

# Nutrition Nuggets

Food and Fitness for a Healthy Child

January 2009

Chambers County Schools  
Donna Pike, Child Nutrition Director

## BEST BITES

### Healthier treats

When your youngster has dessert, make it a little lighter with these tips. Serve a single scoop of ice cream in a bowl instead of a cone. Cut a smaller wedge of pie. Split a cupcake. Let him dip several low-fat cookies in fat-free milk—and then drink the milk for a healthy dose of calcium.



### DID YOU KNOW?

Children with asthma breathe more easily when they're physically fit. Encourage activities like sprinting, gymnastics, and baseball. They're less likely to trigger attacks since they require short bursts of energy rather than constant effort. Talk to your youngster's doctor about ways



to control asthma during play, and be sure to share details with teachers and coaches.

### More magnesium

Eating foods rich in magnesium helps keep your child's heart healthy and her bones and immune system strong. Good sources include halibut, beans, nuts, spinach, potatoes, cereals like bran and instant oatmeal, bananas, and kiwi. Try for 130 mg daily for kids 4–8 and 240 mg for ages 9–13.

### Just for fun

**Q:** What happens when you tell an egg a joke?

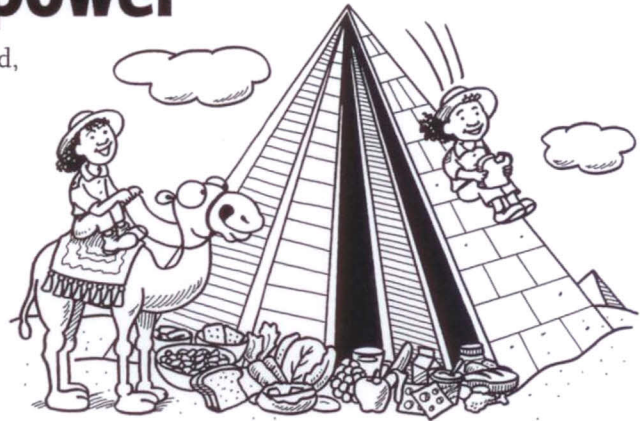
**A:** It cracks up.



## Pyramid power

What's orange, green, red, blue, purple, and yellow and helps youngsters eat better? *Answer:* the food pyramid for kids.

Introduce your child to this tool, and she'll learn how to take more responsibility for eating a healthy diet.



### Check it out

Start by looking over the pyramid together. Point out the food groups (grains, vegetables, fruits, milk, meat and beans) and the daily recommended quantities. Post a copy of the pyramid on the refrigerator, and attach sticky notes to the bottom. Each day, your youngster can make tally marks for the foods she eats from each group. *Note:* Find the pyramid in a book like *Fun with the Food Pyramid for Kids* (George Roby) or online at [www.mypyramid.gov/kids](http://www.mypyramid.gov/kids).

### Riddle this

Perfect for the car or dinner table, riddles will keep your youngster thinking about healthy foods. Take turns posing them, making sure you rotate through each section of the pyramid. *Examples:* "I'm white or brown outside and white and yellow inside. I'm in the protein group. What am I?" (an egg) "I'm long and yellow, and monkeys love me. I'm in the fruit group. What am I?" (a banana)

### Play games

Computer games are a fun way to help your child remember the foods that make up each group. For example, she can "blast off" into space by fueling a rocket ship with activities and healthy foods ([http://teammnutrition.usda.gov/resources/game/BlastOff\\_Game.html](http://teammnutrition.usda.gov/resources/game/BlastOff_Game.html)).

Have her Google "food pyramid games" to find other games. *Tip:* If you don't have a computer at home, she can play at the library. ♥

## Healthy fund-raisers

The next time your child's school or sports team is planning a fundraiser, consider suggesting healthy alternatives to candy or cookie dough sales. Here are several options:

1. Host a jog-a-thon or hoop-a-thon. Participants run or shoot baskets for pledged amounts per block or basket.
2. Hold a car wash or pet wash. Scrubbing cars and shampooing dogs will give kids an active afternoon while raising money.
3. Sell plants or flower bulbs, team sweatshirts, or magazine subscriptions.



