

Just Try it

Healthy Eating During Summer

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As much as I look forward to a break from the structured schedule of school days, I've learned over the years that it takes a couple of weeks to transition into summer. We are not only shifting from early wake-ups and busy afternoons, but also adjusting to the different food and eating routines of summer. Sometimes, children's eating habits during summer can feel like a free-for-all, but the good news is there are many strategies that can keep healthy eating a priority while enjoying the downtime of summer.

Fruits and vegetables are abundant, making it an opportune time to show your enthusiasm for these healthy gems and introduce new foods to kids. For example, parents can take kids to one of the many farmers markets in our area and make it a goal to find one new item to taste or bring home to prepare.

Another option is to have a scavenger hunt at the market by challenging your child to find a certain fruit or vegetable on their own (assuming he or she is old enough to be left alone for a short time). By making it a game and engaging kids in the process, they are more likely to try new foods. Another great way to engage kids is an outing to a u-pick farm to harvest your own fruit at peak season. This is a fun way to educate your child about where food comes from. Kids love this hands-on activity – picking cherries, berries, peaches or any of the many fruits that are available nearby. When fruit is picked at peak season, it is especially sweet and tasty, creating a positive association.

Berry-Banana Smoothie

- 1 cup milk
- 6 oz. blueberry or strawberry yogurt
- 1 frozen ripe banana, partially thawed
- 1 cup frozen blueberries or strawberries
- ◆ Place frozen banana in microwave on high for about 30 seconds to partially thaw.
- ◆ Place ingredients into the blender in the order listed.
- ◆ Blend until smooth, stirring as needed, then serve.
- ◆ Makes 2 large or 4 small servings.

I like using frozen fruit instead of ice to thicken the smoothie, and instead of throwing away those over ripe bananas, this is a great way to sweeten the smoothie naturally and reduce food waste. Enjoy!

Parents can also encourage kids by planting a garden. Children can be involved in each step of the process: preparing the soil, planting and watering the plants, picking the fruit or vegetable and helping prepare it. Kids take ownership of this process and love to see the fruits of their labor, literally.

I also recommend parents maintain structure by offering meals and snacks at a predictable time most days. When meals and snacks are a free-for-all, the nutritional quality of a diet diminishes because there is more snacking (chips, crackers, popsicles) and less whole foods eaten (cereal, milk, sandwiches, fruits, vegetables). A great way to ensure kids are getting the nutrition their bodies need is to offer two food groups at snack time and at least three food groups at meals. I also

recommend parents provide at least three servings of dairy and five servings of fruits and vegetables daily.

For example, an apple with peanut butter or string cheese and strawberries provide two food groups, helping to ensure the snack is nutrient-rich and can provide nutrients that may have been missed at breakfast or lunch. When at home, parents can turn snack time into an activity by having kids help prepare the snack. Fruit kabobs, healthy trail mixes, fruit-yogurt parfaits, smoothies and English muffin pizzas are all great options for turning snack time into activity time. Try making this nutrient-rich snack with your child.

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