

Eat right and be bright- Healthy eating for school age students!

The school years are the perfect time for children to learn about healthy food, bodies and activity. A large body of research suggests that healthy nutrition and a good night's sleep profoundly improves children's cognitive function and engagement throughout the school day.

It is important to encourage breakfast. A good night's sleep followed by food in the morning helps your child to stay active and concentrate at school. It also means your child is less likely to be too hungry during the morning and it can help with performance at school. Be a role model and let your child see you eat breakfast too. A bowl of cereal with milk and fresh fruit is a great starter for the whole family.

The food your child has at lunch must also be a healthy choice. A packed lunch from home is a great way for your child to learn about healthy food and to help with preparation.

Lunch box suggestions include:

- Sandwiches or pita bread with cheese, lean meat, hummus and salad
- Cheese slices, crackers with spread, and fresh or dried fruits
- Washed and cut up raw vegetables or fresh fruits
- Water bottle

Highly processed, sugary, fatty and salty foods should only make up a very small part of your child's diet. Foods to limit in everyday school lunches include:

- Processed meats such as salami, ham and pressed chicken
- Chips, sweet biscuits, and muesli bars and breakfast bars
- Fruit bars and fruit straps
- Cordials, juices and soft drinks.

For schoolchildren, family mealtimes are a chance to share and talk about the day's activities and events. The evening meal together is an important time to do this.

Family mealtime suggestions include:

- Allow talk and sharing of daytime activities.
- Avoid the distractions of electronic devices
- Let your child decide when they are full – don't argue about food.
- Allow children to help with preparing meals and shopping.
- Teach some simple nutrition facts such as 'milk keeps your bones strong'.

Finally, a healthy body also requires a healthy sleep pattern in order to function properly. The benefits of good sleep are endless and contributes significantly to improved school results. Unfortunately, studies have indicated that up to 7 out of 10 children don't get enough sleep, which can lead to temper tantrums, concentration and behavioural problems, and much more. As a general guide, your child's sleeping needs naturally decrease by about 15 minutes each year. Toddlers and pre-schoolers need around 12-14 hours per day, primary school-aged children should get 10-12 hours and teens will usually want 9 hours. (Grown-ups do best with about 8 hours). Please do your best to ensure your children, our students meet these requirements.



Better Health VIC 2018, accessed 12 March 2018,
<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/>