Healthy learners

There are no two ways about it: When children have healthy habits, they go to school more ready to learn. Use these ideas to help your youngster thrive in the classroom.

Eat breakfast
Breakfast-eaters score higher on tests and have better grades, behavior, and attendance. Make breakfast a daily habit by building it into your child’s schedule.

Tip: Consider having her eat breakfast at school. That way, the meal can be part of a relaxed routine at school rather than a morning rush for you.

Stay active
Did you know that after just 20 minutes of exercise, brain activity improves? Encourage your youngster to run, jump, and move around after school—her body and brain will stay more active! In fact, see if her focus for homework improves after a game of hide-and-seek or a jump-rope session. Idea: Help her keep track of times that she is active. Ask how many 20-minute periods she tallies each day.

Get enough sleep
If your child is tired, she won’t be able to pay attention, absorb information, or learn as much. Try making it fun to go to bed on time with nightly rituals like reading to each other or playing a quiet game. Note: Set a bedtime that gives her 9–11 hours of sleep. If she wakes up around the same time each morning without needing an alarm, she’s getting the right amount of shut-eye.

Cut portions down to size
Do your children eat larger portions of meat than they should? Try this chef’s trick. Cut meat or chicken into 3-oz. servings (the size of a deck of cards), and thinly slice. Then, fan the slices on each person’s plate. The smaller amount will fill the plate—and your youngsters will think their food looks “prettier”!

Just for fun
Q: What animal makes the most of its food?
A: A giraffe—it goes a long way!

Joining a team
As the new school year starts, you might be wondering if your child is ready for a team sport. These questions can help you decide.

● Behavior. Does your youngster follow directions? Will he share and take turns nicely? When he plays games, does he manage losing well? If the answers are yes, he may be ready.

● Interests. Has your child told you he wants to play on a team? If you bring it up, does he seem enthusiastic? Let his interest level be your guide. After all, he’s the one who has to commit to attending practices and games.

   Remember, children develop at different rates and have different interests. If you wait until he’s ready, he’s more likely to enjoy team sports and get the physical activity that goes along with them.
Got (enough) milk?

It’s a fact that most kids don’t get enough calcium. And what’s the single best source of calcium for a child? Milk! In addition, milk provides vitamin D and protein—other important nutrients for your youngster.

Try these strategies for getting your child to drink 2–3 cups of fat-free milk a day:

- Make milk or water the only choices at meals.
- Serve milk ice-cold.
- Put milk in fun glasses or mugs. Use striped, colorful, or bendable straws. *Idea:* Give your youngster a straw to drink up the milk left in his cereal bowl.
- Let him see you drinking milk yourself.
- Use milk in foods that your child eats, such as oatmeal or tomato soup.

*Note:* If your youngster has milk allergies or is lactose intolerant, get calcium-fortified almond, soy, rice, or lactose-free milk.

**O&A**

**The cafeteria experience**

*Q:* I’d like my son to buy school lunch each day, but he doesn’t want to. How can I persuade him?

*A:* You could start by telling him about fun parts like going through the cafeteria line with his friends and picking out his own meals. He might also get to punch in his PIN number or scan a meal card, depending on his school’s payment system. Plus, you can mention that he’ll get to know the nice people who work in the cafeteria—and they’ll get to know him, too.

Then, get your son interested in the food by reading the next day’s menu together each evening. He could highlight his choices with his favorite color. Finally, when he gets home, ask positive questions like, “What was the best part of your lunch?” or “What kind of fruit did you eat?”

**Start a “Fit Club”**

Children love to be in clubs. Whether it’s a cousins club, a neighborhood club, or a pony-lovers club, groups give kids a comforting sense of belonging. To help your youngster stay active, why not encourage her to start a fitness club? Here’s how.

1. **Invite friends to join.** She might ask the kids on your street or the other third-graders on her bus, for instance.
2. **Hold an organizational meeting.** Help the youngsters figure out where they’ll meet and how often. They could alternate houses or go to a local park, based on when parents can supervise. Suggest that they name their club, too (“The Elmwood Street Exercisers”).
3. **Draw up a list of activities.** The only rule? They have to be active activities! *Examples:* Basketball, backyard games, dancing, climbing on playground equipment. Then, let them get started—and get moving!

**Boost your smoothies**

Combine all kinds of healthy goodness—fruit, vegetables, yogurt, milk—into one glass of deliciousness with these smoothie recipes.

- **Green pineapple**
  - 2 cups spinach leaves, 1½ cups almond milk, ½ cup coconut water, 3 cups pineapple chunks, and 2 tbsp. unsweetened coconut flakes

- **Berry good**
  - 1 cup blueberries, 1 cup cherries, ½ cup strawberries, 1 cup 100% grape or apple juice, and 2 tbsp. nonfat vanilla Greek yogurt

- **Banana split**
  - 1 banana, 2 cups strawberries, 1 cup fat-free milk, and ½ cup nonfat plain Greek yogurt

*Add to the fun and the nutrition with these pointers:*

- Let your child make the smoothie herself. She can put the ingredients into a blender, hold down the top with one hand, and push “on” with the other. Have her blend until the ingredients are combined.
- Mix 1 tsp. flaxseeds, wheat germ, or protein powder into any smoothie.