



BEST BITES

Baked-potato buffet

Want an easy dinner idea your children will love?

Consider a baked-potato bar. Just bake (or microwave) a small white potato, sweet potato, or yam for each person. Then, set out healthy toppings, and let everyone fix her own. *Suggestions:* cooked chicken, beef, or pork (leftovers work well), sliced scalions, shredded low-fat cheese, salsa.

Plane fun

Here's a lively game for family or friends. Divide into two teams, and have each player make five paper airplanes. Stand on opposite sides of a divider (sofa, coffee table). On "go," sail planes over the divider. Quickly pick up new planes as they land, and send them back. Call "stop" after 20 seconds—the team with the fewest planes left wins.



DID YOU KNOW?

The average child spends four hours a day watching TV. Experts suggest no more than one hour. Ask your youngster to keep track of his TV viewing every day for a week. Then, work together on a plan for cutting down. *Ideas:* Swap one show each day for an active game outside. Turn off the set during meals and homework.

Just for fun

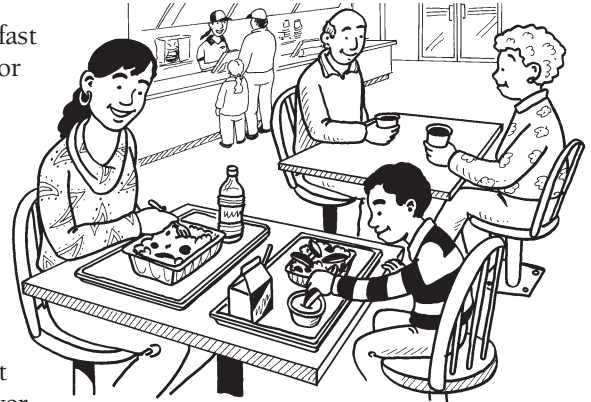
Q: What did one flea say to the other flea?

A: "Shall we walk or take the dog?"



Fast food: better choices

Whether your youngster eats fast food with you, a friend's family, or his sports team, it's likely to be part of his life. Show him ways to make fast food as healthy as possible with these strategies.



Suggest options

Talk up better choices in ways that will appeal to your child. ("What about a fruit cup? Look. It has apples and oranges—your favorites!" or, "You can drink the milk right out of the little bottle!") *Tip:* If he still wants the fries or soda, get the smallest size. By not turning it into a fight, you'll make these items less tempting for the future.

Lighten up

Teach your youngster to say "hold the sauce" when he orders a chicken sandwich or hamburger. Leaving off mayonnaise or creamy sauces (ranch, tartar) will cut fat and calories. If he gets a salad, he can request "dressing on the side, please." Then, let him dunk his lettuce and vegetables into the dressing—he'll think that's more fun anyway.

Gather information

Check nutrition information on menu boards, tray liners, brochures, or websites. Let your child look at the numbers with you and help pick out the healthiest options. For instance, you could ask him to find the sandwich with the fewest calories. Or he could look for the bread with the most grams of fiber.

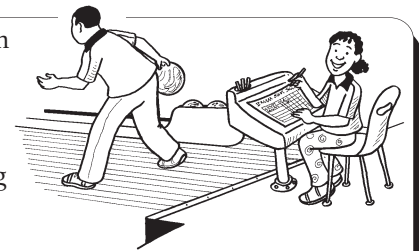
Take your time

Create good eating habits even when eating fast food. Try to sit at a table—either in the restaurant or at home—rather than in the car. And set aside the same amount of time for eating as you would for a home-cooked meal. ♥

Stay active and learn

Physical activity and learning can go hand in hand. Try these ideas:

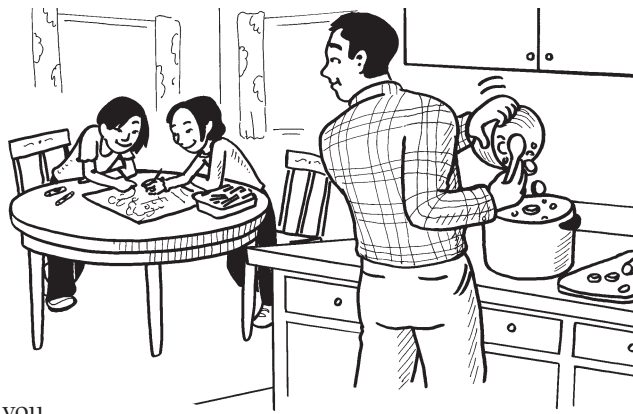
- Play Ping-Pong or go bowling, and make your youngster the scorekeeper. (*Note:* Don't use the automated scorekeeping at the bowling alley.) Or time each other doing sprints. Your child will build math skills as she exercises.
- Boost science skills by going on nature hunts. Suggest that your youngster look for bugs, follow animal tracks, run after butterflies, or gather leaves of different sizes and shapes.
- Build comprehension skills by reading a story aloud and challenging your child to act it out as you go. *Tip:* Look for books with lots of action words (*climbing, hopping, scurrying*). ♥



