

News Notes To Parents

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Services, Health and Human Sciences

February 2026

Raise Healthy Eaters in the New Year

Ring in a new year by teaching kids the importance of food, nutrition and eating skills: food to fuel busy, successful lives; nutrition to nourish strong bodies and smart brains; and eating skills to enjoy the social aspect of meals with family and friends.

As a parent, grandparent or adult caregiver, you can help to raise healthy eaters during these critical years by doing your best to:

- Serve regular, balanced meals and snacks with a variety of nutrient-rich foods.
- Provide calm, pleasant mealtimes where adults and children can talk together.
- Remove distractions such as television, phones and tablets so your attention is on each other.
- Allow children to use their internal signals to decide how much and what to eat from the foods you set out for each meal.
- Explore a variety of flavors and foods from different cultures and cuisines.
- Share an appreciation for healthful food, lovingly prepared and shared with others.
- Make food safety, such as washing hands, part of every eating occasion.
- Teach basic skills for making positive food choices away from home.

Find credible food and nutrition resources when you don't know the answer.

While this may seem like an intimidating to-do list, two family habits go a long way to making all this happen: regular family meals and involving kids in nutrition from the ground up.

Make Family Mealtimes a Priority

Sometimes a simple act can have important, long-lasting benefits. According to parenting and health experts, that's the case with family meals. For example, eating and talking together can help:

- Increase family unity
- Help prevent behavior problems at home and school
- Encourage academic success
- Improve nutrition

Promote healthy weight for kids

With that impressive list of benefits, it's worth making the time and effort to enjoy more meals together each week. Look for easy ways to add just one family meal to the schedule. If evenings seem too hectic for family dinners, set aside time for a weekend breakfast or lunch. After a month or two of this new pattern, try adding another family meal each week. Before you know it, you will be

eating together on most days.

Get Kids Involved in Nutrition

Start young and make nutrition fun. There's an opportunity for kids to learn about nutrition in a variety of places — your kitchen, the grocery store or a community garden. Every trip through the supermarket can be a nutrition lesson. Kids can learn to categorize food into groups: grains, fruits, vegetables, dairy and protein foods. They can choose new foods they want to try. For example, let children pick out a new fresh, frozen, canned or dried fruit each trip. As children get older, they can help plan the menu at home and then pick out the foods to match the menu items while shopping.

Nutrition is just one of many reasons to have a garden. The process of planting, watching over and harvesting a garden provides daily opportunities for children to learn valuable lessons and enjoy physical activity, while reaping the fruits (and vegetables) of their labor.

Kids Eat Right content is brought to you by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation, the only charitable organization devoted exclusively to supporting nutrition and dietetics professionals.

www.eatright.org

Contributors: Dayle Hayes, MS, RD

Reviewed: December 17, 2025

Source: Kids Eat Right www.eatright.org

Photo Credit: Canva



Needs vs. Wants: The Grocery Store Classroom

Research from the **University of Wisconsin–Madison** suggests that practicing "choice-making" is a cornerstone of future financial health. You can turn a routine grocery trip into a powerful lesson by teaching your child to distinguish between needs and wants.

The Activity: The "Need" Detective

Give your child a "mission" while shopping. Ask them to help you find three needs (such as milk for strong bones or bread for lunch) and one want (like a favorite box of cookies).

The "NEED" (Essential)	The "WANT" (Extra)
Water to stay hydrated	Juice because it taste sweet
Warm Socks for cold feet	A superhero cape for play
Apples for a healthy snack	Candy for a sugary treat

The Financial Spin: The Power of "No, Not Now"]

When your child asks for an extra toy, use it as a teaching moment for opportunity cost. Explain: "We have \$5 left. We can buy the eggs we need for breakfast or the toy you want. If we buy the toy, we won't have eggs tomorrow."

Explaining the reasoning behind spending helps children develop executive function and self-regulation. By labeling items, you aren't just saying "no," you are teaching them to prioritize. This simple shift moves a child from impulsive "I want" to thoughtful "Is this a need?" This habit can help build a lifetime of financial security!

High Protein Cottage Cheese Mac & Cheese



Ingredients:

8 oz elbow macaroni noodles
 1 cup full fat cottage cheese
 1 cup whole milk
 1 cup freshly grated cheddar cheese
 1 Tablespoon arrowroot powder or cornstarch
 ½ teaspoon garlic powder
 ½ teaspoon onion powder
 ¼ teaspoon paprika
 ¼ teaspoon black pepper
 Salt to taste

Instructions:

1. Cook the pasta according to package directions. Drain and set aside.
2. While the pasta is cooking, add the cottage cheese, milk, cheddar cheese, arrowroot powder, garlic powder, paprika and black pepper to a blender. Blend until smooth.
3. In a separate large skillet or saucepan pour the cheese sauce into it and heat over medium-low for about 8-10 minutes, whisking occasionally until the cheese sauce is heated and thickens slightly.
4. Add the cooked pasta to the cheese sauce and stir to fully coat the pasta. The sauce might seem thin at first but it'll start to thicken as it sits for a few minutes. Taste and add any additional seasonings if desired. Enjoy!

Storage: Store any leftovers in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 3-4 days.

Nutrition: Serving: 1/4 recipe

Calories: 417kcal Carbohydrates: 48g Protein: 22g Fat: 15g Saturated Fat: 9g
 Cholesterol: 49mg Sodium: 397mg Potassium: 93mg Fiber: 2g Sugar: 7g

Recipe and Photo Credit: [High Protein Cottage Cheese Mac and Cheese - Eating Bird Food](#) by Brittany Mullins

Abigail Creigh, Health & Human Sciences Educator

www.extension.purdue.edu/Noble

News Notes To Parents is a product of Purdue Extension—Wells County. If you have comments or need information, call (260) 636-2111 The office is located at 109 N., York St. Albion In 46701 **Tell someone about us!**

Purdue University prohibits discrimination against any member of the University community on the basis of race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin or ancestry, genetic information, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, or status as a veteran.



Extension - Health and
Human Sciences