

# A Healthy Start in School



From the first bell to the last, opportunities abound for putting fitness and nutrition into the school day. And that's a good thing, because healthy children are ready-to-learn children!

To get the best results, the whole team should pitch in, from administrators and teachers to librarians, cafeteria workers, and janitors. Try these ideas for the classroom, cafeteria, gym, and playground.

## Walk time

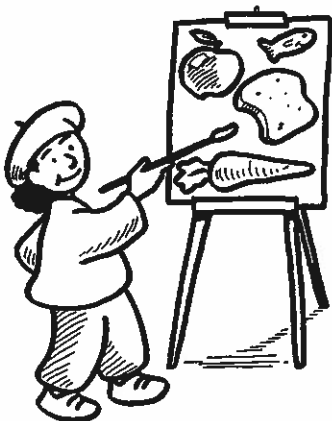
Need an easy way to get children moving? Start a daily walk time. Before lunch, have classes walk briskly around the perimeter of the school grounds. Jazz things up by playing music, if possible. On inclement weather days, bring the walk indoors, and have children snake quietly through the school hallways.

Encourage your school community to pitch in with leading the walks. Everyone could join in the fun, from the principal to classroom teachers, specialty teachers, cafeteria staff, building services staff, and parent volunteers.

*Idea:* Ask your PTA to sponsor pedometers for the children—and staff—in your school. These step-counting devices now come in kid-friendly colors and shapes, and they can be inexpensive when purchased in bulk. A healthy goal is 10,000 steps a day.

## Advertise good habits

Turn art projects into healthy projects by having students create posters advertising physical activity and good nutrition. Then, hang their projects in the cafeteria and gym so kids will get the message!



Children could paint a picture of their classmates eating healthy foods or enjoying outdoor activities, such as riding a bike or playing volleyball. They could draw a "rainbow" of fruits and vegetables, or illustrate various fun fitness activities.

*Idea:* Ask a parent volunteer to take digital pictures of the artwork, and post them on your school Web site.

## Dear diary

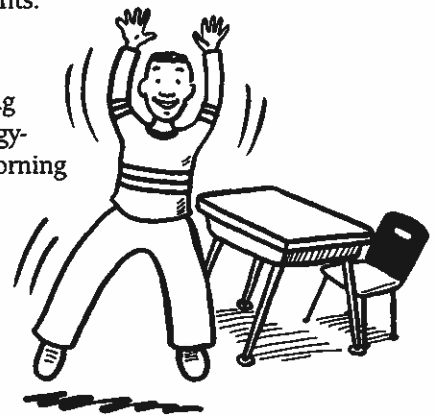
Encourage students to eat a balanced diet by asking them to keep track of what they eat for a week. Have them make their own food diary: fold three sheets of paper in half horizontally, staple together at the fold, decorate the cover, and label each page for a day of the week. Children can then use a different color crayon to record foods they eat from each group. For example, grains could be written in blue, vegetables in green, and fruits in yellow. Pre-writers could draw pictures instead of writing the words.

*Idea:* Present nonfood rewards, such as sports-themed pencils, erasers, or stickers, to kids who each week turn in diaries signed by their parents.

## Fitness breaks

Jump-start every morning with a few minutes of energy-boosting exercise. Begin morning announcements by having students get out of their seats and move around. For example, you might lead them in doing 10 jumping jacks, marching around the classroom three times, or touching their toes five times. Or play upbeat music for two minutes of freestyle dancing. To keep motivation high, vary the activities from day to day. Encourage teachers to model healthy behavior by participating in the exercise yourself.

*Idea:* Extend the fitness breaks throughout the day. For example, when switching gears from language arts to math or getting ready for music class, have children do 5 to 10 minutes of physical activity.



continued



**Road to health**

Give kids the chance to brag about their fitness accomplishments. Keep a box of sneaker or foot shapes, die-cut out of construction paper, in the school office.

When children exercise at home, let them take a shape and write down their name, what they did, and for how long. *Example:* "I walked around the neighborhood for 20 minutes last night with my family."

Then, put your students' efforts on display. Using black bulletin-board paper, create a giant "Road to Better Health" along your school walls. Let students put their "feet" end-to-end along the road. As more students participate, the road will get longer and longer!

*Idea:* Teachers and staff—post your fitness "feats," too. Your healthy behavior will inspire children to do even more.

**Nutrition lessons**

Teachers and cafeteria staff can work together to tie healthy eating to the curriculum. Cafeteria workers could supply food samples to teachers for lesson plans. Or the cafeteria manager or food service director might even present a lesson to a class.

Start by encouraging teachers to look for ways to relate nutrition to units of study. For example, when kindergartners are studying the letter M, chunks of melon or mango could be set out to make a giant M. Maybe each student could bring in a snack that begins with M, and kids could tell why their snack is good for them.



Are your second-graders studying graphs in math? Challenge them to figure out which color apple the students like best. Teachers could draw a large, blank graph on butcher paper and set out three bowls of apple slices (red, yellow, and green). Then, students could sample the pieces and color their favorite apples on the graph.

*Idea:* Suggest that the food service staff offer samples of these foods during lunch.

**Great wall of food**

Help students learn about healthy food choices with a colorful, student-made collage. Start by hanging a giant sheet of poster paper along one wall of the cafeteria, and label sections for each food group (grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy, and meat and beans). Then, ask youngsters to clip pictures of healthy foods from magazines, newspapers, and food packages, and glue them in the correct place.

*Idea:* Have children make personal healthy-food collages. In a notebook, they could label pages for each food group, and glue in pictures of their favorite good-for-you items.

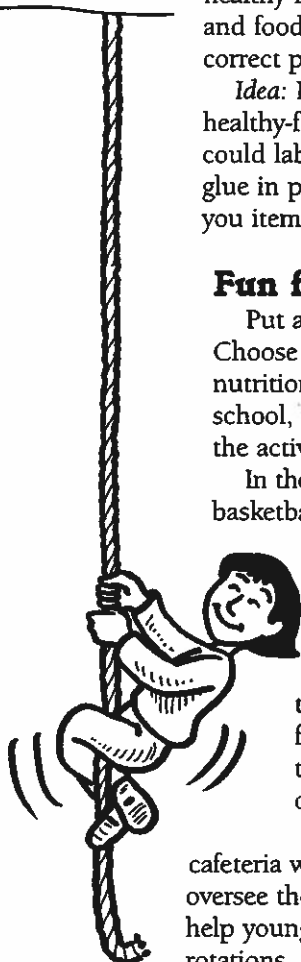
**Fun fair**

Put a twist on the traditional field day. Choose a day to set up a fun fair with nutrition and fitness stations around the school, and have students rotate through the activities.

In the gym, try a rope-climbing challenge, basketball shoot-out, and beanbag toss.

Outside, have children maneuver a soccer ball around an obstacle course, run relay and sack races, and follow an aerobics routine. In the cafeteria, set up water breaks, fruit and vegetable tastings, and a table where kids can assemble their own healthy recipes.

*Idea:* Enlist the help of teachers, cafeteria workers, and parent volunteers to oversee the stations. Also, older kids could help younger students through some of the rotations.



**Nutrition Nuggets**