

NIH News in Health

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Good Health to Go Eating Smart at School

"Want my pizza bagel?" "Awesome, here's my blueberries!"

Is your daughter, son or grandchild a master dealer at lunch? Packing a healthy school lunch is helpful only if the food ends up in the tummy—or gets traded for something else that isn't loaded with sugar, fat or salt. But even in the chaotic, wolf-down-your-lunch-to-get-to-recess-as-soon-as-possible world of the school cafeteria, children can make smart food choices. Parents and caregivers play a key role in helping children learn the fundamentals of healthy living—eating well and staying active—whatever pressures they face outside home.

Child nutrition specialist Dr. Daniel Raiten at NIH says that one of the most important strategies for parents to help kids stay healthy is to foster good eating habits at home. Raiten talks often to kids in schools and finds that few understand what a healthy "diet" means.

"Most think that diet is a verb—what you do to lose weight," Raiten says. "I tell them that diet is the mix of foods that gets into their body, and healthy nutrition is the end result of eating good food in a healthy diet."

Try to help children see healthful eating as a natural and fun part of every day. "My own kids help me



cook," Raiten adds, "and we sit down and eat our meals together every night."

Another way to encourage healthy eating is to sample a variety of fruits and vegetables from the grocery store or local farmers market. Chances are that even "expensive" produce is still cheaper than most processed foods on supermarket and convenience store shelves.

Teach your kids how to be savvy consumers. Enlist them as food detectives at the grocery store. Set some standards for healthy foods and show them how to read Nutrition

Facts labels, which list the nutrition content of pre-packaged foods. Then let them choose a few items that make the grade. If you're not sure what to look for on labels, see www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/foodlab.html.

Making foods totally forbidden is likely to backfire, Raiten says, "so keep the guilt out of it." Better to chat regularly with your child about good eating habits, he says, and praise him or her for making smart choices in the grocery, at school or in a restaurant.

If kids are eating well outside of school, you may wonder if their diet at school really matters. The answer is a resounding "yes." Research has shown that appropriate levels of fat, sugar, vitamins and minerals like iron contribute to development, learning and general behavior.

Packing a healthy school lunch can

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Wise Choices Good Health to Go

Pack a healthy lunch kids want to eat:

- Shrink the portion size and up the variety.
- Read the Nutrition Facts label before you pack it. Look out for junk food disguised by clever packaging to be healthful.
- Splash a few drops of lemon juice on sliced fruit to keep it fresh and appetizing.
- Make a sandwich with turkey or other lean filling on multigrain bread. Try using mustard or a low-fat mayonnaise instead of the high-fat variety.
- Freeze juice pouches and boxes so they'll stay cold.
- Re-use containers. It's greener and helps keep food bruise-free.
- Pack fun with a cool sticker, note or joke.

sticks, popcorn, snap peas, fresh strawberries or pudding.

If your children buy lunch at school, make sure to talk to them about how to choose healthier food options, and why it's so important.

Parents need to teach children not only what to eat, but how much. People tend to blame restaurants' super-sized meals for Americans' expanding waistlines, but portion distortion has become a part of our everyday lives. In a 2006 study, researchers randomly gave participants a small or large bowl and a small or large serving spoon, and everyone served themselves ice cream. Those given a bigger bowl and spoon ate the most—a whopping 57% more than people with small ones.

The lesson is to pay attention to serving size. Use smaller dishes and containers for treats, and bigger ones for fruits and veggies.

Healthy food and an appreciation for eating smart is only half of the health equation, however. In a recent study funded by NIH (see this month's Health Capsule), more than 90% of grade-school children met the recommended level of 60 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day. That's the good news. By age 15, however, far fewer boys and girls were cycling, swimming or just plain running around. Only 31% met the recommended level on weekdays, while 17% met the recommended level on weekends.

Upping physical activity is a key goal of the NIH-sponsored health awareness campaign We Can! (Ways



Web Links

For links to more information about healthy eating and physical activity, see this story online:

- <http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2008/September/feature1.htm>

to Enhance Children's Activity and Nutrition!). This science-based national education program provides useful resources for teachers, parents and community program planners. Making healthy food choices, increasing physical activity and cutting screen time are WeCan!'s main goals.

We Can! has lots of helpful tips for fitting more physical activity into the family's daily routine. It also has tools to help parents pick healthier foods and drinks and plan healthier meals for the family. For kids, it provides an easy way to think about food choices. GO foods are great anytime; SLOW foods are all right to have sometimes or less often; and WHOA foods should be eaten only once in a while or on special occasions. Visit <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov> or call toll-free, 1-866-35-WECAN, to learn more.