*Safety Note:* Be sure that children sell to people they know (relatives, friends) and avoid door-to-door sales. ♥

# Snow days

"Look, Mom! It's snowing out!"

When your child wakes up to snowflakes falling outside his window, add to the excitement with these ideas. He'll get exercise and have a great time too!

- See who can jump the farthest forward, backward, and sideways in the snow. Mound snow into hurdles, and jump over them.
- Build snow castles. Using sand buckets and shovels, your youngster can make a frozen version of his summer sand castles.



- Have snow races. Help your child scoop out snow into a racetrack down a small hill. He can time how long it takes toy cars or balls to make it to the bottom.
- Tie a hula hoop to a tree as a target. Make snowballs, stand back, and try to throw them through the hoop.

- Roll a huge snowball. Your youngster can start with a little bit of snow and roll and roll until it's gigantic!

*Note:* If it doesn't snow where you live, try variations like jumping over hurdles (upside-down buckets, crates, and small trash cans) or racing toy cars down a grassy hill. ●



## ACTIVITY CORNER Tangled-up math

Math + movement = fun in this active family game.

*You'll need:* 4 poster boards, ruler, markers, masking tape



Using the ruler and markers, divide each poster board into a dozen boxes. In each box, write a math equation ( $11 + 7 = \underline{\quad}$ ,  $4 \times 4 = \underline{\quad}$ ). Make the problems harder for older children, easier for younger ones. Then, tape the poster boards to the floor side by side.

Take turns calling out math problems to each other. With a correct answer, put a part of your body (hand, foot) on that box. If the answer is wrong, your turn is over. Continue solving math problems and placing body parts (elbow, head) on the boxes. The game ends when you can't make another move—or you fall over laughing! ●

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## PARENT TO PARENT

### Breakfast for dinner

The other day I was telling my neighbor Carol how my kids were tired of our regular dinners of chicken or beef. Carol said she sometimes serves breakfast food for dinner, and her family loves it. What a great idea, I thought.

So the next night I surprised my family with a dinner of blueberry pancakes and turkey bacon. The kids were so excited that we decided to have breakfast for dinner one night a week. We make sure it's a balanced meal by including a vegetable and fruit and some kind of protein (eggs, meat, beans, or nuts).

So far we've had waffle-and-peanut butter sandwiches, oatmeal with bananas and pecans, and breakfast burritos. The kids' favorite? Build-your-own omelet night, where they got to choose fillings like mushrooms, onions, ham, or cheese. ●



## IN THE KITCHEN

### Twist on tuna

Tuna fish is rich in lean protein, vitamins, and minerals—and the best part is that most kids love it! Try these everyday ideas for a change of pace from tuna sandwiches.

**Meltaways.** Mix 1 can water-packed tuna (drained) with light mayonnaise. Spoon onto whole-wheat English muffin halves, and add sliced apples or pears. Cover with low-fat cheese (Swiss, Monterey Jack). Broil until brown and bubbly.

**Small bites.** Slice the top off of cherry tomatoes, scoop out the insides, and fill with tuna salad. Wrap

each tomato in a lettuce leaf, and use a frilly toothpick to hold the "bite" together.

**Tacos.** In a nonstick pan, combine 1 large can tuna with  $\frac{1}{2}$  package low-salt taco seasoning and  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup water. Stir until the mixture is warm and no water remains. Spoon into taco shells along with salsa, lettuce, and shredded cheddar cheese. ●



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## BEST BITES

### Peanut butter substitute

If your child is allergic to peanut butter or her school has a peanut-free policy, try these alternatives: sunflower seed butter, soy nut butter, or cashew butter. Any of them will give her the taste of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. You can find these products in grocery or health food stores.



### Simon says "hop"

Combine exercise and fun with this active version of Simon Says. The leader calls out directions like "hop on one foot,"

"march in place," or "stretch up high"—with or without "Simon Says." Follow the commands only when you hear "Simon Says," or you're out!

### DID YOU KNOW?

Canned tomato sauce, pasta sauces, and soups vary widely in nutritional content. When you're grocery shopping, let your youngster help you check food labels for the lowest sodium and sugar and the highest vitamin levels. He'll practice reading labels, and your family will have healthier meals.



