

# Nutrition Nuggets

Food and Fitness for a Healthy Child

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Northeast Independent School District  
Dr. Richard A. Middleton, Superintendent



## BEST BITES

### Learn from pets

If you have a pet, consider putting your youngster in charge of feeding it. Show her that a dog, cat, or hamster needs healthy food in just-right portions and water all day long—just like she does. And when she walks the dog or watches a hamster run on a wheel, point out that pets need exercise—again, just like she does!

### Vegetable couscous



Combine a healthy grain with vegetables for this quick side dish. Dice 2 carrots, 1 onion, 1 bell pepper, and 1 zucchini, and sauté in a little olive oil for 5 minutes. Season with garlic salt and lemon-pepper seasoning. Stir in 1 cup couscous and 1½ cups chicken (or vegetable) broth. Remove from heat, let stand 5 minutes, fluff with a fork—and serve!

### DID YOU KNOW?

Ice skating builds endurance, tones muscles, and provides an aerobic workout. Plus, it's fun! Take your family ice skating at an indoor or outdoor rink or on a safely frozen pond. Consider low-cost lessons at a community rink to build your child's skills and self-confidence.

### Just for fun

**Q:** What can you serve but never eat?

**A:** A tennis ball.



## The breakfast habit

Making time for breakfast on busy mornings can be a challenge. But eating a healthy breakfast will give your child the energy he needs after sleeping—and fasting—all night. After all, breakfast literally means to *break the fast*!

Here are easy ways to build a daily breakfast routine.

### Get started the night before.

Have your child set out plates, bowls, silverware, glasses—and even cereal boxes. Also, he can choose his clothes and pack his backpack. Meanwhile, you can get a jump on breakfast by hard-boiling eggs or mixing up (and refrigerating) pancake batter. These steps will save minutes in the morning when you're trying to get to school and work.

**Create family time.** Sit down together for breakfast, even if it's only for a short while. Keep the conversation light and friendly, perhaps talking about the day ahead. If your child is too sleepy to talk, you could just let each person read a section of the newspaper. The important thing is to be together and eating breakfast.



**Vary the options.** Whole-grain cereal with fat-free milk is healthy and quick—try bumping up the nutritional value by sprinkling on wheat germ, dried cranberries, or chopped nuts. Keep breakfast interesting with other kid-friendly foods, too. *Examples:* mini bagels with peanut butter, leftover pizza, and yogurt layered with granola and fruit.

*Note:* School breakfast is another good choice, especially if you have to be at work early or if your child goes to before-school care or would enjoy eating with friends. ♥

### Active, all by myself!

Does your child tend to be more active when she has a friend over? Encourage her to get exercise when she's alone, too, with suggestions like these:

1. Draw a hopscotch board on the sidewalk, and practice.
2. Time yourself in short races.
3. Hop on one foot across a room and back.
4. See how long you can keep a hula hoop going.
5. Move a different way through each room of the house (skip, jump, roll).
6. Learn to twirl a baton, and twirl while marching to music. ♥



# Dealing with food allergies

Having a child with food allergies can be worrisome. Teach your youngster to take charge of her allergy, and you'll both feel safer when she's away from home. Consider these ideas:

- Make sure she knows exactly what she's allergic to. Teach her "code words" to watch for on food labels. For example, if she has a peanut allergy, she'll have to watch for peanuts, peanut oil, ground nuts, mixed nuts, peanut flour, or the words "may contain nuts." Also, point out how peanuts can show up in obvious foods (peanut butter) but also sometimes in other items



(cookies, chili, spaghetti sauce, and Thai or Vietnamese foods).

- Help her handle school meals by reading the cafeteria menu with her and discussing foods to avoid. *Idea:* Talk with the cafeteria manager about menu items or ingredients to watch for. Also, remind your youngster never to share food with classmates. And identify school staff (teacher, school nurse, cafeteria aide) who can help her in an emergency.

- Encourage your child to ask questions when she is at friends' houses or restaurants. She should explain the situation and ask about ingredients. ("I'm allergic to wheat. Is this food made with any wheat products?") If her host isn't sure, your child can just say, "No, thanks." ●

## Q & A Buy organic?

**Q:** I've read that organic fruits and vegetables are healthier—but they're expensive! Is it really necessary to buy organic?

**A:** Some people prefer buying organic to cut down on the chemicals they eat. You can make choices that will make the most difference for your money. For example, pesticides aren't as likely to get through produce that has thick or removable coverings. So you could continue buying regular bananas, avocados, onions, corn, pineapples, mangos, melons, grapefruit, and oranges, for instance.

On the other hand, more pesticides get through fruits and vegetables with edible or thin skin. So you might choose organic for celery, apples, strawberries, bell peppers, greens (lettuce, spinach, kale, collard greens), or cherries.

*Note:* Whether you buy organic or conventional produce, wash all items (even melons) thoroughly before eating. ●



## ACTIVITY CORNER

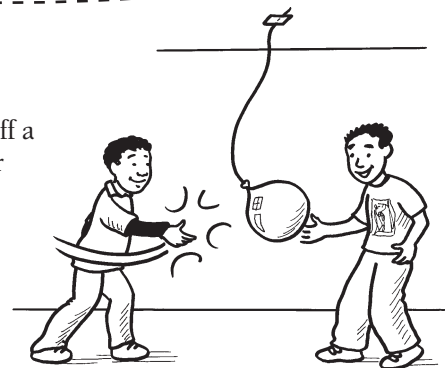
### Balloon games

To help your child blow off a little steam inside the house on a cold winter day, just blow up a few balloons. Then, try games like these.

- Hit a balloon back and forth to each other. Reach, run, and dive to keep the balloon in the air. *Variation:* Catch the balloon and throw it back.

- Have each person bat his own balloon in the air. Count how many times you hit it before it touches the ground. Who can keep his balloon afloat the longest?

- Tie a 4-foot string to a balloon, and tape the end of the string to the ceiling. Play tetherball by hitting the balloon in a circular motion toward the other player. That player then hits it back to you in the opposite direction. ●



## IN THE KITCHEN

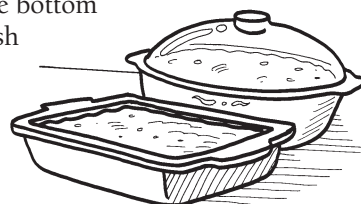
### One-dish meals

Having a whole meal in one dish is an easy way to put dinner on the table, especially with these two do-ahead casseroles.

**Tortilla bake.** Sauté 1 diced onion about 5 minutes, and stir in 1 grated zucchini, 1 can black beans (drained and rinsed), 1 can drained diced tomatoes, and 1 cup frozen corn (thawed). Cook until hot. Cover the bottom of a 9x13 inch baking dish with corn tortillas, and top with half the vegetable mixture, ½ can low-sodium enchilada sauce, and ½ cup low-fat

shredded cheddar. Repeat the layering. Bake at 400° about 25 minutes, until the cheese melts.

**Chicken and broccoli.** Spread 1 cup cooked brown rice in a casserole dish. Add fresh broccoli pieces and shredded rotisserie chicken. Mix 1 can cream of mushroom and 1 can cream of chicken soup (both low-sodium varieties), and spoon half the mixture on top. Repeat the layering (rice, broccoli, chicken, soup mixture). Bake at 375° for 45 minutes. ●



## OUR PURPOSE

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

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