

News Notes To Parents

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service of Adams County

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Happier Meals for Kids at the Drive-Thru

You've got hungry kids in the car and you need food pronto, so you pull into the drive-thru at a fast food restaurant. We've all been there... but, hopefully, not too often. A 2013 study in *JAMA Pediatrics* found that teenagers and younger children who eat fast food consume more calories from takeout meals than meals prepared at home. In addition to excess calories, a steady intake of fast food may result in large amounts of saturated fat, added sugars and sodium and fall short on dietary fiber, vitamins and minerals.

Fast food meals for kids may have gotten more nutritious, with fruits and vegetables becoming common side dish options. But many quick-serve food establishments still offer less-than-desirable choices. While parents don't need to enforce a complete ban on fast food, make sure to choose the most nutrient-rich options in kid-appropriate portions.

Set Limits on Fast Food

The wafting smells of French fries or fresh doughnuts can play havoc on your resolve to order smart, so be clear about your rules for fast food before ordering. For example, let your kids know you want them to sip milk instead of soda or have a fruit or vegetable with their meal.

Arm Yourself with Nutrition Information

Many quick-serve establishments list nutritional content directly on their menu boards. Another place to check is online, so you can take a few minutes to study the best choices at a variety of fast food joints before you hit the road. When you don't have the time to check facts, keep these lighter choices in mind and ask for sauces, dressings, and condiments on the side:

- Salad with grilled chicken
- Grilled chicken wrap or fresh turkey wrap
- Plain, kid-sized hamburger
- Low-fat yogurt
- Apple slices
- Bean burritos or tacos
- Chili
- Large fruit cups
- Small roast beef sandwich
- Fat-free or low-fat milk

Mind the Portions

Order appropriate child-size meals for youngsters and resist supersizing meals for older kids, unless two or more children are splitting it. Adults also can order kid-sized meals, which automatically come with fruit and low-fat milk at some restaurants and supply about half the calories of some of the regular menu items.

Rethink Your Drink

Milk and water are appropriate options for younger children. Teenagers, who may be able to have more calories because they are active, might request regular soda or blended coffee beverages that are loaded with added sugars. These choices may displace more nutritious calories from milk or other foods. Instead, steer them toward the smallest size possible or have them split a larger size.



Plan for Healthful Snacking

Planning for hunger can help you avoid the pull of the drive-thru. Keep tasty and nutritious foods in the car, including dried fruit, applesauce without added sugar in single-serve containers and nuts. On longer trips, take ice packs in a small cooler or refrigerator bag and stock it with fresh fruit, string cheese, low-fat yogurt, milk boxes, whole-grain crackers, nut butters or hummus and fresh veggies to tide you over or to supplement a fast food meal.

Source: eatright.org

The Importance of Exercise For Children

Regular exercise is essential for children's health, helping them develop stronger muscles and bones, maintain a healthy weight, lower their risk of type 2 diabetes, and improve heart health. Exercise also enhances mood, sleep, academic performance, and resilience to physical and emotional challenges.

Fitness includes three main components:

1. **Endurance (Aerobic Activity)** – Activities like running, swimming, and biking strengthen the heart and improve oxygen circulation.
2. **Strength** – Kids build strength through push-ups, climbing, and active play, which also helps bone health.
3. **Flexibility** – Stretching, dance, yoga, and martial arts improve range of motion and prevent injuries.
4. **Reducing Sedentary Time**

Excessive screen time contributes to inactivity and weight gain. The **American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)** recommends:

- Limiting screen time to **one hour daily** for ages 2–5 and avoiding it for children under 18 months
- Keeping devices out of bedrooms and turning them off during meals
- Choosing high-quality programming and watching it with kids

The **U.S. Department of Health** advises:

- **Children (6–17 years):** At least **60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity daily**, with muscle and bone-strengthening exercises **three times a week**



- **Preschoolers:** Around **three hours of varied activity daily**, including structured and free play

Tips for Raising Active Kids:

- Encourage a variety of fun, age-appropriate activities
- Set a daily exercise routine
- Incorporate activity into daily life (e.g., taking stairs)
- Be a role model by staying active yourself
- Engage in family activities like hiking or playing outside
- Keep it enjoyable so kids stay motivated

By limiting screen time and promoting active play, parents can help children build lifelong healthy habits.

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/exercise.html>

Medically reviewed by: **Elana Pearl Ben-Joseph, MD**

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Strawberry Chocolate Chip “Ladybugs”



Ingredients

5 fresh, large whole strawberries
30 semi-sweet dark chocolate chips

Directions

Before you begin: Wash your hands.

1. Cut the tops off the strawberries and cut them in half lengthwise.

2. With your fingers, gently push three chocolate chips into each half to create the ladybug's spots.
3. Serve on a fun platter.

Source: eatright.org

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News Notes To Parents is a product of Purdue Extension—Adams County. If you have comments or need information, call (260) 724-5322. The office is located at 313 W Jefferson St Ste 213 Decatur, IN 46733. **Tell someone about us!**



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