Wellness and Healthy Living

Packing Nutrition Into School Lunches

Child obesity is soaring in this country. And it’s being fueled by junk food like soda and French fries. These sugary, high-fat foods fill kids up with extra calories, but don’t provide the nutrients kids need. Sadly, schools can be a big source of this food. Parents can help take a bite out of childhood obesity by ensuring their kids get a healthy school lunch. Join the spirit of this month’s National School Lunch Week by learning what you can do to support healthy eating at school.

The government is working hard to bring healthier food options to schools. Among the new programs is the HealthierUS School Challenge. Schools that join this program must meet strict standards of nutrition in the foods they serve. They must also teach kids about nutrition. Chefs Move to Schools is another new program. It helps chefs partner with local schools to create more wholesome meals. A third program, the USDA Farm to School Team, brings locally grown foods to school menus and teaches kids where food comes from. To learn more about these programs, visit www.letsmove.gov.

Local and national programs aren’t the only way to help improve your child’s nutrition at school. You can also partner with your child. Try these tips to encourage healthy choices if your child buys lunch at school:

- Go through the cafeteria menu with your child. Discuss healthy options that your child would be willing to choose.
- Encourage fruits, veggies, and whole grains. Suggest whole wheat sandwich bread over white. Encourage a fruit or veggie with every lunch.
- Talk about treats. Find out if foods like soda, chips, and French fries are available at school. If so, you might want to agree to a limit of 1–2 a week. Whenever you can, get your child to take a packed lunched. This gives you more control over what your child is eating. Try these tips for packing healthy lunches:
  - Get your kids involved in packing their own lunches.
  - Have healthy food options on hand for them to choose from.
  - Provide lean meats like chicken, turkey, and tuna.
  - Choose whole grain breads, pita, wraps, or tortillas.
  - Include fruit with every meal. Use veggies for salads, wraps, or snacks.
  - Pack healthy treats like dried fruit, yogurt covered almonds, or popcorn.
  - Choose low-fat milk or 100% juice in place of soda and sweetened drinks.

Get involved in what your child is eating at school. It’s not just about fighting child obesity. It’s about making sure kids have the energy and nutrients they need to learn and grow.
Diet and Exercise
Socialize Without Adding to Your Waistline

You know what it’s like—you show up at a friend’s party and face a lavish spread of hors d’oeuvres. At a family gathering, Aunt Mae insists you take a second helping of pecan pie. Or the gang’s headed out to the all-you-can-eat Chinese buffet for lunch. Before you know it, you’ve eaten far more than you meant to. Sticking to a healthy eating plan can be tricky at social gatherings. But there are ways to enjoy your time with others and stay on track with your eating goals.

It doesn’t help that people tend to eat more when they’re with other people. Research shows you may eat more as the number of people you’re eating with goes up. So if you eat with one other person, you may eat more than if you were alone. And if you eat with a large group of people, you may eat more than if you were with just 1 or 2 friends. Why? In part, because people are more likely to sit and eat for longer periods of time with people they like. They may also be influenced by how much other people eat. Add to that a plate of rich food, and you’ve got a recipe for overeating.

So how do you deal with all of these food temptations (without giving up your social life)? Try these strategies:

- Don’t arrive hungry—eat a healthy snack or meal before you go.
- Serve yourself, and use the smallest plates or bowls you can find.
- Fill up on fruits and vegetables.
- Have just one bite (or a small serving) of rich foods.
- Limit or avoid alcohol. If you do drink, avoid the high-calorie mixers.
- Focus on the socializing and activities—not the food.
- Move away from the buffet table, so you’re less likely to graze.
- Bring a healthy dish to a potluck—at least you’ll have one thing to eat.
- Wait 10–20 minutes before having seconds.
- Practice your most polite, “No thanks.” Instead of saying “yes,” compliment the cook or host.

Better yet, plan a social event that doesn’t revolve around food. Get your girlfriends together for a night of dancing or a pedicure. Or round up the guys for poker night or a basketball game. Maybe the gang would like to sing karaoke or play board games. Maybe your coworkers would like to go bowling or play softball. Make activities, not food, the focus of the fun.

Most important of all, don’t be hard on yourself if you slip up and eat more than you meant to. Just ease up on your calories for the next few days and get more active. It’s not what you eat on one day that counts. What you eat over the course of each week is what matters. With practice, you’ll find that it gets easier to make healthy choices while enjoying your time with others.
Have you tried to quit smoking and failed? If your answer is yes and you’ve been beating yourself up over it, it’s time to stop. In fact, you might want to give yourself a pat on the back. Most smokers make multiple attempts to quit before they find the right mix of tools and strategies to succeed. If you’ve already made your first quit attempt, then you’ve begun the process of quitting. Studies show that, on average, successful quitters make 8–11 quit attempts before succeeding. With each new attempt, they learn a little more about what does and doesn’t work for them. Then, they build this knowledge into their next try. Each quit attempt you make is an important step toward success.