In today's media-soaked society, kids and teens—even preschoolers—are exposed to a flood of messages that counter home- and school-based teaching about nutrition and health. Media-Smart Youth is an NIH-sponsored after-school program for young people from 11 to 13 years old. It challenges young people to analyze and recognize ways the media tries to get their attention, and to evaluate these media messages for accuracy and for consistency with their ideas about being healthy. Visit www.nichd.nih.gov/msy to learn more.

Remember, good eating habits start at home. Children are much more likely to do what you do, not what you say. So eat smart and teach your kids how to make good choices themselves. ■

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be a family activity. Involving kids in the decision process can help them learn how to make good choices and also feel more enthusiastic about their lunch options. Most are more likely to eat meals they help prepare. Since weekday mornings can be a crazy time crunch, pack lunches the night before. Have your child choose a few healthy items, such as pretzel

NIH News in Health (ISSN 1556-3898)

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Back to School with Diabetes

Plan Ahead for a Smooth Start to School

Notebooks, erasers, pencil sets and backpacks are on most kids' back-to-school lists. But if your child has **diabetes**, you should add a few extra tasks to the list. At the top, put "good communication," with your child and with the school. Planning ahead, and getting help from others, will help pave the way for a successful year.

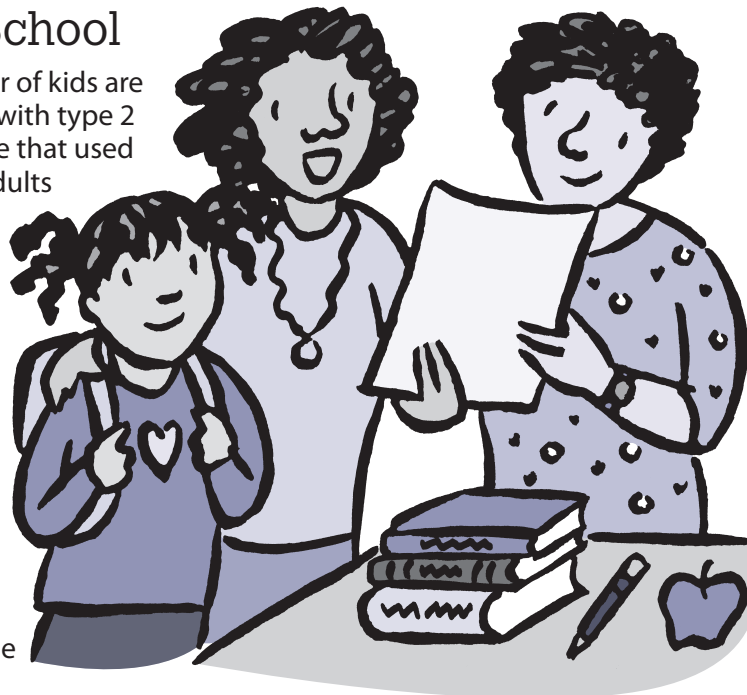
Diabetes is a serious and lifelong condition, and it's a growing problem among children and teens. About 186,000 Americans under age 20 have diabetes. Most have type 1 diabetes, which usually first appears during childhood. But in recent years

a growing number of kids are being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, a disease that used to strike mostly adults over age 45. Excess weight and inactivity put children and teens at risk for type 2 diabetes.

When you have diabetes, you have too much **glucose** in your blood. Over time, this excess glucose can damage both large and small blood vessels, leading to heart disease, stroke, nerve damage, blindness and kidney disease. That's why people with diabetes must regularly check their blood glucose. They need to keep their level from dropping by using strategies like snacking. When their glucose is too high, **insulin** can help to bring it down. Essentially, they have to manage their blood glucose level 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

This intensive management can be daunting to kids during school. They may wonder: What happens if I feel light-headed, or need a snack in the middle of class? Will I be OK in gym class? When should I go to the nurse?

These are all issues that you should discuss ahead of time with school staff and with your child. Work with your child's health care team to develop a written diabetes management plan that outlines your child's specific medical needs. Make sure



key staff members, like your child's teacher, have a copy of the plan.