More veggies, please

Looking for ways to get more vegetables into your child's diet? Look no further! Here are five painless tips to try:

1. Chop vegetables into tiny pieces and add to ground turkey or beef before making hamburgers, meatloaf, tacos, or meatballs. You can also put finely chopped vegetables into spaghetti sauce or casseroles.
2. Puree vegetables in a blender or food processor and stir into canned (low-sodium) soups as you heat them. *Hint:* Use vegetables the same color as the soup, such as cauliflower for New England clam chowder or yellow squash for chicken noodle soup.



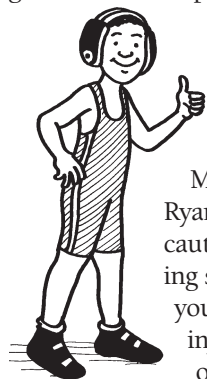
3. Microwave fresh or frozen vegetables. Then, sprinkle on low-fat cheese. Microwave again until the cheese melts.
4. Puree peas and add to guacamole. Serve with vegetables like baby carrots or celery stalks instead of chips.

5. Set out a colorful tray of raw vegetables (sugar snap peas, cucumber spears, radishes, asparagus tips, grape tomatoes) for an after-school snack. Which ones does your youngster like best? ♥

PARENT TO PARENT

All soccer, all the time?

My son loves soccer, and he's a pretty good player. In fact, his coach suggested that Ryan play indoor soccer last winter and then play in spring and fall leagues as well. On top of that, Ryan wanted to go to soccer camp over the summer.



I wondered whether he should be focusing on one sport, so I asked his pediatrician. Dr. Miller was thrilled that Ryan likes soccer, but she cautioned against specializing so young. She said youngsters can have more injuries and even "burn out" by doing one sport

year-round. Playing different sports would let my son build skills—and develop the muscles and joints that he uses in soccer, she said.

I told Ryan he could play soccer for two seasons, but I wanted him to try other sports, too. He decided on wrestling for the winter and swim team for the summer. And guess what? He found two more sports that he likes! ♥



ACTIVITY CORNER

My plate, my health

What's on your child's plate? With these projects, she can learn about—and practice using—the new USDA recommendations for healthy eating.



The Choose My Plate guidelines are simple. Have your youngster think of her plate in sections: half for vegetables and fruits, a quarter for grains (bread, rice, pasta), and a quarter for protein (meat, beans, eggs). She can picture a serving of dairy where her glass goes. Then, let her bring the guidelines to life!

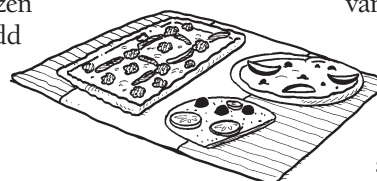
- Have her gather paper plates, play food, packaged foods, and stuffed animals or dolls. She can use the food and plates to arrange balanced meals, seat her "friends" at a table, and "serve" a plate to each one.
- Let your youngster trace around a plate and a glass on a small poster board. Have her divide the circle into four parts and label them: Vegetables, Fruits, Grains, Protein. Then, she can draw pictures of her favorite foods or cut and paste photos from old magazines. *Idea:* Hang her poster in the kitchen as a reminder of how she should fill her plate at mealtime. ♥

IN THE KITCHEN

Pick a pizza

Involve your youngster in making his own pizza—these healthy twists are sure to be winners.

My favorite color. Build a pizza around your child's favorite color. A green pizza, for instance, could be chopped broccoli and green beans with pesto sauce. Place the toppings on a frozen whole-wheat crust, add shredded skim mozzarella cheese, and bake at 350° until the sauce bubbles.



Garden on a pita. Large round pita bread makes an easy pizza crust. Let your youngster put cherry tomato halves, sliced zucchini, and black olives on top of a pita. Bake at 350° until the vegetables are tender. Then, he can sprinkle on crumbled feta cheese.

Pizza for dessert. Cover a ready-to-eat pizza crust with a thin layer of nonfat vanilla yogurt. Let your child decorate the pizza with fruit. *Examples:* blueberries, sliced kiwi and apples, halved strawberries and grapes. ♥

OUR PURPOSE

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

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