Many people try to quit the first time by going cold turkey. They wake up one morning and say, “That’s it! I’m not smoking anymore.” This works for a few people, but not most. The first 2 weeks after quitting can be rough. This is when withdrawal symptoms are at their worst. Without a plan or any tools to support them, most people relapse during these first crucial days.

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An early failure like this can be discouraging, but it’s a good learning tool. Most people need a solid plan when they’re quitting. They may also need nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) products (like nicotine gum or the patch) or other medicines to help with withdrawal symptoms and cravings. Your plan starts with your quit date. It also includes how you will quit and whether you will use NRT products or other medicines. It lists your smoking triggers—the people, places, situations, and feelings that may tempt you to smoke. And it lists strategies for each trigger—things you plan to do instead of smoking.

A plan and the aids you need to help you quit are a good start. But what if this still doesn’t work for you? First, look at your plan. Did you account for all of your triggers? Did your strategies work for you? If not, come up with new ones. Next, look at any NRT product you used. Did you consult your doctor when you chose it? Or did you buy the first nicotine patch you found at the store? You may need a different or stronger product. Or you may need a combination of NRT and medicine from your doctor. Your doctor can offer options that are right for you.

If you don’t think your plan is the problem, ask yourself if you have good support systems in place. Support from family and friends can bolster you when quitting gets tough and give you the edge you need. Do you have people in your life who support your goal to quit? If not, try reaching out. Ex-smokers, nonsmokers, and people who are also trying to quit can make great supporters.

Support from trained tobacco cessation counselors can also be crucial when quitting. They can help you change the habits that keep you smoking. Have you called the quitline in your state? Expert help may be just a phone call away. You could also join a local quit group or seek one-on-one tobacco cessation counseling. By combining cessation counseling with a quit plan and the right NRT products or medicine, you greatly increase your odds of success.

All of these quitting methods have worked for other people. They can work for you, too. It just takes time and patience to figure out which combination will work best for you. The key is to keep trying. Use each quit attempt to learn something new. Before you know it, you’ll succeed, too.
Low-Stress Living
Clear Communication: Less Drama, Less Stress

Trying to communicate can be downright frustrating at times. The other person doesn’t understand—or isn’t listening. You can’t express what you want to say. Or a discussion blows up in an argument. Communication misfires like these can be stressful, especially if they involve home, work, or other key areas of life. Over time, this stress can be bad for your health. Improving your communication skills can help you reduce stress. It may also help you get more from your relationships.

Most people have a few bad habits when it comes to communicating. These habits can easily get in the way of a good conversation. Here are some common pitfalls:

- Thinking about what you want to say next, rather than listening
- Assuming you know what the other person thinks or feels
- Interrupting the speaker
- Giving advice the other person hasn’t asked for
- Criticizing the speaker or reacting defensively
- Practicing one-upmanship (You think your day was bad? Listen to mine!)
- Bringing up old issues or arguments that don’t relate to the present issue

Changing these habits can feel strange at first. Habits, after all, feel comfortable. But as you drop old patterns and try out the new communication skills below, you are likely to find your efforts rewarded. And it all starts with listening.

Active listening is perhaps the most important communication skill you can learn. It is a way of listening that shows the speaker you want to understand them. When you listen in this way, the speaker can feel heard and understood. Then, they are more able to listen to you. Here’s how to do it:

- **Look like you’re listening.** Turn off the TV. Put down your phone. Face the person who is talking. As the person speaks, make eye contact, lean forward, and nod to show you understand.

- **Listen for the emotion behind the words.** Acknowledge feelings first. You could say: What an upsetting day! Or: Wow, that sounds frustrating.

- **Check whether you’ve understood.** After the speaker finishes, repeat what you heard them say in your own words. Did you get it? If not, ask for clarification.

The next step to better communication is to send a clear message. A clear message states what you feel, think, need, or want. Avoid blaming or being defensive. The best way to send a clear message is to use “I” statements, not “you” statements. This will help you speak about your own experience without accusing the other person. (Think of the difference between “I feel angry” and “You made me angry.”) To use “I” statements:

1. **Describe how you feel:** I feel frustrated…
2. **Describe the problem:** …when you interrupt me…
3. **Describe why:** …because I feel you don’t care about what I’m saying…
4. **Describe what you want:** …I’d like you to let me finish speaking first.

Take some time to practice these skills. Not only can they reduce everyone’s stress levels—they might just improve your social life, too.