional sandwich lunch.

If your child prefers a hot lunch, you can easily use a small thermos with last night's dinner left overs. A skewer and Tupperware container will accommodate skewers of cooked chicken with cheese, grape tomatoes, cucumber wedges and grapes to make lunch more interesting! So get creative...you will help your child develop healthy eating habits that can last a lifetime!

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