

Benefits of Healthy Celebrations

Healthy Kids Learn Better: Research clearly demonstrates that good nutrition is linked to better behavior and academic performance. To provide the best possible learning environment for children, schools must also provide an environment that supports healthy behaviors.

Provides Consistent Messages: Providing healthy classroom celebrations demonstrates a school commitment to promoting healthy behaviors. It supports the classroom lessons students are learning about health, instead of contradicting them. Healthy celebrations promote positive lifestyle choices to reduce student health risks and improve learning.

Promotes a Healthy School Environment: In order to positively change eating behaviors, students need to receive consistent, reliable health information and ample opportunity to use it. Healthy celebrations are an important part of providing a healthy school environment.

Creates Excitement About Nutrition: Children are excited about new and different things, including fun party activities. School staff and parents need not worry that children will be disappointed if typical party foods aren't served in the classroom. *Holiday treats and traditional birthday parties with cake will still be available at home.*

Protects Children with Food Allergies: When parents send in food, it is difficult to ensure the safety of children with food allergies. Schools can protect food allergic children by providing nonfood celebrations.

Activities to Celebrate the Child at School

Schools can help promote a positive learning environment by providing healthy celebrations that shift the focus from the food to the child. Choose a variety of activities, games and crafts that children enjoy.

Plan special party games and activities. Ask parents to provide game supplies, pencils, erasers, stickers and other small school supplies instead of food.

- Create a healthy party idea book. Ask school staff and parents to send in healthy recipes and ideas for activities, games and crafts. Compile these ideas into a book that staff and parents can use.
- Give children extra recess time instead of a class party. For birthdays, let the birthday child choose and lead an active game for everyone.
- Instead of food, ask parents to purchase a book for the classroom or school library in the birthday child's name. Read it to the class or invite the child's parents to come in and read it to the class.
- Instead of a party, organize a special community service project, e.g., invite Senior Citizens in for lunch, make "curechiefs" for chemotherapy patients, and blankets for rescue dogs. Involve parents in planning the project and providing needed materials.
- Create a "Celebrate Me" book. Have classmates write stories or poems and draw pictures to describe what is special about the birthday child.
- Provide special time with the principal or another adult, such as taking a walk around the school at recess.
- Create a special birthday package. The birthday child wears a sash and crown, sits in a special chair and visits the principal's office for a special birthday surprise (pencil, sticker, birthday card, etc.)
- The birthday child is the teacher's assistant for the day, and gets to do special tasks like make deliveries to office, lead the line, start an activity, and choose a game or story.
- Sing a birthday song.

Food-Free Celebrations Examples at School

Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa

These holidays provides the opportunity to focus on community outreach. Instead of throwing a party, have each class pool its efforts in honor of a worthy cause.

Examples include:

- decorating pillowcases to give to a homeless shelter.
- making holiday cards for a nursing home.
- collecting animal treats for the SPCA.

Halloween

- There's more to Halloween than just candy. Focus the students on wearing their costumes. Make Halloween into a drama day where kids get to make their own costumes or masks and write and act out their own plays.

St. Patrick's

- Teach an Irish step dance.

Thanksgiving

- Thanksgiving is about giving thanks for what we have and for the people we have in our lives. Have students share what they are thankful for by writing a poem, drawing a picture, or telling a story.

Valentine's Day

- Have students write down one positive comment about each classmate, e.g., "you're a good friend, you have a nice smile, or you're smart" and pass them out for valentines.
- Have them write poems and read them aloud to the class. Vote on the best one and have a Valentine's Day assembly showcasing each classroom winner.

Healthier Eating Away from School: Snacks and Celebrations

Typically, foods for school celebrations include cupcakes, candy, cookies and soda. So what's the harm? There is nothing wrong with an occasional treat, but unhealthy choices have become the norm rather than the exception. Parties, treats used as classroom rewards, food fundraisers, vending machines, snacks and school stores constantly expose children to high-fat, high-sugar, low-nutrient choices.

Constant exposure to low-nutrient foods makes it difficult for children to learn how to make healthy food choices. By providing students with nutritious choices wherever food is available (including the classroom), schools can positively influence children's eating habits.

