



Schools vs Cancer Nutrition Guide

Elementary School



SCHOOLS vs CANCER



cancer.org/schools | 1.800.227.2345



Making the case for good nutrition

From the moment kids are born, we want what is best for them – especially good health. Yet, today nearly one in five students (ages 6-19) is obese.¹ Obesity rates have more than tripled since the 1970s and, unfortunately, there are many things presently working against our children’s health. These factors contribute to poor diets and increasing overweight and obesity rates among the youth²:

- Families are eating out more often than they used to. These meals tend to be less nutritious and higher in calories than meals prepared at home.
 - Restaurant and fast-food portion sizes have dramatically increased, and so has the number of calories we consume with these meals.
- There is extensive food advertising and marketing of low-nutrient, high-calorie foods and beverages to kids on TV, the internet, food packages, and even in schools.

The benefits of maintaining a healthy diet

1 Improved quality of life

Inadequate intake of key food groups deprives children of many things. Among them are the necessary nutrients for optimal growth and immune function. Chronically undernourished children have less ability to resist infection and are more prone to other health complications in the future – including the following:

- Asthma
- High blood pressure
- Depression
- Joint problems
- High cholesterol
- Sleep apnea

2 Fewer academic challenges

Emerging evidence suggests an association between being overweight and lower academic achievement. It could be that this is related to absenteeism, which has been clearly and directly linked to poorer academic performance. Also, overweight students may face physical, psychological, and/or social problems that are directly related to their weight and can lead to academic problems. Among children with poor nutrition, the following effects have been noted:

- Hyperactivity
- Absenteeism
- Tardiness
- Suspension
- Cognitive function
- Retention
- Social conflict
- Physical impact
- Psychological challenges

¹Fryar CD, Carroll MD, Ogden CL. Prevalence of overweight and obesity among children and adolescents: United States, 1963-1965 through 2011-2012. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Health Statistics, 2014.

²United States. CDC. Healthy Schools. Childhood Obesity Facts. (2017) <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/obesity/facts.htm>





Promoting a nutritious lifestyle is essential to children’s wellbeing – both now and in the future. Having a healthy diet is important for kids to get the nutrients they need to be healthy and grow strong, and to set the stage for a lifetime of good health. We have created a snapshot for you. A healthy eating routine can help you achieve each of the following:



SNAPSHOT

Benefits of a healthy lifestyle:

- ✓ Lower obesity rates
- ✓ Improved test scores
- ✓ Lower risks for cancer
- ✓ Improved concentration
- ✓ Better classroom behavior
- ✓ Decreased risk for asthma, sleep apnea, and bone and joint problems

What’s contributing to obesity trends?

The current burden of obesity in America is a cause for alarm, and we all need to work together to support our youth in living healthy, active lifestyles. Let’s take a closer look at some of the things that are contributing to this widespread problem.

3 Diets

- In 2010, the overall top five sources of energy for children were grain desserts (cakes, cookies, donuts, pies, crisps, cobblers and granola bars), pizza, soda, yeast breads, and chicken dishes.

- Empty calories from added sugars and solid fats make up about 40% of the daily calorie intake for children and teens ages two to 18 years.
 - About half of these empty calories come from six sources³:
 - Soda & fruit drinks
 - Pizza
 - Dairy desserts
 - Grain desserts
 - Whole milk
- Of the more than \$200 billion spent collectively by children and youth each year, the top four leading items selected by children ages eight to 12 years (without parental permission) are high-calorie and low-nutrient foods and beverages.³
- Food and beverages – particularly candy, carbonated soft drinks, and salty snacks or chips – were ranked among the leading items that teens ages 13 to 17 years old purchase with their own money.⁴

4 Advertising and marketing

The early years of a child’s life is a good time to learn to make healthy decisions about what they consume. Because commercial advertising is used to influence their decisions, it is important to equip young people to discern messaging and make responsible decisions. Check out these facts:

- Food advertisements affect children’s preferences, purchasing behaviors, and eating habits for different food and beverage categories, as well as for different product brands⁴

³United States. CDC. Nutrition and Health of Young People; <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/nutrition/facts.htm>

⁴Overview of the IOM Report on Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity?





