

HEALTH

Packing healthy school lunches as easy as ABC

Special to Sentinel-Voice

HOUSTON— Remembering the ABCs will help parents pack healthy lunches for their school-age children.

"A good guideline for packing nutrition into your child's school lunch is to have a source of vitamin A, a source of the B vitamins and good source of both vitamin C and calcium," said Dr. Debby Demory-Luce, nutritionist at the USDA/ARS Children's Nutrition Research Center at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, "because many foods rich in these nutrients are also good sources of vitamin D, iron, protein and carbohydrates."

Here are the ABC's of packing healthy lunches:

A: For vitamin A, provide one half-cup serving of a deep yellow or deep orange fruit or vegetable. Baby carrots (packed with a favorite yogurt dip), cubed cantaloupe, or dried apricots are good choices.

B: B vitamins are found in whole grains, meat, nuts and seeds. Meat, cheese or peanut butter sandwiches on whole grain or enriched breads, low-fat cheese with whole wheat crackers, pasta salad with cheese and kidney beans, and even lunch-box treats of graham crackers, oatmeal cookies studded with raisins, and sunflower seeds provide B vitamins, protein, carbohydrates and iron. For kids' lunches pack at least two servings of grains or bread and some protein every day.



Sentinel-Voice file photo

A balanced diet, adequate sleep and exercise can improve a children's overall health.

C: Vitamin C and calcium are both found in calcium-fortified orange juice. Pack one half-cup of fresh strawberries, cubed pineapple, citrus fruits or citrus juice for vitamin C, and one cup of low-fat milk or yogurt for calcium. Low-fat dairy products also provide protein and vitamin D. This food source of vitamin D is especially important for children in cold climates who may not get enough sunshine in winter.

"Lunch should provide one-third of a child's daily intake of vitamins, minerals and calories," said Demory-Luce. To ensure children receive a nutritionally balanced diet, she recommends choosing a variety of foods from the USDA Food Guide Pyramid.

"It's important to get children involved in the selection and preparation of their school lunches," said Demory-Luce. "Not only do most children want a say in what they are going to have for lunch, but parents can also use this time to teach them how to make healthy choices. These lessons, will, in most cases, stay with them for the rest of their lives."

Doctors warn against gum for young children

Special to Sentinel-Voice

CHICAGO — Children who are too young to understand that swallowing chewing gum can cause them sticky medical problems shouldn't be allowed to chew it, doctors say.

While it's age-old motherly advice not to swallow gum, researchers decided the subject merited more attention after three young children with gum-related problems were brought to the same Florida hospital within two years.

The children all needed medical treatment to clear wads of gum blocking their digestive tracts, researchers reported in the August issue of *Pediatrics*.

A 4-year-old boy who chewed and swallowed five to seven pieces of gum a day was constipated for two years after his parents gave him gum as a reward in toilet training. His intestine became blocked, and doctors had to remove the gum through his rectum, researchers said.

A 4-year old girl had a similar experience, they said.

"When a toddler has chronic, unremitting constipation, you should think about whether they're gum swallows," said the lead author, Dr. David E. Milov, chief of gastroenterology at Nemours Children's Clinic in Orlando, Fla.

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Program cheap, easy, lowers children's cholesterol levels

Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON— Getting 9-year-olds to jump rope, play tag and listen to tips on healthy eating significantly lowered their cholesterol levels after just two months.

Alas, 9 is not too early to worry about cholesterol, and a new study shows a simple school program that stresses an active physical education class can help set children on a healthier path to adulthood.

The program tested in North Carolina is easy and cheap enough that the National Institutes of Health hopes schools nationwide will quickly adopt it. Essentially, it took some educational material from the American Heart Association, \$100 per school to buy fitness equipment and a day's training for teachers.

"We're very excited about this," said Patricia Grady, director of the National Institute of Nursing Research, which funded the North Carolina study.

Doctors have increasing evidence that heart disease takes root in early childhood. Autopsies of young children killed in accidents have found their arteries already clogging with fat. And the risks are on the rise: Studies show more and more children are obese, and fewer exercise; some schools even have cut back on gym class.

Researchers at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, studied 422 third- and fourth-graders around the state who got little physical activity and were obese or had high cholesterol.

The children's cholesterol levels averaged 179 — borderline high, equivalent to a level of 200 in an adult. For an adult at that level, doctors would promptly prescribe serious diet and exercise and occasionally medication. (More dangerous cholesterol levels are 200 in a child, equal to 240 in an adult). The overweight children were at least 15 pounds

too heavy; one child weighed 200 pounds.

The children were divided into three groups. In one, teachers taught healthy nutrition habits during regular classes two days a week, plus gym class that kept kids moving for 20 full minutes, three times a week.

Other "control" classes got the state's routine health and physical education classes, which featured little aerobic activity. A third group of children were removed from class a part of each day for individualized instruction from nurses, plus the vigorous exercise.

In classes that got the heart-healthy education, students' cholesterol dropped almost 12 points in just two months, lead researcher Joanne Harrell reports in the journal *Pediatrics*.

Kids who got nurses' instruction had cholesterol drops of 10 points — showing, surprisingly, that the classroom-based program was more effective.

The control classes had cholesterol drops of 2 points, presumably because children's cholesterol does fluctuate somewhat.

"I was very surprised," said Harrell, a UNC nursing professor. "I was convinced the nurses would do better."

She says stressing fun, high-aerobic activity probably was key - kids ran relays or raced around schoolyards playing parachute instead of doing boring sit-ups or standing around awaiting a turn at bat. Parents weren't involved in the study, so kids' at-home diets presumably didn't change much.

In the UNC program, children were taught what foods are high in fat, urged to choose low-fat milk, and shown what "healthy" servings of treats like ice cream look like so they might remember when to stop indulging.

The program lasted just two months, but a year later most of the children's cholesterol still was low.

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