### Just for fun

**Q:** What's the hardest thing about learning to rollerblade?

**A:** The ground.



## Spring activities ahead!

It may be cold outside, but warm weather will be here before you know it. Use this four-step plan to help your child choose a sport that he will enjoy this spring.

**1. Discuss.** Start by talking about what he likes. How does he usually spend recess (playing soccer, climbing on the jungle gym)? Which sports does he watch or read about? Would he rather be on a team, take a class, or do something on his own? Together, make a list of possible activities.

**2. Research.** Check on programs at your school, community center, local sports leagues, or YMCA. See how class, practice, or game times would fit into your family's schedule. Ask specific questions, such as: "How many kids are on the team?" "Do all children get to participate no matter what their skills are?"

**3. Evaluate.** Think about your youngster's personality and abilities. A social child might enjoy a team sport, while



a quieter one may prefer a class or an individual sport. If your child is still developing basic skills (throwing, kicking), consider a noncompetitive program—one where they don't keep score or have playoffs.

**4. Support.** Try to make sure your youngster attends practices and games. Lend a hand if you can, and cheer on all the kids. Talk about the fun of the activity, and downplay winning or losing. If your child knows that the goal is to be fit and have a great time, he'll feel good about himself. ♥

## Salad days

Get your youngster to eat salad more often with ideas like these.

**Add crunch.** Kids like to bite into crunchy foods. Toss thinly sliced radishes, raw green beans, and grape halves with crisp romaine lettuce pieces.

**Use color.** Attract your child to the salad bowl with bright orange carrot slices, shredded red cabbage, and diced yellow bell peppers.

**Dip it.** Put a small bowl of low-fat salad dressing alongside her salad. Dipping salad pieces will limit the dressing she uses and make eating more fun. *Note:* Try kid favorites like ranch, Italian, or French dressing. ♥



# Bring it home

Take-out food can be a quick solution for a hectic dinnertime. Make it a *healthy* solution by showing your child these ways to choose wisely from carryout menus.

## Italian

- Put healthier toppings (vegetables, low-fat cheese) on pizza, and order thin-crust rather than deep-dish.
- Try minestrone soup for a serving of beans and vegetables.
- Get pasta dishes with tomato sauce rather than cream sauce.



## Chinese

- Choose steamed or lightly stir-fried dishes instead of ones that are battered or deep-fried like General Tso's chicken, sweet and sour pork, and orange beef.
  - Look for items that have a lot of vegetables, such as chop suey or moo goo gai pan.
  - Select steamed dumplings and brown rice rather than fried versions.
- Tip:* Ask for low-sodium soy sauce.

## Indian

- Try mulligatawny, a lentil-and-vegetable soup.
- For entrees, order baked or roasted dishes like shish kebab, tandoori chicken or fish, or saag (for example, beef with spinach). Stay away from rich curries made with coconut milk or cream.
- Ask for mango chutney—a sweet side order made from fruit that your youngster can put on meats, vegetables, or rice. 🍌



## ACTIVITY CORNER

### Sing along, dance along

Whether your youngster likes to sing, rap, or dance, you can use her love of music to get the whole family moving. Try these ideas:

- Turn on the radio or put on favorite CDs, and dance to the music. See who can keep moving for the longest time. Teach your child some old dances, and let her show you new ones.

- Homemade tap shoes will really get your youngster moving! Get two metal washers and thread a piece of string through each one. Lay one flat against the bottom of each shoe, and tie the string securely on top of the shoe. For extra fun, make tap shoes for yourself, and tap dance together on the sidewalk or in the basement or garage.



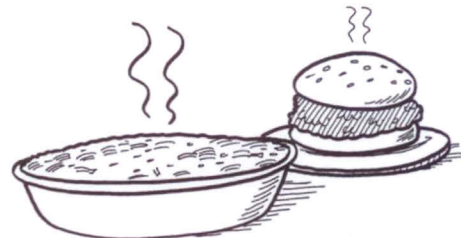
- Using a real or pretend microphone (try an empty toilet paper roll), your child can belt out a song and move to the tune. You might write the words on a poster board and let her sing along karaoke-style. 🎤

## IN THE KITCHEN

### Meaty dishes

Meat packs healthy protein, iron, and vitamins. Use lean ground meat for these two kid-pleasing dishes.