- Food and beverage advertising on television influences children ages two to 11 years to prefer and purchase high-calorie and low-nutrient food and beverages.⁴
- Based on actual dollars spent in 2009, child- and teen-directed advertising is most often done to market fast-food restaurants, carbonated beverages, breakfast cereal, and snack foods.⁵

Remember that elementary school age is a good time for students to learn to start making healthy decisions about what they consume.

How teachers can help

While healthy eating begins at home, the food and beverages available at school can also have a big impact on a child's health. It is also important to help children learn to process and challenge information.

Working together, we can encourage kids and families to eat better and make changes at school, at home, and in our communities. Here's how:

1 Know the facts

Schools can help kids eat healthy by following the American Cancer Society's guidelines for nutrition:

- Eat a healthy diet, with an emphasis on plant sources.
- Choose foods and drinks in proper serving measures.
- Limit intake of processed and red meats.

- Eat at least 2 1/2 cups of a variety of vegetables and fruits every day.
- Choose whole grains over processed (refined) grains.

Choosing foods based on these guidelines will help both children and adults stay at a healthy weight, which is an important factor for improving overall health and reducing cancer risk.

2 Encourage a healthy lifestyle

Supplemental materials can be found as part of this packet or on our website. [cancer.org/schools](https://www.cancer.org/schools)

The objective(s) of the classroom activity sheets include:

- Educating students, teachers, and parents regarding the need for physical activity among kids.
- Empowering students to become agents of change in their homes and within their communities – as they plan and execute physical activity efforts.
- Helping students discover the ways in which their social environments impact their perception of health.

In addition to the material mentioned above, we have also included useful notes on ways you can adopt and encourage healthy habits at your Schools vs Cancer events. Also, we are sharing links to sites where you can find more inspiration for supporting this journey to wellness.

⁴Overview of the IOM Report on Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity?
⁵FTC, A Review of Food Marketing to Children and Adolescents. (Dec 2012)





Classroom activities

- Have students create healthy eating posters/ decorations for cafeteria.
- Launch an “Eating the Rainbow” challenge – have students keep track of the fruits and vegetables they eat each day. Discuss what they ate. Was it fresh? Frozen? Canned? Did they like it? Was it easy or hard to eat more fruits and vegetables? Did they encourage their family to eat more? Once they have eaten enough fruits and/or vegetables to make up each color in the rainbow, they can pin their rainbow to a classroom bulletin.
- Develop “Healthy Celebration” standards for the classroom. Have students brainstorm fun, healthy food ideas (fruit for birthdays, water instead of sodas/juice, etc.), and share ideas with parents.

– HEALTHY SCHOOL CELEBRATIONS

actionforhealthykids.org/storage/documents/parent-toolkit/partner-resource-pdfs/healthypartyguide-cando.pdf

– 20 HEALTHY CLASSROOM PARTY SNACKS

michigan.gov/documents/mdch/20_healthy_classroom_party_snacks_394380_7.pdf

– HEALTHY & ACTIVE CLASSROOM PARTIES

actionforhealthykids.org/tools-for-schools/1249-healthy-and-active-classroom-parties

- Invite a local farmer to talk to the class about nutrition and farming. Have students research the availability of farmers markets in their neighborhood. Consider starting a school garden, and involve the PTO.

– 7 STEPS TO CREATING A SCHOOL GARDEN

farmtoschool.org/resources-main/7-steps-to-creating-a-school-garden

– SCHOOL GARDEN CHECKLIST

letsmove.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/school-garden-checklist

– USING SCHOOL GARDENS TO GROW HEALTHY HABITS

fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/FactSheet_School_Gardens.pdf

- Talk about portion sizes (reading labels, measuring standard serving sizes, etc.). Have students measure what they think is a standard serving of popular foods (cereal, pasta, etc) and compare to standard serving sizes. Discuss how they think this impacts how much they eat and their overall health.

– SERVING SIZE VS. PORTION SIZE

eatright.org/resource/food/nutrition/nutrition-facts-and-food-labels/serving-size-vs-portion-size-is-there-a-difference

- Ask a local grocery store to conduct a taste test of healthy foods and provide coupons for parents, along with recipe cards.
- Create a video in which students express their favorite healthy nutrition habit. Each student could announce, “I choose _____ instead of _____” (e.g., steamed broccoli instead of canned veggies). Allow students to share a copy of the video on their social media pages.
- Research the amount of sugar in sugar-sweetened beverages (sodas, sports drinks, fruit drinks). Have students measure how many teaspoons of sugar are in one bottle/can. Ask them how many of these drinks they drink each week, and have them calculate how much sugar they are drinking in a week. Discuss healthier alternatives. Discuss how they can encourage their family to drink fewer sugar-sweetened beverages, as well.