Parties can even incorporate a fun nutrition lesson by involving children in the planning of healthy snacks. When healthy foods are chosen as part of the festivities, it can be an opportunity to reinforce nutrition lessons as well. By increasing children's awareness and encouraging them to eat 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day, we can help them develop life-long healthy habits. Try these ideas for fun activities and healthy foods at school parties and other celebrations.

Healthy Food Ideas

Fruit

Fruit is naturally sweet, so most kids love it. Fruit can be served whole, sliced, cut in half, cubed, or in wedges. Canned, frozen, and dried fruits often need little preparation.

- ❖ Apples
- ❖ Bananas
- ❖ Blueberries
- ❖ Cherries
- ❖ Grapes (red, green, or purple)
- ❖ Apricots
- ❖ Blackberries
- ❖ Cantaloupe
- ❖ Grapefruit
- ❖ Honeydew Melon

- ❖ Watermelon
- ❖ Mangoes
- ❖ Oranges
- ❖ Pears
- ❖ Plums
- ❖ Strawberries
- ❖ Kiwis (cut in half and give each child a spoon to eat it)
- ❖ Mandarin Oranges
- ❖ Nectarines
- ❖ Peaches
- ❖ Pineapple
- ❖ Raspberries
- ❖ Tangerines

Applesauce (Unsweetened), Fruit Cups, and Canned Fruit – These have a long shelf life and are low-cost, easy, and healthy if canned in juice or light syrup. Examples of unsweetened applesauce include Mott’s Natural Style and Mott’s Healthy Harvest line. Dole and Del Monte offer a variety of single-serve fruit bowls.

Dried Fruit - Try raisins, apricots, apples, cranberries, pineapple, papaya, and others with little or no added sugars.

Frozen Fruit – Try freezing grapes or buy frozen blueberries, strawberries, peaches, mangoes, and melon.

Fruit Leathers – Some brands of fruit snacks are more like candy than fruit, and should be avoided due to their high content of added sugars and lack of fruit. Brands to *avoid* include Fruit Rollups, Farley’s Fruit Snacks, Sunkist Fruit Gems, Starburst Fruit Chews, Mamba Fruit Chews, Jolly Rancher Fruit Chews, Original Fruit Skittles, and Amazin’ Fruit Gummy Bears. Try Natural Value Fruit Leathers and Stretch Island Fruit Leathers, which come in a variety of flavors and don’t have added sugars.

Fruit Salad – Get kids to help make a fruit salad. Use a variety of colored fruits to add to the appeal.

Popsicles – Most so-called “fruit” popsicles have added sugars and should be reserved for an occasional treat. Look for popsicles made from 100% fruit juice with no added caloric sweeteners, such as Breyers or Dole “No Sugar Added” fruit bars.

Deliveries – Deliveries of fresh fruit or platters of cut-up fruit are a convenient option offered by some local grocery stores.

Vegetables

Vegetables can be served raw with low fat dip or salad dressing:

- ❖ Broccoli
- ❖ Cauliflower
- ❖ Cucumber
- ❖ Snap Peas
- ❖ String Beans
- ❖ Yellow Summer Squash Slices
- ❖ Carrot Sticks or Baby Carrots
- ❖ Celery Sticks
- ❖ Peppers (green, red, or yellow)
- ❖ Snow Peas
- ❖ Tomato slices or grape or cherry tomatoes
- ❖ Zucchini Slices

Dips – Try low-fat salad dressings, like fat-free Ranch or Thousand Island, store-bought light dips, bean dips, guacamole, hummus (which comes in dozens of flavors), salsa, or peanut butter.

Salad – Make a salad or set out veggies like a salad bar and let the kids build their own salads.

Soy - Edamame (pronounced “eh-dah-MAH-may”) are fun to eat and easy to serve. (Heat frozen edamame in the microwave for about 2-3 minutes).

Veggie Pockets – Cut whole wheat pitas in half and let kids add veggies with dressing or hummus.

Ants on a Log – Let kids spread peanut butter on celery (with a plastic knife) and add raisins.

Healthy Grains (bread, crackers, cereals, etc.)

Though most kids eat plenty of grain products, too many of those grains are cookies, snack cakes, sugary cereals, Rice Krispy treats, and other refined grains that are high in sugars or fat. Try to serve mostly whole grains, which provide more fiber, vitamins, and minerals than refined grains. In addition, try to keep the added sugars to less than 35% by weight and the saturated and trans fat low (*i.e.*, less than 10% of calories, or about one gram or less per serving).