**Sloppy Joes.** Saute 1 lb. ground beef with 1 diced onion and 2 cups chopped fresh mushrooms. Cook until the onion and mushrooms are soft, 8–10 minutes, and drain. Stir in a 15-oz. can diced tomatoes and 2 tbsp. flour. Then, add ¼ cup water, 2 tbsp. apple cider vinegar, and ½ cup ketchup. Cook 10 minutes until the sauce thickens. Spoon onto whole-wheat buns.



**Burger Pie.** Brown 1 lb. ground turkey with ¼ cup diced onions, and drain off any fat. Stir in 1 small can tomato sauce, 1 tsp. chili powder, and salt and pepper to taste. Pour into a pie dish, and cover with 1 cup shredded low-fat cheddar cheese. Bake at 375° until the cheese melts, about 10 minutes. 🍌

## Q & A Cutting back

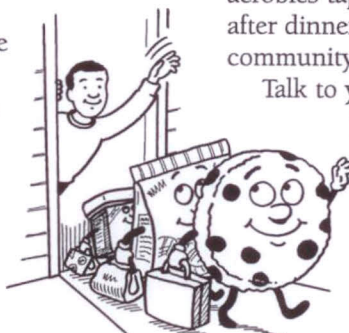
**Q:** *Our family is trying to lose weight, but we're having trouble sticking to a plan. How can we be more successful?*

**A:** One of the easiest ways is to watch what you have in the house. If you don't have cookies and chips in the pantry or ice cream in the freezer, you won't eat them.

Also, try to control what you'll eat when you go out. For example, don't take extra money for food

when you go to the movies or bowling alley. Instead, have a healthy meal or snack before leaving. Also, be sure to build in daily exercise like following an aerobics tape together, taking a walk after dinner, or swimming at an indoor community pool.

Talk to your child's pediatrician and your own doctor, and set healthy weight-loss goals for each of you. Then, celebrate your successes with a family outing—maybe to an ice-skating rink or a sporting event. 🍌



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## BEST BITES

### Drink water

Soda and fruit drinks can add unnecessary sugar and calories to an otherwise healthy meal. Try making water the regular drink in your house. Serve it with snacks and meals, and take it along when you go out. *Tip:* Tap water is inexpensive and often contains fluoride for healthy teeth.



### Tumble time

Want to fit in more exercise at home? Have your child take a tumbling break. On a carpeted area of your family room or basement, challenge him to do a few forward and backward rolls. Join in the fun—seeing Mom or Dad do somersaults will encourage him to do more. *Note:* Tumbling is a weight-bearing exercise that helps children build bone density.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Honey is the only food produced by insects that people eat. Not only that, it contains vitamins and can help lower cholesterol. Offer your youngster this natural sweetener instead of sugar sometimes. She might like a little honey drizzled onto toast, stirred into plain yogurt, or added to decaffeinated iced tea.



### Just for fun

**Q:** Why are Martians good gardeners?

**A:** They have green thumbs!



## Fantastic fruit

Fruit is the ultimate fun food—it comes in all different colors, shapes, sizes, and tastes. Use these ideas to get your child in the habit of eating a variety each day.

### How much?

Kids need about 1½ cups of fruit a day. Show your youngster what that looks like by lining up portions on the kitchen table. You can set out ½-cup servings, such as 4 strawberries, a small box of raisins, ½ grapefruit, 16 grapes, or a medium-sized apple or orange. Have her arrange them into groups of three (3 servings of ½ cup = 1½ cups).

### Add to meals

Serve fruit with every meal. Make a “fruit face” on grits or cream of wheat with a papaya mouth, grape nose, and blueberry eyes. For lunch, dice apples or pears into tuna or chicken salad. At dinner, top brown rice or broiled fish with tomato salsa, or put out bowls of fruit (grapefruit sections, peaches canned in their own juice).

### Try new kinds

Introduce interesting fruits to your family. Delight your child with star fruit sliced crosswise into five-pointed shapes. Cut a pomegranate in half—the edible seeds will burst with flavor in her mouth. Sauté peeled, sliced plantains in a little olive oil and butter until they’re soft and sweet.

