

# 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 and YMCA of the USA."

## Fruits and Vegetables for Better Health

Everyone knows the old saying, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." However, most children (and adults!) in the U.S. are not eating the recommended 5 servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Fruits and vegetables are important because they provide vitamins, minerals, and fiber. A diet high in fruits and vegetables can help kids grow and fight illness. It also protects against heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, and some cancers. The fiber and water in fruits and vegetables help you feel full.

How can you get more fruits and vegetables into your family's diet? The key is to make the foods available, and to model healthy habits yourself. The following are some tips for success:

- ▶ **Serve fruits and vegetables with every meal and snack.** Even if your kids don't always eat them, make them an option every time. Don't forget to send them to school for snacks and lunches!
- ▶ **Involve your kids.** Get your kids to help in cooking and planning meals. They are more likely to try new foods if they help out!
- ▶ **Role model.** Serve and eat a variety of fruits and vegetables at every meal and snack. Kids learn good habits from their parents!
- ▶ **Start early.** Introduce fruits and vegetables to children early in life. Continue serving them often.
- ▶ **Be prepared.** Have a supply of cut up, prepared fruits and vegetables in the refrigerator for snacks. Store them in clear containers at eye level.
- ▶ **Trade up.** Ask for a salad instead of fries when eating out.
- ▶ **Don't overdo the juice.** Serving 100% fruit juice doesn't substitute for whole fruit. Limit 100% juice to 4 ounces per day.

Remember, as a parent, you are the most important person for deciding 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, B. Otis, and S.L. Gortmaker, 2016, *Eat Well & Keep Moving*, 3rd ed. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics). Adapted, by permission, from *Food & Fun After School 2nd Edition Parent Communications*. ©2013 President and Fellows of Harvard College.

(continued)

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

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

- ▶ Apple slices and peanut butter
- ▶ Cucumber slices, cheese, and whole-grain crackers
- ▶ Corn tortillas with beans, cheese, and salsa
- ▶ Baby carrots and hummus
- ▶ Dried fruits like raisins, pineapple, and apricots with nuts and sunflower seeds

From L.W.Y. Cheung, H. Dart, S. Kalin, B. Otis, and S.L. Gortmaker, 2016, *Eat Well & Keep Moving*, 3rd ed. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics). Adapted, by permission, from *Food & Fun After School 2nd Edition Parent Communications*. ©2013 President and Fellows of Harvard College.

(continued)

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

**Subject Line: Healthy Habits Power Tips—Get your 5 servings of colorful fruits and veggies!**

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:

- ▶ Go for Five! Eat 5 or more colorful fruits and vegetables (combined) each day.
- ▶ Try to eat a fruit or a vegetable with every meal and snack, instead of choosing junk food.

Just take a bite! Don't be afraid to try a new fruit or vegetable—chances are you'll like it. 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:

- ▶ **Serve fruits and vegetables with every meal and snack.** Even if your kids don't always eat them, make them an option every time. Don't forget to send them to school for snacks and lunches!
- ▶ **Involve your kids.** Get your kids to help in cooking and planning meals. They are more likely to try new foods if they help out!
- ▶ **Role model.** Serve and eat a variety of fruits and vegetables at every meal and snack. Kids learn good habits from their parents!
- ▶ **Start early.** Introduce fruits and vegetables to children early in life. Continue serving them often.
- ▶ **Be prepared.** Have a supply of cut up, prepared fruits and vegetables in the refrigerator for snacks. Store them in clear containers at eye level.
- ▶ **Trade up.** Ask for a salad instead of fries when eating out.
- ▶ **Don't overdo the juice.** Serving 100% fruit juice doesn't substitute for whole fruit. Limit 100% juice to 4 ounces per day. Want to learn more? For information on the health benefits of fruits and vegetables, go to [www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutrition-source/fruits.html](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutrition-source/fruits.html).

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

From L.W.Y. Cheung, H. Dart, S. Kalin, B. Otis, and S.L. Gortmaker, 2016, *Eat Well & Keep Moving*, 3rd ed. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics). Adapted, by permission, from *Food & Fun After School 2nd Edition Parent Communications*. ©2013 President and Fellows of Harvard College.