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Fully ready for back-to-school time? Here's how to pack your child a heart-healthy lunch

American Heart Association offers tips for parents as kids head back to school

By the American Heart Association

With back-to-school season upon us, parents are preparing for their children's return to school. The American Heart Association has some tips to help parents plan school lunches, since they play an essential role in a student's wellbeing and success in the year ahead.

Cardiovascular disease is a major cause of illness and premature death in men and women around the world, and mounting evidence reveals the importance of primary prevention of heart disease beginning in childhood. The American Heart Association recommends that children eat a wide variety of foods while consuming enough calories to support their growth and development.

Kids and their families should eat foods low in saturated fat, cholesterol and total fat; choose a wide range of foods to get enough carbohydrates, protein and other nutrients; and consume enough calories to maintain a healthy weight for their height, build and activity level.

A disturbing trend observed around the country is the increase of overweight and obese children. The trend is particularly alarming because obesity increases risk for other major cardiovascular disease risk factors like hypertension, cholesterol disorders and type-2 diabetes, which are rising in children and adolescents.

Teaching children healthy eating habits now may increase their chances of living a healthy life, helping to reduce their chances of developing cardiovascular disease later in life.

Here are some tips to think about when preparing your children's food:

Choose foods naturally low in saturated fat and cholesterol, like fruits and vegetables. Most are naturally low in fat, calories and sodium, and high in fiber, vitamins



and minerals.

Swap peanut butter with added sugars and oils to one made with just peanuts.

Use lean meats. Choose fish, chicken, turkey and lean cuts of beef and pork.

Switch to fat-free milk. Gradually reduce the fat content of the milk your family drinks. Start with 2% ... then try 1% ... and finally fat-free milk.

Switch white bread to wheat bread.

Change juice boxes or chocolate milk for water (infuse it with fruit if they need a flavor boost).

A nutritious, heart-healthy lunch, combined with daily exercise, will help set up every child for a year of optimal learning and development.

For additional heart-healthy tips, visit www.heart.org/healthyliving.

Many school districts will start

the school year off participating in Kids Heart Challenge, a program designed to support long-term mental and physical health among students while raising funds to support the lifesaving mission of the American Heart Association, a global force for healthier lives for all.

The American Heart Association's school-based program, Kids Heart Challenge offers a variety of physical activities to get elementary students' hearts pumping. This includes dance, basketball or jumping rope, paired with Finn's Mission - an online component where students can earn digital badges for learning life-saving skills like Hands-Only CPR and how to spot a stroke, ways to combat stress, and ideas for healthy eating. The program has nearly 50 years of proven success rooted in scientific research that shows

that kids who are regularly active feel better, have improved mental health, build self-esteem, and decrease and prevent conditions such as anxiety and depression.

More About the American Heart Association

The American Heart Association is a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives. We are dedicated to ensuring equitable health in all communities. Through collaboration with numerous organizations, and powered by millions of volunteers, we fund innovative research, advocate for the public's health and share lifesaving resources. The Dallas-based organization has been a leading source of health information for nearly a century. Connect with us on heart.org, Facebook, X or by calling 1-800-AHA-USA1.

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