*Snack idea:* Make fruit shapes for extra fun. Cut and peel round slices (about ½” thick) from a whole cantaloupe or honeydew melon. Let your child use a small cookie cutter to cut shapes (heart, circle) out of the centers.



Then, have her use the same cookie cutters to cut the same shapes out of kiwi or watermelon to fit into the holes. ●

## Everyday activity boosts

Your youngster needs 60 minutes of physical activity a day to stay healthy and fit—and every little bit helps. Here are a few simple ways to increase his daily activity:

- Bike together to his friend’s house, instead of driving him.
- Take the stairs rather than the elevator or escalator when going to the dentist or shopping at the mall.
- If you need a book from upstairs or a box from the basement, ask your youngster to get it for you.
- At the grocery store or library, park farther from the entrance.
- Do errands on foot where possible (walk together to the bank or post office). ●



# Create food traditions

Let's have Grandma's beef stew for dinner—and Aunt Pearl's homemade applesauce for dessert!

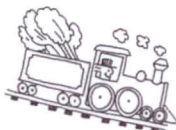
There's something magical about family recipes. They stir up warm memories of meals with favorite relatives and make families feel connected. Build food traditions in your family with these suggestions:

- Prepare a favorite dish from your childhood (your great-aunt's mashed potatoes, your grandmother's black-eyed peas). While you eat, tell a story about the person who created the recipe. You'll give your youngster a sense of family history while passing on your heritage.



- Together, brainstorm a list of your family's favorite dishes. Your son might love your corn pudding, or your daughter may think Uncle Mark grills the best hamburgers. Write the recipes in a spiral notebook, and let your child decorate a cover and make up a title ("Our Family's Favorite Foods").

- You can start a new tradition, too. If your family loves tacos, declare a monthly taco night. You'll create memories for a lifetime—one day your child will tell his children about the tacos he had growing up. And future generations just might put your taco recipe in their family cookbook. ♣



## ACTIVITY CORNER

### Jump to it

Jumping rope is great exercise for a lifetime.

Try these four ideas to get your children jumping their way into good health:

1. Take turns calling out moves to each other. *Examples:* "Double jump" (jump twice for each time the rope goes around), "Cross" (cross the rope in front of you while jumping up), or "Backward" (start with the rope in front of your feet).

2. Say the alphabet while jumping, and name a vegetable for as many letters as possible. *Example:* A is for artichoke, B is for broccoli, C is for corn on the cob, and so on.



3. Put on music, and start jumping rope. When you stop the music, the jumpers have to freeze. Start the music, and jump again.

4. On the count of three, everyone jump as many times as you can. Can your children outjump you? ♣

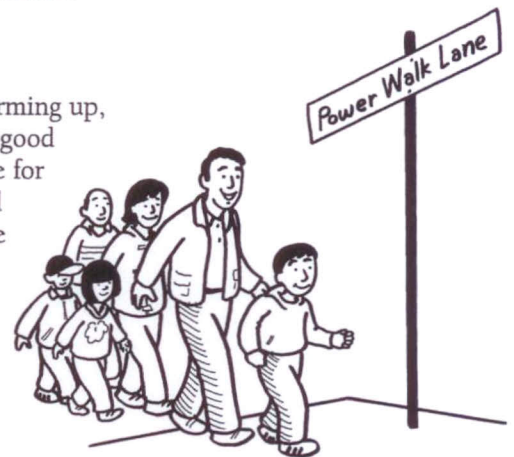
## PARENT TO PARENT

### Walkie-talkie

With the weather warming up, I thought it would be a good time for my son and me to get outside for more exercise. I suggested that he and I start going for walks together, and he immediately asked if he could bring a friend along. That gave me an idea.

I suggested that we start a neighborhood walking club with other moms and kids. We made a list of friends to call, and almost all of them were interested.

Now we meet at the corner Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 5 p.m. We take a "power walk"—walking fast and swinging our arms back and forth for extra exercise—for about 45 minutes. We're all getting more exercise, and we have fun talking as we walk. I think this is something we'll keep up for a long time! ♣



## IN THE KITCHEN

### Way to go

Turn healthy snacks into boats, trains, and rockets, and even picky eaters won't be able to resist. Here's how.