Whole Wheat English Muffins, Pita, or Tortillas – Stuff them with veggies or dip them in hummus or bean dip.

Breakfast Cereal – Either dry or with low-fat milk, *whole* grain cereals like Cheerios, Grape-Nuts, Raisin Bran, Frosted Mini Wheats, and Wheaties make good snacks. Look for cereals with no more than 35% added sugars by weight (or roughly 8 grams of sugar per serving).

Crackers – Whole-grain crackers like Triscuits, which come in different flavors or thin crisps (or similar woven wheat crackers), Kalvi Rye crackers, or whole wheat Matzos can be served alone or with toppings, like low-fat cheese, peanut butter, or low-fat, reduced-sodium luncheon meat.

Rice Cakes - Look for rice cakes made from brown (whole grain) rice. They come in many flavors, and can be served with or without toppings.

Popcorn – Look for low-fat popcorn in a bag or microwave popcorn. Or you can air pop the popcorn and season it, *e.g.*, by spraying it with vegetable oil spray and adding parmesan cheese, garlic powder, or other non-salt spices.

Baked Tortilla Chips - Baked tortilla chips are usually low in fat, and taste great with salsa and/or bean dip. Look for brands with less sodium.

Granola and Cereal Bars - Look for whole grain granola bars that are low in fat and sugars, like Barbara's Granola Bars (cinnamon raisin, oats and honey, and carob chip flavors), Nature Valley Crunchy Granola Bars (cinnamon, oats 'n honey, maple brown sugar, and peanut butter flavors), Nature Valley Chewy Trail Mix Bars (fruit and nut flavor), and Quaker Chewy Granola Bar (peanut butter and chocolate chunk flavor).

Pretzels, Breadsticks, and Flatbreads - These low-fat items can be offered as snacks now and then. However, most of these snacks are not whole grain and most pretzels are high in salt.

Low-Fat Dairy Foods

Dairy foods are a great source of calcium, which can help to build strong bones. However, dairy products also are the biggest sources of artery-clogging saturated fat in kids' diets. To protect children's bones and hearts, make sure all dairy foods served are low-fat or fat-free.

Yogurt – Look for brands that are low-fat or fat-free, moderate in sugars (no more than about 30 grams of sugars in a 6-oz. cup), and high in calcium (at least 25% of daily value [DV] for calcium in a 6-oz. cup). Examples include Danimals Drinkable Low-Fat Yogurt, Go-Gurt by Yoplait, or cups of low-fat or non-fat yogurt from Stonyfield Farm, Dannon, Horizon, and similar store brands. Low-fat or non-fat yogurt also can be served with fresh or frozen fruit or low-fat granola.

Low-Fat Cheese - Cheese provides calcium, but often its saturated fat price tag is too high. Cheese is the number two source of heart-damaging saturated fat in children's diets. Even with low-fat and reduced-fat cheese, be sure to serve with other foods like fruit, vegetables, or whole grain crackers. Choose reduced-fat cheeses like Trader Joe's Armenian Style Braided; Borden or Sargento Light Mozzarella string cheese; Frigo Light Cheese Heads; Kraft Twist-Ums; Polly-O Twisterellas; the Laughing Cow's Light Original Mini Babybel; or Cabot 50% Light Vermont Cheddar.

Low-Fat Pudding and Frozen Yogurt - Low-fat or fat-free pudding and frozen yogurt should be served only as occasional treats, because they are high in added sugars.

Other Snack Ideas

Nuts - Since nuts are high in calories, it is best to serve them along with another snack such as fruit. A small handful of nuts is a reasonable serving size. Examples include peanuts, pistachios, almonds, walnuts, cashews, or soy nuts. Look for nuts that are unsalted.

Trail Mix - Trail mixes are easy to make and store well in a sealed container. Items to include: low-fat granola, whole grain cereals, peanuts, cashews, almonds, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, and dried fruits like raisins, apricots, apples, pineapple, or cranberries.

WARNING: A small but growing number of kids have severe peanut and/or tree nut allergies. Before bringing in peanuts, peanut butter, or other nuts as a snack, check to make sure none of the children has an allergy.

