

## School Age Diet

The school age years are between the preschool and teenage years. During this time, food choices and amounts are influenced by changes in growth rate and personality development. At this age food habits and preferences have been formed. Children are influenced by their family, friends, culture, TV, and school about eating habits. It is important to eat a balanced, healthy diet during these years. Below are important topics for school age children.

### Healthy Eating Tips

- Encourage eating breakfast, lunch and dinner daily.
- Set up a routine for offering healthy snacks at regular times. Children at this age usually need 2 snacks per day depending on their activity level.
- Avoid snacking in front of the television, during homework, or after dinner.
- Encourage drinking water throughout the day instead of sugary or caffeinated beverages.
- Eat a healthy balanced lunch that includes a fruit or vegetable, protein, whole grain and low fat dairy product.
- Encourage eating dinner together as a family.
- This is a good age to have children become involved in grocery shopping and talk about healthy foods and snacks. They can also participate in some meal preparation.

### Breakfast

Breakfast is a very important meal. Studies have shown that children who eat breakfast have better attitudes and better school records. It is difficult for children to obtain all the nutrients they need throughout the day when they skip breakfast, and for some children it can lead to overeating later in the day.

### Sugar Intake

School age children begin to make their own food choices since they are spending more time away from home. Sugar and concentrated sweets such as sodas, punch, fruit juices, cake, cookies and candy may be more available. These foods and beverages offer very little nutrition. Limit these foods and encourage more fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grain products such as whole grain bread, crackers, rice and pasta.

### Obesity

Frequently eating high calorie foods such as fast foods, baked goods, and vending machine snacks can cause your child to gain weight too fast. Soda, candy and desserts can also cause weight gain. Encourage exercise and limit time watching TV, playing on the computer and video games. Try to preplan healthy meals at home. If you are eating out, ask for healthy substitutions on the menu (a salad, vegetables or fruit instead of chips or fries). Physical activity is important for a healthy weight. Since some schools may offer PE less often, look into involvement in sports and activities outside of school to ensure your child gets at least 60 minutes of physical activity most days.

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### School Lunch Ideas

**Your child may say they do not like school lunches, find them boring, or do not have enough time to eat. Some ideas to help include:**

- Involve the child in choosing the menu.
- Pack a lunch from home. Use a thermos to keep foods such as soups or pasta hot
- Include fresh fruit (apple slices, melon balls, orange wedges), celery filled with peanut butter or raw fresh vegetables with hummus dip or ranch dressing.
- Instead of using bread to make a traditional sandwich, use whole grain bagels, tortillas, pita bread or whole grain crackers.
- Send low fat yogurt with fresh fruit or low fat cottage cheese with fruit.
- Protein ideas include peanut butter and banana sandwich, chicken or turkey (no skin), chicken salad, canned fish packed in water, or hard boiled eggs.
- Pinto beans, black beans or lentils with rice in a tortilla (burrito) are other options.
- Add a surprise such as stickers, a cute note or a cookie cutter shaped sandwich.

\*Note that this is a general list and does not account for your child's specific food allergies/intolerances.

### Snack Ideas for School Age Children

- Cereal with low-fat milk
- Fresh fruit and cut up vegetables
- Low fat yogurt
- Cut up vegetables with hummus or a low fat dip or dressing
- Sandwich on whole grain bread
- String cheese
- Soup and whole grain crackers
- Whole grain granola bars
- Whole grain crackers with cheese or peanut butter
- Pretzels
- Light popcorn
- Dried fruit with nuts

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Refer to [www.ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://www.ChooseMyPlate.gov) and MyPlate Daily Checklist for help with meal plans

This handout was provided to assist you with your child's nutritional needs. All nutrition plans should be individualized by working with a registered dietitian. Please get a referral for "Nutrition Clinic" from your Primary Care Provider. Then call (858) 576-1700 ext. 5999 to book an appointment with a dietitian.