**Sail away.** Slice hard-boiled eggs in half lengthwise. Mash the yolk with a little light mayonnaise, and put it back into the egg white. Make a sail by sliding a toothpick through a slice of cheese.



**Choo-choo.** Tape together small paper cups to make a "snack train." Fill each cup with a different snack—perhaps cereal for the engine, celery pieces for the boxcar, mini-pretzels for the coal car, and dried cherries for the caboose.

**Blast off.** Use a pineapple ring (canned or fresh) as a launching pad, and stand half of a peeled banana in the center as the rocket. Top with half of a maraschino cherry to make the rocket's nose. ♣

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## BEST BITES

### Go light

When it comes to cheese, a little can go a long way. Rather than using whole slices, grate cheese into your child's sandwiches or omelets.



You'll cut down on the fat, calories, and sodium that way. Also, look for reduced-fat and reduced-sodium versions of your youngster's favorite cheeses.

### DID YOU KNOW?

More schools, community centers, and recreation departments are addressing the childhood obesity crisis by offering fitness classes for kids.

Check library and grocery store bulletin boards or school Web sites for free or low-cost programs. Then, sign your child up for an after-school or a weekend activity he can enjoy with friends.



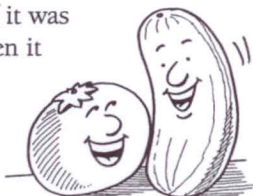
### Cooking playdate

When your youngster invites a friend over, suggest a cooking playdate. Help them look through cookbooks for a healthy recipe, and then supervise them in the kitchen. They'll have a great time mixing and stirring, and they'll want to eat the nutritious food they make.

### Just for fun

**Q:** Why is a tomato round and red?

**A:** Because if it was long and green it would be a cucumber!



## Fast food tips

Does your busy family eat fast food often? You're certainly not alone. But quick doesn't have to mean unhealthy. Try these tips for a healthier trip to the drive-thru.

### Do your homework

Have your child research nutrition facts for his favorite fast food chains (on their Web sites, in brochures at the restaurants). Ask him to find items that are lower in calories, fat, cholesterol, and sodium.

### Make sample menus

Suggest that he put together a few healthy menus and write them in a notebook (example: small hamburger with mustard, baked potato with salsa, water). Keep the notebook in the car so he can refer to it when you stop for food.

### Choose healthy drinks

Watch the drinks—one supersize soda can add 425 calories to a meal! Have your youngster drink water or fat-free milk



instead. *Idea:* He can squeeze a lemon wedge into the water to add flavor.

### Try something new

Instead of a bun, your child could request a "lettuce wrap." Ask the clerk to serve a burger or grilled chicken with a large lettuce leaf, and your youngster can wrap it up to eat.

### Eat at home

Did you know that people tend to eat more when they eat out? Try ordering the main meal only and then adding healthy vegetables and fruit at home. ♡

## Stocking your pantry

A key to healthy snacking is having the right foods on hand. Try these ideas for stocking your pantry with foods your kids will eat:

- Replace potato chips with baked veggie, pita, or tortilla chips. Or get low-fat graham crackers or flavored soy crisps (ranch or barbecue, for example).
- Choose a variety of whole-grain cereals, crackers, bagels, and rice cakes. Other good choices include oatmeal and low-fat granola and cereal bars.
- Fruit is always healthy. Try applesauce, canned fruits (packed in their own juice), and dried fruits like raisins, apples, figs, and blueberries.
- Seeds, such as sunflower or pumpkin seeds, are filled with minerals. Pistachios or mixed nuts make a tasty, high-fiber snack.

*Tip:* Put the items you want your children to eat the most often at their eye level. Place "sometimes" foods on higher shelves. ♡

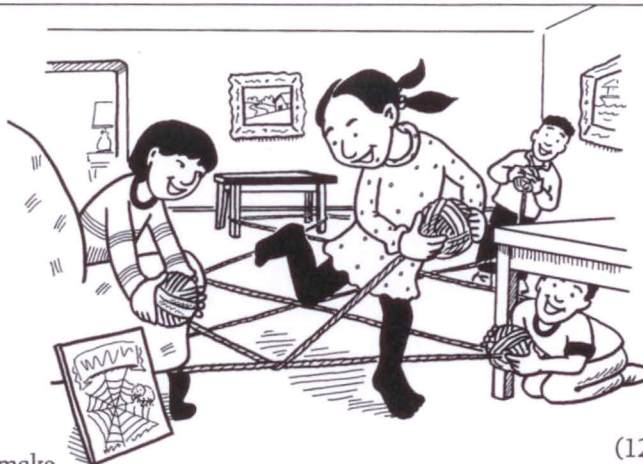


# Active learning

Learning and exercise can go together! Try these fun ideas for combining physical activity and skill building.