Healthy Beverages

Water – Water should be the main drink served to kids at snack times.

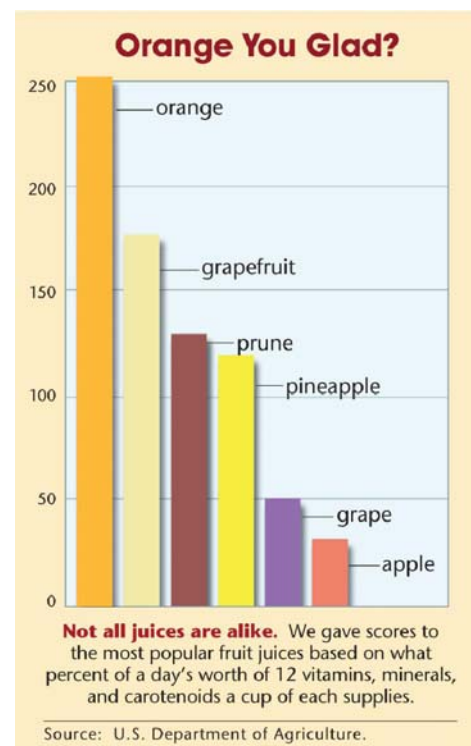
Water satisfies thirst and does not have sugar or calories. (Plus, it is low-cost for care-givers!) If kids are used to getting sweetened beverages at snack times, it may take a little time for them to get used to drinking water.

Seltzer - Carbonated drinks like seltzer, sparkling water, and club soda are healthy options. They do not contain the sugars, calories, and caffeine of sodas. Serve them alone or try making “healthy sodas” by mixing them with equal amounts of 100% fruit juice.

Low-Fat and Fat-Free Milk - Milk provides key nutrients, such as calcium and vitamin D. Choose fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk to avoid the heart-damaging saturated fat found in whole and 2% (reduced-fat) milk. It is best to serve fat-free versions of chocolate, strawberry, or other flavored milks to help balance the extra calories coming from added sugars. Single-serve containers of chocolate or other flavored whole or 2% milk drinks can be too high in calories (400-550 calories) and saturated fat (1/3 of a day’s worth) to be a healthy beverage for kids.

Soy and Rice Drinks - For children who prefer not to drink cow’s milk, calcium fortified soy and rice drinks are good choices.

Fruit Juice - Try to buy 100% fruit juice and avoid the added sugars of juice drinks, punches, fruit cocktail drinks, or lemonade. Drinks that contain at least 50% juice and no additional caloric sweeteners are also healthful options. To find 100% juice, look at beverage nutrition labels for the percentage of the beverage that is juice. Orange, grapefruit, and pineapple juices are more nutrient-dense and are healthier than apple, grape, and pear juices. (See “Orange You Glad?” chart.) Many beverages like Capri Sun, V8-Splash, Tropicana Twisters, Sunny Delight, Kool Aid Jammers, Hi-C, or juice drinks from Very Fine, Welch’s or Snapple are easily mistaken for juice. However, those beverages are more like soda than juice -- they are merely sugar water with a few tablespoons of added juice. Fruit juice can be rich in vitamins, minerals, and cancer-fighting compounds. However, it is high in calories. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children ages 1-6 years old drink no more than 6 ounces (one serving) of juice a day and children ages 7-18 years old drink no more than 12 ounces (two servings) of juice a day.



Theme Party Examples (Create Your Own Theme Parties Ideas)

Halloween

- Roasted Pumpkin Seeds
- Pumpkin Bread Muffins

Harvest or Thanksgiving

- Nut & Dried Fruit Trail Mix
- Corn Bread

Valentine's Day

- Low Fat Angel Food Cake with Topped with Fresh Strawberries
- Cherry Tomatoes Filled with Low-fat Cottage Cheese Sprinkled with Sunflower Seeds.

Spring

- Fruit Salad with Yogurt Dip
- Ants on a Log (peanut butter on celery sticks topped with raisins)

End of the Year or Summer

- Fresh Fruit Kabobs
- Veggie Sticks with Low fat Dip
- Banana Splits (bananas, fresh berries, low fat vanilla yogurt, low fat granola)