

# Parent Communications— Fruits and Vegetables

Newsletter article: Use this article in your school's publications. Be sure to include the credit "Provided by Harvard Prevention Research Center on Nutrition and Physical Activity."

## **An Apple a Day? Here's How.**

Everyone knows the old saying, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." Even so, many Americans still have trouble including enough fruits and vegetables in their diets. Fruits and vegetables provide vitamins, minerals, and fiber essential for proper growth and development in children. For adults, a diet abundant in fruits and vegetables protects against heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and possibly some cancers. And everyone can benefit from the fiber and water in fruits and vegetables that fill you up and keep your digestive track working well.

How can you boost the amount of fruit and vegetables in your family's diet? Make the foods more available and accessible, and model healthy habits yourself. If all else fails, try sneaking fruits and vegetables into dishes you already prepare! The following are some tips for success:

- ▶ **Start early.** Introduce fruits and vegetables to children when they're young, and continue serving fruits and vegetables often.
- ▶ **Be prepared.** Always have a supply of cut, prepared fruits and vegetables in the refrigerator for easy snacking, and store them in clear containers at eye level.
- ▶ **Pack 'em up.** Include washed, single servings of fruits or vegetables in your child's packed school lunches every day.
- ▶ **Choose 100% juice.** A small serving (4 ounces, or 125 milliliters) of 100% juice is a handy fruit serving. But remember to limit 100% fruit juice consumption to no more than 8 ounces (250 milliliters) per day. Juice contains vitamins and minerals, but it naturally contains a large amount of fruit sugar (fructose) and it lacks the fiber found in fresh whole fruit.
- ▶ **Trade up.** Substitute fruit or a salad for a side of fries when eating out.
- ▶ **Sneak 'em in.** Add extra vegetables to foods you prepare from scratch or to prepared foods.

Remember, you are the person who decides what goes on the table and into the lunch boxes. Set a good example by eating and serving fruits and vegetables every day. This is so important in an age of fast food and intense food advertising aimed at children. For more information and great recipe and snack ideas, check out [www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov](http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov).

From L.W.Y. Cheung, H. Dart, S. Kalin, and S.L. Gortmaker, 2007, *Eat Well & Keep Moving*, 2nd ed. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics). Adapted, by permission, from *Food & Fun After School Parent Communications*. ©2006 President and Fellows of Harvard College.

(continued)

Optional sidebar: If you like, you may include the following:

### **Fruits and Vegetables Make Easy Snacks!**

- ▶ Baby carrots and ranch dressing
- ▶ Orange wedges
- ▶ Raisins or other dried fruits
- ▶ Cucumbers and cheese
- ▶ Applesauce

Optional e-mail message: Use this sample message to communicate with parents by e-mail (if available).

### **Subject Line: Healthy Habits Power Tips— Eat a Rainbow!**

Dear (insert school name and grade) Parents,

This week your child will explore a rainbow of fruits and vegetables in the (insert school name and grade) *Eat Well & Keep Moving* program. The key messages will be the following:

- ▶ Fruits and vegetables come in different colors, so try them all!
- ▶ Each colored fruit or vegetable gives your body different nutrients to grow healthy and strong.
- ▶ Go for 5 or more! Eat 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day.

Our goal is to help children enjoy new fruits and vegetables through trying new foods in the cafeteria and through other fun food-related activities.

You can support this goal by reinforcing the key messages at home and by following these Healthy Habits Power Tips:

- ▶ Be a good role model by serving and eating a variety of fruits and vegetables in different colors.
- ▶ Focus on deep-green, orange, and red choices—they pack in the most nutrients.
- ▶ Go for 5 or more servings each day by offering a fruit or vegetable at every meal and snack.
- ▶ Ask your children which fruit and vegetable snacks served at school they like the most. Try new variations of these foods at home.

Want to learn more? For information on the health benefits of fruits and vegetables, go to [www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/fruits.html](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/fruits.html).

Also visit [www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org](http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org) for fruit and vegetable recipes, activities for kids, and health information.

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