**Act out verbs.** Brainstorm a list of 20 action words. *Examples:* gallop, slither, crawl, jump. Have your youngster write each word on an index card. Take turns drawing a card and doing what it says.

**Make a web.** Read a book about spiders (try *Spinning Spiders* by Melvin Berger), and then make a web together. Each person unwinds a ball of yarn through obstacles (over a sofa, under a table, around chair legs). Switch yarns, and walk back through the web, rewinding the ball. The first to finish wins.



**Solve math problems.** Help your child draw a 25-box grid (5 boxes across, 5 boxes down) with chalk on a driveway or blacktop, and number them 1–25. Call out a math problem ( $6 \times 2 = \underline{\quad}$ ), and have her jump to each number and the answer (12). Then, let her give you a problem to solve.

**Spell it out.** Challenge your child to make letters with her body. She could move through the whole alphabet, curving her body into A, B, C, and so on. Or she can form her spelling words one letter at a time. ♡

## ACTIVITY CORNER

### An herb garden

Growing herbs is a great way for children to learn about gardening—and about ways to spice up food.

Start by going together to pick out plants and seeds. Good choices include basil, chives, oregano, and mint.



If you have room, let your child plant the herbs outside. Or consider a clay pot garden. He can decorate the pots with markers or paint and even name and label his plants (“Bobby Basil” or “Ollie Oregano”). Have him set the pots on a sunny windowsill or on a deck or porch.

As the herbs grow, talk about ways your youngster will use them. You might plan a pizza night so he can sprinkle oregano on top of the tomato sauce and cheese. Or he could put sprigs of mint into iced tea for guests. ♡

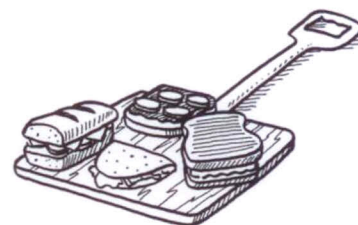


## IN THE KITCHEN

### Panini time

Take healthy items, put them between two pieces of bread, press down, and cook. The result? A delicious panini sandwich! Try these combinations.

- On a baguette spread with pesto sauce, layer tomato slices and skim mozzarella cheese.
- Spread hummus on a whole-wheat tortilla. Cover with mushrooms and shredded carrots. Fold in half.
- Layer lean corned beef or turkey, sauerkraut, and Swiss cheese on rye bread.
- Put leftover chicken or beef strips, chopped romaine lettuce, shredded



cheddar cheese, and low-fat mayonnaise on whole-grain bread.

*Note:* You can buy an inexpensive panini maker, or simply weight down the sandwich with a soup can in a skillet (coated with cooking spray) until it’s crisp on the bottom. Then flip and weight it down again until the other side is browned. ♡

## Q & A Gluten-free eating

**Q:** We recently learned that our daughter has celiac disease. How can we find foods she can eat?

**A:** People with celiac disease cannot digest gluten, a protein that’s in wheat and some other foods. Fortunately, grocery stores are carrying more gluten-free products these days.

Take your daughter shopping with you, and teach her to read food labels carefully. Together, make a list of words she should

watch out for. *Examples:* wheat, flour, soy sauce, malt, rye, couscous, oats, graham, grain, barley.

If she goes to a friend’s house or a party, let her pack a snack to take along. When you eat out, you can help her find safe foods on the menu. Some restaurants will substitute ingredients if you ask.

Learning to live with celiac disease is an adjustment, but with support and planning, your daughter will find plenty of foods she can eat. ♡



**OUR PURPOSE**

To provide busy parents with practical ways to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity for their children.

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