Heading back to school with diabetes can be a challenge. But by eating regular meals, making healthy food choices, staying active and taking medications, kids with diabetes can do all the things their friends do, and then some. With planning and good communication, you can help your child have a healthy and happy school year. ■



Wise Choices School Checklist for Diabetes

- **Tell the school principal that your child has diabetes.** Set up a meeting with the school's health team.
- **Develop a diabetes management plan** with your child's health care team. Give a signed copy of the plan to the school, and discuss how the plan will be put into action.
- **Give the school supplies for managing your child's diabetes,** including glucose-monitoring equipment, snacks, insulin and other medications.
- **Inform school staff of any changes** to your child's health status or emergency contact information.
- **Help your child take control.** Discuss the diabetes management plan with your child. Encourage healthy food choices and physical activity.
- **Make sure your child wears a medical alert ID** and carries a fast-acting source of glucose, like juice or glucose pills, as prescribed by your physician.



Definitions

Diabetes

A disease in which blood glucose levels are too high. In time, it can lead to serious problems including heart disease, blindness and kidney failure.

Glucose

A type of sugar used by the body for energy. When the glucose level in the blood gets too high, it can damage tissues and organs.

Insulin

A hormone needed to convert sugar, starches and other food into energy. Diabetes develops when the body can't produce or properly use insulin.



Web Links

For links to more information about diabetes in youth, see this story online:

- <http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2008/September/feature2.htm>



Health Capsules

For links to more information about these topics, visit this page online:
<http://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2008/September/capsules.htm>

Children's Physical Activity Drops

Physical activity levels dropped sharply in a large group of American children between ages 9 and 15, according to a new study. By the age of 15, most failed to reach the daily recommended activity level.

A lack of physical activity in childhood raises the risk for obesity and the many health problems it can contribute to later in life, including heart disease and diabetes. The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that children and teens

get at least 60 minutes of physical activity on most, if not all, days.

To see whether children are meeting these recommendations, an NIH-funded team recorded the activity of more than 800 9-year-olds for about a week. The kids' activity levels were measured again at 11, 12 and 15.

At ages 9 and 11, more than 90% of the children met the recommended level of activity. By age 15, however, only 31% met the recommended level on weekdays, and only 17% met

it on weekends.

This research highlights the need for action by families,

communities, schools, health care systems and governments to help encourage physical activity as children get older.

"Whenever possible, parents could encourage family walks with their children," said study leader Dr. Philip Nader at the University of California at San Diego. "Even walking for as few as 15 minutes a day would provide health benefits. On weekends, family outings could be centered on longer walks or biking." ■

For more health information from NIH, visit



<http://health.nih.gov>



Featured Web Site NIDA Goes Back to School

www.backtoschool.drugabuse.gov

This site provides free science-based publications and teaching materials for grades K-12 about the consequences of drug abuse on the brain and the body. The resources are designed for children, teens and the adults who influence them, including teachers, curriculum developers, science department heads, school nurses, counselors, gym teachers and others.

NIDA goes back to school
Science-based drug abuse education

Click here to order FREE Spanish resources!

A Service of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

The NIDA Goes Back to School campaign is your source for FREE information about the latest science-based drug abuse publications and teaching materials.

Students: do you need to know the science behind drug abuse? Check out this site and also visit our special teen site: teens.drugabuse.gov

Teachers: check out specialized [curricula](#) and other teaching aids listed on these pages.

Parents: we provide the latest research findings on drug abuse and addiction. The fact sheets and [booklets](#) appearing here will give you the data based on science.

In addition, we recently adapted several of our science education publications for Spanish-speaking audiences. These FREE Spanish-language materials are now available on our site.

Diabetes and a Healthy Pregnancy

Pregnancy is a time of great excitement and anticipation. It also can be a time of anxiety, especially for women with diabetes. A new, easy-to-read booklet has information to help women with diabetes have safe, healthy pregnancies.

If you have diabetes and are pregnant, your pregnancy is automatically considered high risk. That doesn't mean you'll have problems, but it does mean you need to pay special attention to your health. Millions of high-risk pregnancies produce perfectly healthy babies without the mom's health being affected.

Pregnancy causes a number of changes in your body, so even if you've had diabetes for years, you may need to make changes in your meal plan, physical activity routine

and medications. In addition, your needs might change as you get closer to your delivery date.

The booklet *For Women with Diabetes: Your Guide to Pregnancy* includes information about checking and controlling blood sugar levels, maintaining a healthy diet, staying physically active and taking tests and diabetes medications during pregnancy. It stresses the importance of planning and getting blood glucose levels under control before pregnancy.

The new booklet is available online at www.diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/pregnancy. A Spanish-language version will be available soon. To order a free print copy, go to www.catalog.niddk.nih.gov, call 1-800-860-8747 or write to NDIC at 1 Information Way, Bethesda MD 20892-3560. ■

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