Back to School Nutrition Basics

**Brain Foods to Fuel Your Child’s Performance**

**at School and at Home--Lunch**

Nutrient rich foods are critical for brain development and function in children. Children expend so much energy in their activities and their diet needs to support those activities, especially at school where focus and academic performance is required. What they eat does effect how they perform at school. Consider adding these 6 best brain foods in your children’s diet for the nutrients needed to support their proper growth, so that they feel better, and have more energy to perform better at school.

**Best Brain Foods:** typically keeps energy stable helping with concentration, alertness, retention of information and motor coordination

* Oatmeal high in fiber for slower release of glucose for better retention of information.
* Tuna, salmon, nuts and flaxseed (foods containing high amounts of omega 3 fatty acid) for protection against memory loss and increased brain function for focusing.
* Strawberries and blueberries are great for concentration. These fruits have phytonutrients, polyphenols, that may help blood flow to the brain to keep it sharp.
* Dried fruits to keep kids alert.
* Yogurt (full fat Greek Yogurt) or other high calcium dairy products for enhanced learning.
* Eggs and meat for protein, concentration and memory.

**Brain Drains:** typically causes sugar crashes which can lead to sluggishness, lack of concentration, and effect alertness

• Cereals with added sugar

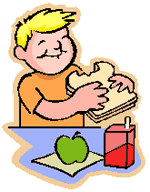
• High sugar fruit juices and beverages

• White bread

**Hydration and Brain Function: Can’t stress this enough!**

It’s essential that your child drinks plenty of water during the day to stay hydrated. The brain is made up of 85 percent water. Water provides energy to the brain. During normal day to day activities, your child may lose water which can lead to dehydration, effecting brain functions. Dehydration can interfere with memory, focus, headaches and brain fatigue. Such interferences may cause problems with your child’s concentration, behavior and learning ability at school and at home. So for healthy brain function, have your child drink plenty of water each day, especially first thing in the morning! Your child is dehydrated after a good night’s rest and needs to rehydrate! Your child should drink five to eight cups of water per day.

**It’s Lunch time!**

Lunch is critical for your child to maintain their energy throughout the afternoon. Whether it be from the cafeteria, out of a brown bag, or eaten at home their lunch should be filled with 1/3rd of their daily calories of lean proteins, complex carbohydrates and low sugar foods. The goal is a nutrient-rich meal to fuel their brains and bodies for the afternoon classes and activities. Involve your child in food choices using the ChooseMy Plate template or 5-A-Day the Color Way tool to make varied healthy choices. You can use the suggestions offered from Back to School Nutrition Basics-Breakfast or check out the following ideas:

• A bag lunch with peanut butter and jelly on whole wheat bread, 1 carton of reduced fat milk and a serving of fruit is a perfect combo of complex carbohydrates and lean proteins your child needs.

• Low fat milk and dairy products; you can add chocolate or strawberry syrup to get your child to drink their milk. Yogurt parfait with a variety of berries, chocolate syrup and sprinkle oatmeal or granola.

• Pack whole grain crackers with reduced fat cheese and fresh vegetable sticks. Hummus dip with carrots and celery sticks.

• Fill a whole wheat tortilla with chopped fresh vegetables and deli meat or tuna fish; or fill it with brown rice, beans and cheese.

• Make little salads with protein (tuna fish, chicken, beef, deli meat), cheese and beans.

• Smoothies made with Greek yogurt, blueberries, strawberries, spinach or kale and walnuts (omit nuts if your child is allergic to nuts).

**Making the changes:**

Making changes can be overwhelming, so start with small steps and gauge how your child is responding to each change.

* If your child skips breakfast, start here. Time can be an issue first thing in the morning so try smoothies which can be prepared the night before. Fill the container with the fruits and yogurt and refrigerate. Scrambled eggs are quick and easy. Add cheese for variety!
* Provide a variety of fruits and vegetables- which are low in fat and calories and are packed with fiber, vitamins and minerals. Make it easily accessible for your child. Try finger foods like baby carrots and broccoli florets with dips, clementine oranges, blueberries, nuts and seeds. It can be as easy as adding lettuce or spinach to their sandwich.

* Encourage your child to drink more water, especially in the morning. Small water bottles are perfect for children’s small hands! Choose beverages wisely—move away from sugary beverages with lots of calories and no nutrient value. Serve water with every meal. Keep a container of water in the refrigerator in an area they can reach. Also use a container that your child can manage on their own.
* Try to involve your child in choosing brain boosting food at the grocery store and when planning meals. Encourage your child to pick one new vegetable and/or fruit when grocery shopping with you. Reach for nutrient rich foods!
* Most importantly, if they see you eating these foods and avoiding the brain draining foods, your child will eat what you eat.



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