– RETHINK YOUR DRINK

actionforhealthykids.org/tools-for-schools/find-challenges/cafeteria-challenges/1274-rethink-your-drink

– 10 TIPS FOR BEING ACTIVE EVERY DAY

choosemyplate-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/audiences/Tipsheet2_BeAFitKid.pdf



Celebrating nutrition at your Schools vs Cancer event

The American Cancer Society Schools vs Cancer event is a great time to promote healthy living! Participants are walking. They're running. They're eating. They're drinking. Take the time to plan some fun events and make announcements that encourage all your Schools vs Cancer participants to eat their way to better health!

Activities:

- Hold a nutrition scavenger hunt. Have kids look for people eating healthy foods, such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Play nutrition bingo or Jeopardy.
- Develop a nutrition “pit stop” where you can share fresh fruits, vegetables, and 100% juices with Schools vs Cancers participants.
- Ask local restaurants or well-known chefs to come and do a food demonstration and/or have a taste-testing.
- Announce special nutrition-themed laps throughout the event. Invite the following people to walk a lap:
 - Anyone who is eating a fruit or vegetable right now
 - Anyone who usually eats at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day
 - Anyone who has made positive changes in their eating habits

- Anyone who has asked for healthier foods at their workplace, school, place of worship, or at a restaurant
- Anyone who ate a healthy breakfast that day
- Anyone who has eaten a fruit or vegetable for a snack that day
- Make general announcements throughout the event, such as:
 - Eat your way to good health!
 - Eating well and being active can help you stay well and reduce your risk of cancer and heart disease.
 - Eating well and being active help you look good and feel good!
- Ask participants to remember these guidelines:
 - Watch your weight.
 - Get regular physical activity.
 - Eat a healthy diet.
- Quiz your participants: What’s the best thing to do to stay well and reduce your risk of cancer? Don’t smoke. The next best thing? Eat better and be active!
 - Eat more fruits and vegetables – at least 2 1/2 cups every day!
 - Fruits and vegetables with the most color are the most nutritious!
 - Fight cancer by eating more fruits and vegetables!





Help your child eat properly

We all want to do everything we can to make sure our kids get a good start on healthy eating habits for life. Good nutrition is important to help kids grow well and be healthy, and it can even help them do better at school.

It's important to develop healthy habits early – the habits we develop as children tend to stay with us through adulthood. And healthy eating habits throughout life can help our kids stay well and reduce their risk of developing chronic diseases – such as cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes – in the future. Follow these tips to help get (and keep) your kids on the path to lifelong healthy eating:

Follow the leader. First and foremost, be a good role model for healthy eating. Parents who eat well tend to have children who eat well. Be sure your kids see you eating a wide variety of healthy foods, including fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

Taste the rainbow. Offer your kids a variety of different foods each day, and don't give up if they turn up their nose the first time around. It may take kids multiple times of trying something new for them to figure out they like it! Kids may find it exciting if you encourage them to select new fruits and veggies on each trip to the market; ask them to target a specific color each time.

Keep it interesting. Prepare foods in different ways. While your kids might not like cooked spinach, fresh spinach might be OK. Maybe they don't like the texture of baked sweet potatoes, but crispy baked sweet potato fries may have them asking for more.

Keep them within reach. Keep healthy snacks available and in easy-to-reach places. Think baby carrots in the refrigerator, a bowl of apples on the counter, or frozen 100% juice bars in the freezer.

Bring out the inner chef. Have your kids help plan and prepare meals and shop for food. Let them pick a new recipe to try. Have them pick a new and different fruit or vegetable to eat each week. Get their help with mixing, pouring, and measuring.

Go bananas! Look for ways to add more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains to their day. Slice a banana on top of their cereal, or whip up a smoothie for breakfast. Chop up peppers in their quesadillas. Make sandwiches with whole-wheat bread.

Have a seat. As much as possible, sit down to eat as a family. With crazy schedules and family members coming and going, this can be hard to do, but it will pay off many times over. Not only do meals eaten at home tend to be healthier than those eaten out, but family mealtime is a great time to catch up with each other and stay connected, too.

